

JUVENILE JUSTICE ADVISORY COUNCIL
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DIVISION OF CRIMINAL AND JUVENILE JUSTICE PLANNING
515-242-5823

Position Paper
Single Gender Environments for Females
December 2012

JJAC Position: In order to maximize positive outcomes and effective service delivery to young women and girls in the justice system, the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council supports implementing a single gender environment at the Iowa Juvenile Home/Girls State Training School.

CURRENT SITUATION

The juvenile justice system has historically over-looked the distinctive needs of young women and girls. Despite many commonalities, the needs of girls fundamentally distinguish them from boys.

At the Iowa Juvenile Home/Girls State Training School (IJH), there is an extensive history of serving both genders. While dual gender environments are not ideal under the best of circumstances, the specific populations served by IJH make it even more challenging. The males living at IJH have extremely high social, behavioral and developmental needs. They possess serious mental health issues and about half have limited functional abilities and low IQ's (Toledo Study Group). At the same time, the females have extremely high behavioral and delinquent needs. They are at the deepest in-state level of the juvenile justice system.

Utilizing proven best practices is essential when working with adolescents in the juvenile justice system. For girls, this means programs that have been developed using a thorough and demonstrable understanding of girls' experience and development. As a proven best practice for serving young women and girls, the recommendation for an all-female campus is supported by the findings of many research studies. It has also been recommended by two groups convened to study the issue as mandated by the Iowa Legislature.

RATIONALE

Safety: Young women involved in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system need space that is emotionally safe, removed from family and friends who depend on them, and removed from the demands of the attention of young men. Females' sense of self is developed differently in female only groups. Additionally, female only groups allow leaders to focus on the unique needs and issues of girls while at the same time being more conducive to addressing those needs in a safe, trusting, supportive, and comfortable environment.

Abuse: Research indicates that 92% of girls in the juvenile justice system have histories of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse (Cauffman, 2008). Additionally, it is theorized that these statistics underestimate the extent of sexual abuse in the lives of girls, because violence, particularly sexual violence, tends to be underreported. Some researchers have suggested that abuse is directly linked to subsequent violent behaviors because one in four violent girls has been sexually abused, versus one in ten nonviolent girls (Cauffman, 2008). For a female, especially one going through puberty with a history of sexual trauma at the hands of a male, being in a facility or program with males can make progress considerably more challenging.

Effectiveness: Research shows that girls placed in gender-specific care have lower levels of delinquent behavior than those who receive group care in a dual gender setting (Cauffman, 2008). Having females and males in groups together can create many problems. First, boys demand the attention of the females. Given our societal gender-based expectations that females be nurturing and accommodating this can make it particularly challenging for the girls to concentrate on themselves at a time when they most need to do so. It can also lower program effectiveness because it inhibits females from speaking freely and openly about personal issues, especially if they have been abused by a male. Sexual tension may also develop between the two groups and no matter how innocent, this creates a dynamic where professionals spend more time monitoring contact between the genders than they are able to devote to individual youth issues. Lastly, dual-gender programming inhibits the development of positive relationships between girls; an important catalyst of female growth.

Commitment: There are few resources available to girls in the form of single-sex environments. Existing single-gender programs most often serve boys, not girls. A study of 443 programs revealed that 42.4% of programs served primarily boys while a meager 5.9% served primarily girls. (Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Stevens, 2008). This creates a tremendous gap between services needed and desired versus services actually available. The search for someone to comfortably listen and talk to is as common for girls in the juvenile justice system as it is for other young women. However, girls in the juvenile justice system are often disadvantaged in this area of their life, with obvious negative consequences. In order to facilitate girls' comfort and skill in finding these healthy relationships, girls must be separated from their male counterparts. The State of Iowa can demonstrate its commitment to young women and girls by providing a single gender environment at the Iowa Juvenile Home/Girls State Training School in Toledo.

ACTION STEPS

An effective juvenile justice system does not recreate the traumatic and abusive environment that so many delinquent girls experience (Covington & Bloom, 2007). A safe, consistent, and supportive environment is the cornerstone of the corrective process. The Iowa Department of Human Services should restrict all placements at the Iowa Juvenile Home/Girls State Training School to females only.

Facilities and programs striving to provide effective and efficient services to young women will opt for single gender environments. The State of Iowa should also encourage private providers in this regard.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and FURTHER READING

Cauffman, E. (2008). Understanding the female offender. *The Future of Children*, 18(2), 119-142.

Chesney-Lind, M., Morash, M., & Stevens, T. (2008). Girls' troubles, girls' delinquency, and gender responsive programming: a review. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 41(1), 162-189.

Covington, S., & Bloom, B. (2007). Gender-responsive treatment and services in correctional settings. *Women & Therapy*, 29(3-4), 9-33.

Goodkind, S., Ng, I., & Sarri, R. C. (2006). The impact of sexual abuse in the lives of young women involved or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system. *Violence Against Women*, 12, 456-477.

Toledo Study Group (2007). *Recommendation and options to divert placement of boys at the Iowa juvenile home in Toledo, Iowa*. Des Moines, IA, Department of Human Services.

Female Responsive Services: An Informational Brief

prepared by
The Iowa Task Force for Young Women
a subcommittee of the
Juvenile Justice Advisory Council

Female Responsive Services intentionally allow gender identity and development to affect and guide program design and service delivery.

Basic Assumptions

Quality female-responsive services begin with quality services.
Young women are different than young men, so their services must be also.
Equality does not equal uniformity.
Services for young women cannot be viewed in isolation from society.

Components of Female Responsive Practice **Programs must...**

Provide Emotional and Physical Safety

Girls need space that is emotionally safe, removed from family and friends who depend on them, and removed from the demands for the attention of adolescent males. Further, programs must provide an environment that is safe from any verbal, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that may be committed by staff or others.

Be Culturally Appropriate

Service providers must acknowledge and approach the cultural differences of program participants in ways that support each individual's cultural identity. Too often, staff and administrators provide services in a culturally neutral way, particularly when issues of race are involved. Programs must be shaped by the unique issues facing both minority and majority girls while building in cultural resources accessible in all communities.

Be Relationship-based

Staff must be able to build non-exploitive and meaningful relationships with young women. Girls must also learn relationship skills including: assertiveness, appropriate expression of anger, and selection of healthy relationships. Programs must shift the relationship discussion off of girls' interactions with males. While those relationship issues are important, girls often lose themselves in those relationships and/or create false selves that focus on the needs of others.

Provide Positive Female Role Models and Mentors

Programs must potentiate girls' relationships of trust and interdependence with women already present in their lives. Friends, relatives, neighbors and social group members can be critical providers of insight, strategy and strength.

Address the Abuse in Girls' Lives

Many researchers suggest that the pervasiveness of abuse in the lives of adolescent girls could be the most significant underlying cause of high-risk behaviors that lead to delinquency. Recognizing this can help

professionals to reinterpret girls' offenses as complex survival strategies rather than simply as unacceptable behaviors. This does not require the sacrifice of accountability as is often the misconception. Also, physical intervention policies should be closely examined for their potential to retraumatize young women.

Address Sexuality, Pregnancy and Parenting

Girls need information that goes beyond the possible consequences of sexual acts. They need comprehensive, science-based information about reproductive anatomy, physiology and sexuality as well as pregnancy and motherhood. They also need opportunities to identify their personal sexual limits and to rehearse communicating those limits to a potential partner.

Be Strength-based

Programs must help girls move from coping to survive to utilizing their experience, support, intelligence, and inner wisdom to develop strategies that lead to their personal success and growth. This means that programs must employ staff who are willing and able to address girls' behaviors from this position, leaving behind the diminishing and shameful labels that so often limit adults' abilities to see delinquent girls' resiliency and strengths.

Provide Opportunities that Promote Educational Success and Employability

Education must address academic, employment and life-skill needs of girls. It will need to offer alternatives to traditional classroom instruction to deal with learning disabilities, learning deficits, or negative attitudes about learning and the value of education. Non-traditional career path preparation should also be offered.

Address the Unique Health Needs of Females, Including Nutritional Concerns and Regular Physical Activity

Negative relationships between mental health treatment and females, often characterized by over-medication, must be avoided. Also, in light of the high rates of sexual abuse among this population, gynecological service providers must be especially sensitive to the emotional response of girls to standard gynecological procedures. Providers must maintain an awareness of early on-set puberty and the variety of effects it can have on the population of young women with whom they work.

Provide Opportunities for Spiritual Expression

Girls with religious backgrounds must be provided opportunities to participate in their personal worship and religious practice. However, spirituality may also be expressed in other ways through daily time for relaxation, journaling or quiet time. Young women's choice to have no spiritual practice must be equally respected. This component should be driven by each young woman and staff must avoid imposing their personal religious beliefs in any way.

Involve Members of Girls' Families and/or Support Networks

Efforts must be made to include family and other supporters in girls' services. Specifically, the mother-daughter relationship should be addressed, due to its significant impact on shaping the adult woman the girl will become. Of course, this component can be challenging as many families are closed to outside help and/or lack adequate skills or resources to participate actively. Similarly, staff should support multigenerational and extended family placements for girls who cannot live with their families of origin.

For more information on how to implement these components, see also the following Iowa Task Force for Young Women publications:

"Female Responsive Protocol for Adolescent Offenders" (2010)

"Providing Gender Specific Service for Adolescent Female Offenders: Guidelines and Resources" (1999)