



POSITION STATEMENT

Adopted by NPJS Board of Directors ~ June 21, 2016

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:

Historically juvenile justice programs for females attempted to replicate services available to their male counterparts in both design and method of service delivery. The relatively small number of youth who had been placed in juvenile justice programs for girls and young womenⁱ resulted in this female population being overlooked or inappropriately served. Approaches designed for boys and young men have proven to be ineffective in meeting the unique needs of the female population resulting in program failure and increases in the likelihood of recidivism. Additionally, gender stereotyping has impacted decision-making at all levels, from public policy to individual treatment.

NATURE OF THE ISSUES:

- Services for youth within the juvenile justice system must be examined to determine their validity and reliability associated with the needs of the population served.
- Programs should acknowledge the unique perspectives that girls and young women develop based on their experiences growing up in their families, neighborhoods, subcultures and in society in general
- Programs should provide positive female and male role models, and empower girls and young women to learn to take control of their lives, to make decisions that are in their interest, and to ultimately reach their full potential.
- All Programming should promote philosophies and policies that work to change attitudes and eliminate stereotypes that prevent our female population from developing into positive role models, leaders and parents. For example, teaching approaches based on gender in the academic environment needs to be sensitive to the historical sexism that limited learning opportunities for females. Educational programming needs to include strategies that embrace equal learning.
- Consideration must be given during program development to the intensity and accessibility of gender responsive programming for girls and young women to ensure it is comparable in quality and effectiveness to that which is provided to males.
- Programs should provide an environment which is physically and emotionally safe, within which girls and young women are free to develop a healthy sense of self-worth and self-esteem.
- Girls and young women need programs that develop and promote positive peer relationships with other females.

- Many girls and young women in the juvenile justice system have experienced life traumas, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and victimization that impact their self-esteem, ability to trust and current behavior. Programs should ensure they employ trauma responsive practices and rely on current research to identify the most effective approach to address the needs of girls and young women.
- Girls and young women have unique health and emotional needs which require specialized services and should consider issues of sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting.
- Programs for girls and young women should provide opportunities for structured recreation, exercise, and leisure.
- Programs for girls and women should consider all of what makes each young person unique, including but not limited to: race, cultural background, religious background or practice, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation. As with all young people during adolescence, the development of one's identity and sense of self is a primary and critical task. These developmental processes should take place in a supportive and non-judgmental environment.

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The National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS) advocates the development and implementation of gender-responsive and trauma-informed programs, which embrace the elements necessary to meet the unique needs of girls and young women in the juvenile justice system. Those programs should be designed to emphasize the importance of relationships for girls and young women, physically and emotionally safe environments, and positive female and male role models. All staff working with justice-involved youth should receive specialized training designed to implement these programs and services with fidelity.

ⁱ This position statement does not attempt to define “girls and young women” in the context of transgender and intersex residents.