



Gender-responsive programming for girls involved in the juvenile justice system

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Context

Many girls who enter the juvenile justice system have experienced some type of trauma in their lives, including violence, neglect, or abuse—experiences that have often led to their system involvement (Watson & Edelman, 2012). Unfortunately, these harms remain unaddressed when they are admitted into the system, as girls encounter a system that is not designed to provide the services necessary to identify and attend to their needs (Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Although girls constitute the largest growing segment of the juvenile justice population, there is a paucity of gender-responsive programming, and currently there are no effective interventions for girls in the system (Javdani & Allen, 2016). According to data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Model Program Guide, only 13 existing programs—approximately six percent of the total—are specifically designed for girls (Javdani & Allen, 2016). This is particularly concerning given that the including gender-specific risk and protective factors in the design and implementation of programs for girls is crucial for accomplishing positive outcomes (Granski, 2020).

Even as overall justice system reform has gained bipartisan support in recent years, these reforms continue to overlook the unique needs of incarcerated girls and young women. Additionally, there are not enough data collection efforts aimed at understanding how girls and LGBTQ/GNC youth, who are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, are affected by the problems these reforms seek to address (Saar, Epstein, Rosenthal, & Vafa, 2015). Thus, few juvenile justice reforms are tailored to meet the specific needs and pathways of girls and LGBTQ/GNC youth in the system, and as a result they are unlikely to benefit from any reforms (Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Gender-based programming

Although there is no exhaustive list of gender-responsive program elements, the following is a compilation of core elements that various experts in the field agree should be considered when designing programs for girls in the juvenile justice system.

- **Relational:** Since adolescence is a profound time of change and growth, an emphasis on supporting healthy social contexts to promote healthy development is crucial. This includes building and supporting healthy romantic and non-romantic relationships and supporting girls’ continuous, positive relationships with older women, family, and peers.
- **Restorative:** helping girls navigate the justice system with attention to their trauma and victimization histories.
- **Socio-culturally relevant and intersectional:** anchored in attending to girls’ multiple marginalities that arise by virtue of their gender, sexual orientation, age, race, immigration status, and socioeconomic class.
- **Individualized:** tailored to meet the individual needs of a heterogeneous group of young women.

- **Multi-level:** designed to target girls' individual, peer, family, community, and multiple system involvements (e.g., child welfare, school, juvenile justice).
- **Community-based:** providing flexible services to youth in their natural communities and fostering healthy family relationships and sustainable community connections.
- **Strength-based/empowering:** moving away from deficit-oriented approaches and instead promoting developmental assets while encouraging leadership and developing strengths.
- **Safe:** promoting healing from traumas caused by physical and psychological abuse.

In terms of specific program structure, experts in the field recommend the following approaches:

- Programs should be *all female* whenever possible.
- Girls should be treated in the *least restrictive* environment, whenever possible.
- Programs should be *close to girls' homes* to maintain family relationships.
- Programs should be consistent with *female development* and stress the role of *relationships* between staff members and girls.
- Programs should address the needs of *parenting* and *pregnant teens*.

Existing programs for girls in the juvenile justice system

The present section includes examples of existing programs designed for girls who are involved or are at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. These programs are categorized into the following types: residential, re-entry, community-based, diversion, probation and court models, alternatives to detention, prevention, and system approaches. All these programs and approaches below have been designed specifically for girls and include at least some of the main components of gender-responsive programming. Still, given that not enough research has been conducted to evaluate gender-responsive programming, only some of these include evaluation information.

Residential programs

Justice for All Girls Services (JAGS), Florida¹

- **Overview:** In 2009 and 2010, the NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women implemented a new detention model for girls detained at the Southwest Florida Regional Juvenile Detention Center, called Justice for All Girls Services (JAGS).
- **Program description:** While girls in the JAGS program wait for judicial disposition of their cases or commitment and placement, they receive alternative services, including

¹ https://www.evidentchange.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/nwsltrdec2009.pdf

assessment, referrals, one-to-one skills training, group skills training, help navigating the system, and information about available community programs. This model to affect systemic change also includes services to girls and their families, such as help navigating the system, information about available community programs, recommendations to DJJ and judges regarding appropriate placements, and collaboration with girls' probation officers where appropriate.

Wings for Life, Marion, TX²

- Overview: Wings for Life is a residential program run by Associated Marine Institutes (AMI, a large national nonprofit service provider) where girls committed to the Texas Youth Commission live with their babies for four to six months and receive a range of gender-responsive programming. Before coming to Wings, each of the girls had been incarcerated and had violated probation. Most of the girls committed felony offenses.
- Program description: Wings for Life provides each girl with education consistent with state requirements, including having a certified special education teacher on staff. Girls receive parenting education and assistance with skills they will need to live in the outside community with their children. The life skills training extends for 30 days after their discharge to ease their transition. Girls in Wings for Life receive individual and group counseling, and programming directed at resocialization on the outside. There is a nurse on staff and pregnant girls receive prenatal care, Lamaze education, and nursing support.

Re-entry programs

Female Focus Initiative (FFI), Boston, MA³

- Overview: FFI is the first female youth re-entry program developed to respond to a rapidly growing population of girls committed to the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS). FFI provides effective programming (recreational, educational, and cultural) for young women who are involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Program description: FFI is run by a community-based nonprofit (Roxbury Youthworks, Inc.), operating out of a girls-only programming space in a Boston neighborhood. Through FFI's collaborations, girls have access to job training and placement, art programming, empowerment groups, and faith-based and recreational programming. In collaboration with a community health center, a nurse works part-time onsite providing gender-responsive health assessments and facilitating health care access in the community.

² Sherman, F. (2005). [Detention Reform and Girls](#). Chapter 5. Promising Practices and Gender-responsive Programs.

³ <http://www.roxburyyouthworks.org/pages/femalefocus.html>

Community-based programs

Young Women's Freedom Center (YWFC), San Francisco, CA⁴

- Overview: YWFC is a unique program based in San Francisco, operated entirely by young women (under 25) who are either currently or formerly involved in the juvenile justice system. YWFC hires all its staff directly from the streets or juvenile hall, pays them a living wage with benefits, and involves them fully in the organization's management and development.
- Program description: YWFC offers opportunities for leadership development, training and education, advocacy, and movement-building, as well as participation in campaigns and other initiatives. One program is the Girls and Young Women's Detention Advocacy Project (GDAP) in which staff lead regular workshops in juvenile hall focusing on political education, healing, personal accountability, and self-advocacy. These group activities are followed by individual goal-setting and an ongoing process of learning how to be self-advocates. GDAP accompanies girls throughout the court process, providing information, advocacy, and support to them and their families. GDAP's goal for girls in detention is to educate them about the system and create circumstances in which they can succeed when released. This is accomplished by incorporating each girl's interests and ideas into her community service, collaborating with the juvenile hall girls' services unit to ease transitions into the community, and providing girls with jobs at YWFC.
- Evaluations: Annually there is a 79-85 percent reduction in recidivism among young women and TGNC people who complete the program. Up to 90 percent of those who complete the program maintain employment and reach educational goals at 6-, 12-, and 18-month follow ups.

New York City ROSES (Resilience, Opportunity, Safety, Education, Strength)⁵

- Overview: ROSES is an individualized, community-based program pairing highly trained advocates with girls who are involved with or at risk of involvement with the justice system.
- Program description: Using a strengths-focused and community-based model, advocates provide intensive outreach and intervention while focusing on girls' strengths and providing services in girls' natural community contexts (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, homes). The main aim of this advocacy is to assess girls' many needs and intensively engage local resources to shift girls' contexts so that they are responsive to those needs, such as by helping girls obtain educational support, financial resources, and legal advocacy, and cultivating their creative potential.
- Evaluations: In one study, girls randomly assigned to receive the ROSES intervention were less likely to engage in violence and minor status offending behavior; were less likely to experience or witness community violence; reported fewer indices of substance

⁴ <https://www.youngwomenfree.org/>

⁵ <https://wp.nyu.edu/rise/interventions/roses/>

use or misuse and sexual risk taking; reported fewer symptoms of mental health problems; and reported greater wellbeing as assessed by resilience and self-efficacy.

Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (YAP)⁶

- Overview: Youth, even those most in need, are most successful when they receive intensive community-based wraparound services through a strengths-based approach—services that treat each youth individually, engage youth’s families, and give youth a choice about what happens to them. Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) is a national nonprofit solely committed to keeping youth and adults ‘safely home’ with their families, supported by their community.
- Program description: YAP wraparound is an intensive, individualized, holistic care planning and management approach to working with high and complex need youth and families from within their homes and communities. Families are given “voice and choice”—empowered as equal partners—and services are tailored to their unique needs, strengths, interests, and preferences. Wraparound principles also emphasize the importance of individualized, culturally responsive, and strengths-based services that engage natural supports and occur within the community. YAP’s planning process has three components: assessment, a family team meeting, and plan development.
- Evaluation: One study of over 3,500 high-need youth involved in YAP found that 86 percent remained arrest-free while in the program, and 96 percent were still living in their communities upon discharge from the program.

Diversion programs

JustUs, New York City⁷

- Overview: *JustUs* is New York City’s first-ever gender-responsive diversion program for girls and other LGB/TGN/CNB young people who are involved with or at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- Program description: *JustUs* offers skilled individual counseling and coaching (in English and Spanish), evidence-based clinical interventions, group-based activities, economic empowerment, skill-building, and other supports. STEPS will provide these services in collaboration with Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), an intergenerational organization committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. Through education, organizing, and physical fitness training, GGE encourages communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives.

The New Avenues for Youth Reception and Referral Center, Multnomah County, OR⁸

⁶ <https://www.yapinc.org/>

⁷ <https://www.risingground.org/justus/>

⁸ <https://newavenues.org/>

- Overview: The police bring youth charged with status offenses and minor misdemeanors to the New Avenues for Youth Reception Center rather than to the detention center. Every arrested youth brought by police to the reception center meets with a counselor who assesses their needs and plans their release and referral services. The center does not have a residential component, so all youth must be released following intake, assessment, and referrals.
- Program description: The New Avenues for Youth Reception Center provides family mediation and family counseling services. Whenever possible the families of screened youth are involved in the referral services, which include domestic violence shelters and counseling; female health; mental health; mentoring; youth empowerment; gang intervention; gay, lesbian, and bisexual support and counseling; and GED and employment programs.

Family team meetings (FTMs)⁹

- Overview: Family team meetings (FTMs) have been used in child welfare and juvenile justice collaborations in many jurisdictions to divert youth out of the formal juvenile justice process.
- Program description: FTMs engage youth and families in problem solving and case planning and fit girls well, incorporating gender- and developmentally responsive elements by building girls' relationships and their sense of agency. The following are four different approaches to FTMs:
 - Family group decision-making (FGDM): A decision-making process to which members of the family group are invited, joined by members of their informal network, community groups, and the child welfare agency that has become involved in the family's life.
 - Family team conferencing (FTC): incorporates wraparound child and family team meetings from mental health, individualized education program (IEP) planning principles from education, engagement approaches from intensive family preservation services in child welfare, and the person-centered philosophy from developmental disabilities practice.
 - Permanency teaming: developed specifically to facilitate permanence for older youth in foster care who have high-level mental health and behavioral needs. Includes a variety of meetings to engage children and youth and their families in comprehensive planning and collaborative decision-making.
 - Team decision-making meetings (TDM): Child welfare staff, family, family supports, service providers, and community members work together to assess a family's strengths and needs, make critical placement decisions, and develop specific safety plans for children at risk.
- Evaluations: The four approaches discussed have a preliminary research base, but they have not yet been turned into evidence-based practices. Still, evaluations show that the Crossover Youth Practice Model, which diverts cases to a FTM model, has been successful for girls by addressing the family context that results in girls' delinquency, and by strengthening girls' family relationships and their control over those relationships.

⁹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "[Four Approaches to Family Team Meetings](#)" (Baltimore, MD, 2013).

Probation and court models

Gender Responsive Probation Model (GRPM), Connecticut¹⁰

- Overview: Juvenile justice reformers implemented a gender-responsive probation model in 2006. Juvenile probation leaders successfully advocated hiring additional officers to sustain the implementation of a gender-responsive probation model.
- Program description: Probation officers at thirteen sites were trained in gender-responsive principles and given a girls-only caseload not to exceed 25 girls. These officers continued to receive training and frequent technical assistance from a designated project coordinator. The model equipped officers to identify root causes of girls' problems and to connect girls to programs and services designed to address their problems. Later, the Department of Children and Families utilized the probation model as the foundation for enhancements to parole services.
- Evaluations: In an outcome evaluation, the recidivism rate was 3.6 percent for all participants in the program, compared to a recent finding of 34 percent recidivism for probationers overall. GRPM positively influences recidivism for some at-risk and delinquent youth (specifically girls between 13-15 years of age at first offense, white participants, and those with moderate risk and low protective factors).

Female-focused probation units, Cook County, Ill¹¹

- Overview: Cook County has two female offender units, including one called Reclaim, Empower, Nurture, and Embrace Womanhood (RENEW). The probation officers believe that their gender-responsive training, focus on girls, and low caseloads allow them to develop relationships and support girls in the community in ways that would otherwise be impossible.
- Program description: Each unit has five probation officers, all of whom are women. The maximum caseload for each probation officer is 25. Probation officers in these units choose to work there and receive specialized training in female adolescent development and the needs of girls in the justice system.

New York State Girls' Justice Initiative (GJI)/Gender Responsive Initiatives and Partnerships (GRIP), Westchester, NY¹²

- Overview: The Girls Justice Initiative (GJI) intends to develop a probation- and court-based approach for girls involved in the juvenile justice system that is informed by and

¹⁰ https://www.jud.ct.gov/cssd/research/juvprob/GRPM_Outcome_Rpt.pdf;
https://www.jud.ct.gov/cssd/research/juvprob/GRPM_Outcome_Rpt.pdf

¹¹ Sherman, F. (2005). [Detention Reform and Girls](#). Chapter 5. *Promising Practices and Gender-responsive Programs*.

¹² <https://www.nycourts.gov/ip/justiceforchildren/gji.shtml>

involves the decision-makers at each point of contact within the juvenile justice system, in partnership with the community, girls, and their families.

- Program description: The Gender Responsive Initiatives and Partnerships (GRIP) Court will develop a responsive environment that is built on culturally competent gender- and trauma-informed policies and practices for participants at risk or involved in the justice system. This will include assessments, resources, and services to prevent participants from being arrested, formally referred to court, and/or placed in detention or placement; and to serve those who enter the system. A major component of GRIP is the roundtable conferencing model. It follows a collaborative team-based approach that is non-adversarial and not focused on the alleged act. All parties meet weekly in cooperation with other agencies to create the best outcomes for each youth. Each matter must meet the eligibility criteria and each matter is discussed at monthly assessment and review meetings with all stakeholders.
- Evaluations: The GRIP Court will be informed by research, data analysis, and the decision-makers at each point of contact within the justice system, in partnership with the community, youth, and their families.

Girls courts models¹³

- Overview: “girls courts” have received a lot of attention in the last decade and take a variety of forms, from girl-only dockets to years-long, court-based programming. They are unified by a commitment to gender-responsive principles such as relationship continuity, girls’ safety, and empowerment.
- Program description: The program might be located within the court, run by probation, or delivered through referrals to community-based organizations. Girls courts that use community- rather than court-based programming may best help girls establish long-lasting supportive relationships within their communities. Programming ranges from 24 weeks to two years. Common program components are family engagement (families are often required to participate); therapy (individual, group, and family); along with specialized probation officers, peer support, and a competency-building approach.

Hawaii Girls Court, Honolulu¹⁴

- Overview: The Hawaii Girls Court began in 2004 and is one of the oldest girls courts in the U.S. It is a one-year program administered through the court. Girls are assigned a probation officer with expertise in gender-responsive programming.
- Program description: Participation in the program includes individual, family, and group therapy and opportunities to build girls’ competencies by exposing them and their families to new experiences and skills. Peers participate in a court session every five weeks, providing girls with peer support and helping to improve peer relationships.
- Evaluations: Hawaii Girls Court is one of the few girls courts to conduct ongoing evaluations. Evaluations from 2005 to 2011 show reduced law violations, fewer status offenses, fewer instances of running away (and reduced length of runaway episodes), and reduced incarceration commitments during the year of programming and for up to

¹³ Sherman, F., & Balck, A. (2015). [Gender Injustice: System-level Juvenile Justice Reforms for Girls.](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.girlscourthawaii.org/>

six months after. However, during the year of programming, Hawaii Girls Court participants experience more shelter admissions and shelter days, and more admissions to and days in detention than their peers outside of girls court. These detention and shelter admissions decline following the girls court year. Evaluators conclude that the increased scrutiny accompanying girls court participation in turn leads to increased short-term detention and shelter use.

Alternatives to detention

Multidimensional treatment foster care (MTFC)¹⁵

- Overview: Multidimensional treatment foster care (MTFC) is a behavioral treatment alternative to residential placement for youth who have problems with chronic antisocial behavior, emotional disturbance, and delinquency.
- Program description: MTFC uses a team approach to case planning. This team may include a clinical supervisor, treatment foster parents, biological family members, a youth advocate, family therapist, child therapist, youth, school, and probation or parole officer. Case planning reflects the girls' views of what they need as well as what they want to be involved in. The foster placement provides the most family-like setting possible, to provide the girl with a safe and stable home environment, help her develop strategies for understanding her past experiences, increase her ability to plan for her future, and give her opportunities to practice the skills needed to realize her plans. Girls in MTFC participate in individual and family therapy, skills training, health activities, school, work, community activities, and other relevant services.
- Evaluations: Evaluation data compared outcomes for girls with those for boys and found that while the foster care treatment process for girls differed from that for boys, arrests, self-reported delinquencies, and program completion outcomes were the same for boys and girls. On all three outcome measures, both girls and boys in multidimensional treatment foster care did better than boys and girls in group care. Focusing on improving girls' peer relationships has reduced their delinquency involvement.

Domestic Violence Alternative Center, Pima County, AZ¹⁶

- Overview: DVAC was created in 2007 as an alternative to arrest and detention for youth who might have otherwise been charged with domestic violence and processed in the formal juvenile justice system. Under the DVAC model, law enforcement responding to domestic violence involving youth bring youth to the center rather than to detention.
- Program description: At DVAC youth are screened and assessed, and their family is connected to health, mental health, and family support services including parenting and support groups.
- Evaluations: From 2010-2013, there was an 89 percent reduction in detention referrals along with a 359 percent increase in DVAC referrals, signaling a need for community-

¹⁵ <https://youth.gov/content/multidimensional-treatment-foster-care%E2%80%93adolescents>

¹⁶ https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/Pima_overview.pdf

based response to in-home chaos and violence involving youth. Reception centers can be operated by community-based non-profit organizations or by juvenile court probation.

Evening Reporting Center, Cook County¹⁷

- Overview: The Cook County Female Evening Reporting Center is a gender-responsive alternative to detention that provides a safe space for girls while building their ties to their community and families. Most girls at the reporting center are awaiting adjudication and scored for conditional release based on their admissions risk assessment. They have been ordered on home confinement, with evening reporting, until hearing and disposition. A minority of the girls were given probation and evening reporting as their post-adjudication disposition.
- Program description: The evening reporting center provides an array of gender-responsive, strengths-based opportunities after school and into the evening. Programming in the center includes victim impact panels as a part of the restorative justice process, as well as skills and strengths-based programs such as computer training, arts and crafts, and nutrition and health awareness.

Prevention programs

PACE Center for Girls, Florida¹⁸

- Overview: PACE Center for Girls is a nationally recognized program operating 19 gender-responsive centers throughout Florida. Girls who attend PACE are either involved in the juvenile justice system or have specific characteristics that put them at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system and other negative outcomes. PACE seeks to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes tied to this profile and to instead foster academic engagement, positive youth development, and healthy relationships.
- Program description: PACE day programs provide education, life management training, communication skills, career awareness, healthy lifestyles, and violence prevention. The program conducts individual comprehensive assessments for each girl and designs individualized education programs in collaboration with local school boards. PACE focuses closely on girls' transitions, monitoring girls for three years following their participation in the day program, a level of follow-up that is unusual in youth programming.
- Evaluations: PACE has succeeded in reducing justice system involvement, and consequently detention, for the girls enrolled in their programs. From 2000–2001, between 85-97 percent of girls in the program (depending on whether they had a prior delinquency record) remained out of the delinquency system. Girls enrolled in PACE ran away significantly less than they had prior to PACE (32.4 percent vs. 13.3 percent, and down to 6.2 percent when enrolled in transitional services. The most recent findings from

¹⁷[https://www.yos.org/services/juvenile-justice#:~:text=Evening%20Report%20Center%20\(ERC\),males%2C%20five%20days%20per%20week.](https://www.yos.org/services/juvenile-justice#:~:text=Evening%20Report%20Center%20(ERC),males%2C%20five%20days%20per%20week.)

¹⁸ <https://www.pacecenter.org/>

2019 show that PACE increased school enrollment and attendance, and girls were more likely to be “on track,” compared with the control group. Rates of formal involvement in the juvenile justice system during the 18 months after study enrollment were similar for the program and control groups. Further follow-up research would be necessary to see whether PACE affects longer-term delinquency outcomes.

Movimiento Ascendencia (Upward Movement), Pueblo, CO¹⁹

- Overview: Movimiento Ascendencia (MA), which translates to upward movement, is a culturally-focused, gender-specific program that provides young females, primarily Mexican-American, with alternatives to substance abuse and gang involvement. Girls are recruited through outreach by youth workers and referrals. Services are operated by the Pueblo Youth Services Bureau.
- Program description: MA services are designed around three key components: 1) mediation/conflict resolution; 2) self-esteem/social support; and 3) cultural awareness. MA provides social and life skills training as well as tutoring and homework help. The program provides mentoring services for those who want it. Program participants are matched with a mentor who accompanies them for a minimum of two hours a week for nine months.
- Evaluations: There program produced significant positive impacts by reducing self-reports of damaging property, of stealing more than \$50, and of buying, selling, or holding stolen goods. However, the program had no impact on self-esteem, grades in school, concealing weapons, and stealing less than \$50.

System approaches

Girls' Link, Cook County, IL

- Overview: Girls Link is an example of a comprehensive approach to gender-responsive practice. Since 1994, representatives of more than 20 public and private agencies in Cook County have been meeting regularly with the goal of affecting system change for girls.
- Program description: Girls Link is directly or indirectly responsible for many of Cook County's most notable innovations in training and program development for girls in the justice system. These include programs such as Girl Talk, a collaboration of organizations working with girls currently or formerly detained at the Cook County Temporary Detention Center, providing information and support to the girls and voice and visibility to their issues. Additionally, there are alternatives to detention such as a shelter care facility that provides a 14-bed temporary alternative to detention for young women who would otherwise be detained in the Cook County detention center due to their RAI score, an override, or awaiting placement.
- Evaluations: Girls Link has had remarkable staying power and consistency, with approximately half of its original members still around the table.

¹⁹ <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/ratedprograms/378#pd>

Alternative Placement Committee (APC), Multnomah County, OR

- Overview: The Alternative Placement Committee (APC), is a cross-system placement made up of representatives from DHS, Oregon Youth Authority, residential treatment programs, and the juvenile court.
- Program description: If a youth is delinquent and has complex service needs, her case can be reviewed by the committee, which can then coordinate multi-system service planning. APC strives to develop a unified recommendation that can be presented to the court. Its guidelines require that cases be presented in a “balanced, ‘strength-based’ approach, identifying youth and family strengths as well as needs;” recommendations are developed by consensus considering level of risk, community protection, limited resources, and the best interests of the youth.
- Evaluations: The committee meets weekly and in 2001 reviewed 55 cases, approximately one-fifth of which were girls. APC deliberations have significantly reduced out-of-home placements in the Multnomah system.

Virtual programs

Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)²⁰

- Overview: Girls for Gender Equity is an inter-generational non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening local communities by creating opportunities for young women and girls to live self-determined lives.
- Programs: GGE’s two most renowned programs, Sisters In Strength (SIS) and the Young Women’s Advisory Council (YWAC) have historically brought together young trans and cis girls of color and gender non-conforming youth of color from across New York City to incite social change in youth organizing, activism, and civic engagement in their communities and in local government.
- Virtual component: GGE has been engaged in innovative virtual curricula during COVID. They partnered with STEPS to end family violence by launching an alternative program for girls called *JustUs* (listed earlier under diversion programs) and will soon be moving from virtual to in-person engagement.

Restorative Empowerment for Youth (REY), Houston, TX

- Overview: A pilot online restorative justice program developed in Fall 2020 for girls of color in order to support more inclusive, culturally responsive, and connected learning environments.
- Program description: The three-month program was taught by REY youth facilitators (YFs), all of whom were girls of color, and integrated social-emotional capacity building with pragmatic skills associated with facilitating restorative circles. The core foundation of the program consisted of monthly workshops led by REY YFs. The curriculum was grounded in an active learning praxis that integrated theory, practice, out-of-session

²⁰ <https://www.ggenyc.org/>

exercises and homework, and individual follow-up sessions between students and YFs. The three workshops were designed to address issues central to the lived experiences of girls of color, such as the need for self-care, the importance of resilience building practices, peer connection, and safe spaces to engage in critical conversations about intersectional oppression.

- Evaluations: YFs observed positive outcomes including increased self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, mutual appreciation and respect, and cooperation. The use of circle practice as the foundation of the program reinforced positive participant experiences in the form of shared histories, stories, and experiences as girls of color.
- Virtual component: The virtual format bolstered the YFs' capacity to provide personalized support for participants during and after sessions, and enhanced participants' ability to be heard through the use of breakout rooms. The technology also expanded access to REY's program, allowing girls of color across the country to participate. At the same time, the virtual format presented challenges in building connection, as it inhibited sustained community-building and interfered with the ability of YFs to interpret social cues. YFs also sensed that participants felt less engaged and connected with each other than during in-person programs. YFs expressed difficulty working within the limited time frames allotted for each session, which was due in part to the confined, contained nature of online sessions.

LGBQ/GNCT youth in the juvenile justice system

Youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and/or gender non-conforming and transgender (LGBQ/GNCT) are significantly overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Conron & Wilson, 2019). Specifically, while six percent of youth in the general population identify as LGBTQ, for youth in detention this number is approximately 20 percent (Irvine & Canfield, 2016). Rates of system involvement are particularly high for sexual minority girls: in a survey conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), 40 percent of system-involved girls identified as LGBT/GNC (Conron & Wilson, 2019; Irvine, 2015). Due to both racial and SOGIE discrimination, LGBQ/GNCT youth of color are at especially high risk for potential system involvement (Wilber, 2015).

Despite LGBQ/GNCT youth's overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system, most agencies do not have existing protocols for collecting SOGIE data from youth (Center for American Progress, 2016). This is problematic as SOGIE data is crucial for better understanding the pathways and experiences of LGBQ/GNCT youth in the system as well as for informing individual decisions such as case planning, safety assessment, and dispositional planning (Wilber, 2015). Additionally, the collection and analysis of SOGIE data is necessary to develop policies that can improve outcomes for LGBQ/GNCT youth in the juvenile justice system (Wilber, 2015).

In recent years, as research has started to shed light on the magnitude of this issue, experts in the field have started to put forward recommendations and practices for best serving

LGBQ/GNCT youth in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The next section provides an overview of these types of recommendations, best practices, and programs that are especially relevant for stakeholders in the juvenile justice system who serve LGBQ/GNCT youth.

General recommendations

System involvement

Identify and evaluate adaptations of promising practices to reduce risk of system involvement and to promote positive outcomes once LGBTQ youth of color are system-involved, including mental health services that promote healing. Examples include: restorative justice practices instead of zero-tolerance policies in schools; community capacity-building instead of policing; and kin placement coupled with family acceptance therapy, instead of group home placement (Conron & Wilson, 2017).

Families

In appropriate cases, the juvenile justice system should provide families with interventions that will help resolve familial conflicts stemming from a child's sexual orientation or gender identity. In particular, juvenile justice professionals should: engage families in the court process; provide support and guidance to parents and caregivers to help them adjust to their child's sexual orientation or gender identity; and educate families on the positive impacts of family acceptance, as well as the negative impacts of family rejection on youth (Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009).

Probation agencies

Consider sexual orientation and gender identity when making disposition recommendations to ensure that youth are not placed in programs that are damaging to them, and are instead placed in programs and provided services that appropriately address their individual concerns. For youth alleged to have violated probation conditions, thoroughly explore the reasons for the behavior and consider whether harassment or abuse associated with sexual orientation or gender identity have contributed to the behaviors before asking the court to revoke probation (Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009).

Staff

Develop and implement nondiscrimination policies supported by education and ongoing training for staff. Departments of corrections should develop policies and implement training for the treatment of incarcerated LGBT people, including procedures for searches and prohibitions on harassment, violence, abuse, or discrimination (Center for American Progress, 2016).

Medical personnel in confinement facilities should provide consistent, research-based medical care according to approved standards of care, including prompt access to HIV medication and transition-related health care for transgender people. All staff should ensure confidentiality for all inmates by protecting medical records and allowing only necessary information to be shared with non-medical staff (Center for American Progress, 2016).

Facilities

Provide LGBT-competent programming and services within facilities. Do not attempt to change a youth's sexual orientation or gender identity, punish youth for expressing sexual orientation or gender, or require youth to undergo sex offender counseling based solely on the youth's sexual orientation or gender identity. Develop and implement evidence-based intake processes to identify youth who are vulnerable to physical and sexual assault for purposes of classification. (Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009).

Housing/classification

Staff must make classification and housing decisions case by case and must not automatically house youth based solely on their actual or perceived LGBTI status. Facilities must have a classification system for screening youth and making housing, bed, program, education, and work assignments (Wilber, 2015).

Prohibit blanket policies regarding the housing of LGBT youth, or those perceived to be LGBT, including policies that allow for the automatic housing of transgender youth according to their birth sex. Prohibit placement of LGBT youth based solely on their sexual orientation (Center for American Progress, 2016).

Data

Juvenile justice agencies should develop protocols for collecting SOGIE information from all youth served by the agency and for protecting the information from inappropriate dissemination (Wilber, 2015).

Existing programs for LGBQ/GNTC individuals

The list below includes re-entry, diversion, probation, and residential programs that have primarily been developed to address the needs of LGBQ/GNTC individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system. These programs were primarily highlighted in the report [*Unjust: How the Broken Criminal Justice System Fails LGBT People of Color*](#), by the Center for American Progress.

Re-entry

- **The Transformative Justice Law Project (Illinois):** Volunteers assemble items to help transgender people make the transition from prison or jail to the outside. In some cases, volunteers may meet incarcerated individuals at a prison or jail, or individuals can pick items up from the project's office. The project also provides gender-appropriate clothing, accessories, or other items as needed.
- **The Queer Detainee Empowerment Project (New York City):** Provides direct assistance to individuals released from immigration detention, including housing through a host

home program, clothing, employment assistance, help accessing medical care, and more.

- **Mariposas Sin Fronteras (Tucson, Arizona):** Assists LGBT individuals in immigration detention facilities in Arizona through visits, raising funds to make bonds, and assisting released individuals with housing and other necessities.

Community-based diversion programs

- **Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (Seattle, WA):** LEAD allows law enforcement officers to divert low-level offenders directly into community services including drug treatment programs and mental health support, housing and healthcare assistance, and job training. Local organizations, including a homelessness advocacy organization, offer case management, financial assistance, legal advocacy, housing assistance, and job training services. An evaluation of the program revealed that 60 percent of system-involved youth were less likely to be arrested within six months of participation. Despite the success of diversion programs there is minimal research on how LGBTQ youth interact with these programs.

Probation

- **Santa Clara County Probation Department (CA):** The Santa Clara County Probation Department underwent a system-wide transformation to improve care for LGBT youth. System-wide change was implemented through a steering committee, which oversaw the work and identified priorities, in tandem with three workgroups: policy, training, and youth and family engagement. The policy workgroup first created a policy for housing and services for trans youth in the juvenile hall, and then created a broader policy for LGBTQ youth across the system. Among the key policy provisions are that LGBT-affirming materials be made available to youth; discrimination, harassment, and violence are not tolerated; and all youth are to be respected and made to feel safe. The policies detail issues from names and language to housing placement, to training for employees, volunteers, and contractors. The policy also spells out processes for responding to harassment and discrimination.
- **New York City Probation Department (NY):** In 2015, the City of New York and its Department of Probation released a revised policy designed to ensure that LGBT, questioning, and intersex youth, adults, and families served by the department are treated with respect and experience a safe environment. Staff are advised to identify and address the individual needs of each client; harassment and discrimination are not tolerated; and staff are advised that they cannot impose their personal or religious beliefs on clients. Beyond these principles, the policy provides detailed guidance on the language to be used by staff, names and pronoun policies, disclosure and confidentiality, family concerns, personal grooming issues, procedures for searches, training, and policies for reporting harassment and discrimination.

Residential

- **Red Hook Residential Center (NY):** Though a male facility, Red Hook has become a leading facility in working effectively with gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning

youth. The staff have made a strong commitment to soliciting feedback and input from youth about programs and services and integrating their suggestions. For example, youth at Red Hook complained that they were unable to access gender-appropriate items through the commissary and as a result the facility now permits youth to purchase gender-specific personal care items, such as deodorant. Several transgender youth were interested in hosting a voguing night, and Red Hook provided the space for that program to occur. Using a positive youth development framework, they emphasize building relationships with the youth and focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment.

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