



FOCUS ON GIRLS
Six Months Later

The Girls' Task Force is dedicated to improving gender specific services and communication between such services to better serve all girls at risk in our community. We will create access to resources that heal, empower, educate, build self-esteem and provide girls with alternatives to juvenile incarceration.

Attached is a summary of progress on addressing gender specific issues in Santa Cruz County in the 6 months since our training on girl responsive services in the justice system. It is an impressive body of work, particularly because all involved must find a way to fit this area of concern into their already busy weeks.

Timing IS everything. Just as interest in and passion for this work reached a crescendo through the training provided by OJJDP, the Annie E. Casey Foundation expressed its desire to work in depth on girls in detention in Santa Cruz County. At the same time, Leslie Acoca visited us once again to update us on her work on a girls' physical health assessment. Through both of these projects, we are taking a deliberate and detailed look at girls detained in the juvenile hall.

Carmen Perez, Task Force member and Youth Advocate expressed her intent to be a force in uniting the efforts of Santa Cruz, Santa Clara and San Francisco County on behalf of girls in the justice system. What Carmen began on her own, will be carried out on a larger and more official scale at a three-site meeting in December sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Our commitment to include girls in our work continues to be supported by sale of "Woman Pins". If you haven't already tried your hand at selling this very popular item, please consider it. They truly sell themselves and the holidays are near. (Contact Yolanda 454-3845)

Interest continues to grow; just today I received the names of two more women interested in being a part of what we're doing. Thank you all!

Toni

FOCUS ON GIRLS Six-Month Report

The end of September marked the 6-month point since 60 of us met over the course of 4 days to raise our awareness of gender specific issues in the juvenile justice system. Santa Cruz County Probation, with technical assistance provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, presented two, 2-day workshops, focusing attention on the needs of and services for girls in the justice system. Probation officers, therapists, group supervisors, social workers, parents, teachers, advocates and mentors focused their attention on the unique needs of girls in a system which was not designed with them in mind.

March 2004

A diverse group of trainees, lead by nationally recognized trainers, had an opportunity to set a direction for future work with girls in Santa Cruz County. March 18th and 19th we were offered a 2-day overview of the issues, taught by Paula Schaefer, consultant and the former Director of Planning for the Female Offenders Unit, Minnesota Department of Corrections. Paula was assisted by Giovanna Toarmina.

The group studied major risk factors for girls, explored trends in interventions and treatment, learned about female psychosocial developmental research, and promising approaches to allow service providers to work more effectively with girls, their families and communities. Those assembled were guided in assessing current policies/procedures and existing services from the female responsive services lens. During the final hours of training, Paula led a strategic planning exercise and drew up a list of interested task force members.

March 25th and 26th Paula returned as a co-facilitator for Giovanna Toarmina, Executive Director of the Girls' Circle Association. [<http://www.girlscircle.com/>] Participants were trained in delivering the Girls' Circle curriculum which is designed to encourage girls to hold on to their voices, enhance judgment and critical thinking skills, respect themselves and others, evaluate decision making in regard to high-risk behaviors, maintain authentic connections with peers and adults and broaden their definitions of beauty and womanhood beyond media messages.

Enthusiasm was high at the close of the four days of training. Evaluations of the experience included praise that it was the most relevant training participants had received. In their final reports to OJJDP, Paula and Giovanna noted, "We found that all the staff was very 'open' to learning more about the needs of girls and was already committed to utilizing a gender specific approach. They were a unique group in their compassion and understanding for girls versus more of a punitive approach that we traditionally see in so many other juvenile systems across the country...Santa Cruz County can serve as a model for other departments and states that are looking to improve their services for girls in the juvenile system". The trainers did point to areas in need of additional training. Specifically they recommended learning more about suicidal behavior, self-injuring behavior and sexual trauma/abuse.

April 2004

Yolanda Perez-Logan of the probation department recruited one of the UCSC interns to assist with the convening of a girls' task force. Melanie Horstmann was a tremendous help with all the logistics involved in bringing together members with widely varied schedules. Once the task force began to meet, Melanie's participation in the creation of a vision and mission statement was key. Her thorough meeting notes will be a permanent record of our efforts.

Continuing a project begun by Toni Spencer, Melanie also recorded data on girls who were booked into the juvenile hall. Her work on that project will be featured in December at a workshop on data collection and girls in detention given by the Annie E. Casey Foundation [<http://www.aecf.org/>].

During the March trainings, the centerpiece of one of the activities was sharing "Just Because" poems written by the girls in the STAR program (short-term residential treatment). Neera Bhatnagar, Mental Health Client Specialist, facilitated the activity at STAR. With the permission of the young poets, our trainers have since shared their powerful poems with women throughout the United States. A group of trainees in Chicago were so taken by what they read that they sent their responses and expressions of gratitude back to the girls. Esther Kamkar, the poet who wrote the piece that inspired the girls' work, was located in Palo Alto and their poetry was shared with her as well.

Volunteers continued to sell the "Woman Pins" which were made available for sale at the training. The profit was set aside to pay stipends to young women for their participation in a Girls' Task Force. The pins proved to be so popular that a second order was placed. To date, more than \$580 has been raised and \$125 paid out to girls.

May 2004

On May 5th, with interest still high, many of the training participants were invited to be present for a report by Leslie Acoca on the Girls' Physical Health Assessment Pilot Project. The project is a partnership between the Juvenile Law Center and In Our Daughters' Hands. Leslie is the author of "No Place to Hide" an examination of girls in the justice system in California. During Phase 1 of her work, Leslie visited Santa Cruz in 2003 and spoke to girls, juvenile hall staff and medical staff. She also reviewed health information on the girls. A similar study was conducted in 2 other sites, with additional data from a fourth jurisdiction. The results were encouraging in some respects and alarming in others.

In short, the girls in custody in Santa Cruz County were younger and had far more serious drug and alcohol involvement than the girls in the other study sites. They also had available to them more comprehensive physical health services while in custody and better links to community health resources. Even though the Santa Cruz resources were rated higher, the group identified many needed improvements. In this and later meetings on the subject of gender specific services, there was an admitted lack of awareness of other agencies' resources in respect to girls.

The Girls' Task Force convened for the first time on May 11th, 2004 at the County Office of Education. Attending were Martine Watkins (COE), Yolanda Perez-Logan (probation), Toni Spencer (probation), Carmen Perez (Youth Advocate), Melanie Horstmann (UCSC intern) and Angela Irvine. Angela is a researcher with Ceres Policy Research, and is currently working on the evaluation piece for the COE's Camino's program for expelled youth

[http://www.santacruz.k12.ca.us/student_services/camyouthsumm.pdf].

Carmen announced that she used the Girls' Circle format at a Youth Summit meeting where she found it to be powerful and effective. Martine will use Girls' Circle in Caminos.

[<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2004/November/08/local/stories/011ocal.htm>].

Angela volunteered to create a simple evaluation instrument for Girls' Circle. The group reviewed the comments of Paula Schaefer and agreed on the need to include more training and awareness of the effect of trauma on girls and implications for girls in detention.

June 2004

On June 9th stakeholders, including members of the Girls' Task Force, met with Francine Sherman Director of the Juvenile Rights Advocacy Project, Boston College Law School.

[<http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/fac-staff/deans-faculty/shermanf/>] Fran is working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation on detention reform as it applies to girls. She presented the national view of girls in detention, followed by a summary of data collected on Santa Cruz County girls in April 2004.

In the discussion that followed, the group looked at social and system issues, suggested next steps and identified work groups and major initiatives.

The Task Force met again on June 15th. Beth Trenchard, Melissa Cowles and Jessica Roa of the Survivor's Healing Center [<http://www.survivorsh healingcenter.org/>] joined the group for the meeting and offered their resources. Karen Lemon (COE), Sarah Ferguson (COE) and Maria Hernandez (Youth Advocate/REAL) also joined in. Maria Gitin, consultant [<http://members.aol.com/GitinAssoc/>], heard of the efforts of the task force and volunteered her services in the mission statement process. Martine announced that Girls' Circles were being conducted through Caminos and at Star Community School. Angela updated the group on assessment tools for the Circles. Carmen and Maria H. reported on a West Coast conference they attended on community justice for youth. Carmen hopes to help unite Santa Cruz, Santa Clara and San Francisco counties in their gender specific work. The group was updated on the Above the Line/Group Home Society move and offered resources and expertise to the transition discussions.

July 2004

Maria Gitin guided a process to develop a vision and mission statement at the July 15th task force meeting. Cindy Couchman (COE) joined in the project. A subcommittee met a week later, armed with the group's input and synthesized the ideas. The theme of gender responsive resources and access to them was apparent. Each member of the subcommittee drew up suggested wording to be presented to the entire task force in August.

August 2004

The Task Force met on August 18th at the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union and arrived at the following Mission Statement:

The Girls' Task Force is dedicated to improving gender specific services and communication between such services to better serve all girls at risk in our community. We will create access to resources that heal, empower, educate, build self-esteem and provide girls with alternatives to juvenile incarceration.

In preparation for an October visit to the Center for Young Women's Development [<http://www.cywd.org/>], the Task Force viewed a 20-minute film on the program. Task Force members volunteered to bring the subject of gender appropriate services into the work of the Reclaiming Futures initiative [http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/site_detail.asp?siteid=11]

September 2004

September and the new school year saw a new round of Girls' Circle. Rita Martinico of Mountain Community Resources conducts a Circle for middle school-aged girls. Martine once again is leading the group at Watsonville Community School where interest and support is high. Circle participation grew from six to ten and is now being offered as an elective.

At the September 22nd Task Force Meeting at the Pajaro Health Trust, the group reflected on the accomplishments of the last 6 months and agreed to the obvious next step of a needs assessment of girls services. Urmila Cohen-Schmidt attended this meeting from Children's Mental Health. Angela updated us on the research proposed by the Girls' Circle Association. We have agreed to participate. The group suggested questions for Toni to have answered when she and two others visited the California Youth Authority on the 30th.

The September 30th visit to the California Youth Authority in Ventura [<http://www.cya.ca.gov/about/locations/ventura.html>] was a productive one. The Santa Cruz County contingent was impressed with the degree of gender responsiveness of the program and wrote a comprehensive report for the Court's review.

October 2004

Yolanda, Toni, Carmen, Karina Cervantes (YCORP/REAL [<http://www.cabinc.org/YCoRP/>]) and students Mayra and Virginia traveled to San Francisco on October 6th visit to the Center for Young Women's Development. The women at CYWD gave a thorough overview of their program and how and why it developed. They summarized their current programs and gave funding suggestions.

At the October 26th Task Force Meeting Arwen Turner, Membership Development Director for the Monterey Bay Girl Scout Council [<http://gsmontereybay.org/index.htm>] joined the group. Arwen is very interested in the work of the Task Force and announced a mural project in the Live Oak area. She spoke a little about the Studio 2B curriculum. The group began the task of listing available services for at risk girls.

Our Next Step (and how you can help):

Continue cataloging resources for at risk girls to determine where gaps in service are.

Please forward a list of resources you are aware of to Toni:

prb239@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

(We may contact you later for information on specific resources, once we've edited for duplication)

NEXT MEETING: 10-11:30 AM, Union Street Café (formerly Java House)
UPCOMING EVENT: Task Force to participate in a 3 site meeting 12/2 in San Francisco