



“Girls make up a growing percentage of the juvenile justice population . . . and their needs are not being met by a juvenile justice system that was designed for boys.”

-Improving the Juvenile Justice System for Girls (October 2012)

Introduction

Girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice system. Between 1985 and 2002, the overall delinquency caseload for females increased 92%. Most girls in the system are identified as low risk but have high personal need: their challenges include trauma, abuse, violence, mental and physical health problems, pregnancy, family conflict and school academic disconnection. For services to be effective, both research and practice highlight the importance of tailoring interventions to meet the specific needs of young women.

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) designs each program to meet the unique needs of the local population. For this reason, some aspects of programming vary (e.g. hours per week, specific activities, etc.), but all programs do share core programming components based on the specific developmental needs of girls and best practice.

Program Components include:

- Individualized Service Planning that addresses all life domains, such as physical/mental health, education/employment, safety, housing, family, recreation, legal, etc.;
- Partnership with each girl that empowers them to have “voice and choice” in their plan and builds on their strengths;
- Engagement of families and other positive people, places and activities in their community;
- Neighborhood-based recruitment of positive female role models from the same communities as the young women they serve who mentor, coach, support, encourage and understand the strengths and challenges facing their youth.
- Evidence-based individual and group interventions with other females that promote physical, psychological and emotional safety, while building self-esteem and positive relationships with other girls.

Outcome Snapshot

91%* of all girls served lived in the community at discharge

91% of girls enrolled in the program were not adjudicated of new offenses while in the program

96% of girls enrolled in the program were connected with some form of formal education or had graduated at discharge



YAP provides gender responsive programming in a number of communities across the country. The vignettes below highlight our work in New York, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Georgia and Florida.

Returning Girls from Residential Facilities in New York State

In 2012, New York State's Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) was struggling to effectively meet the needs of girls in their system. Many of the girls placed in their residential and detention facilities demonstrated violent behaviors toward themselves and toward other girls and staff.

This issue caused OCFS to reach out to YAP for help in providing community-based support for these young women. Through an extensive planning process that occurs while the youth is still in placement, YAP Advocates are able to implement a plan for the youth in the community that is carefully crafted for each girl to meet her specific needs. Often, the girls struggle with similar challenges: trauma, sexualized behaviors, drug and alcohol abuse, and physical aggression. Through the careful match of the youth with a female Advocate with whom she can trust, and intensive work with the young woman and her family, YAP has been effectively working to safely meet the needs of New York OCFS girls in their community, and at a significantly lower price than the residential facility.

All girls were in a residential placement at time of referral. By discharge:**

86% lived in community

86% had no new adjudications while in the program

100% were connected to school or meaningful employment

Helping Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) in Las Vegas

As part of the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI), in 2006 Clark County, Nevada utilized YAP's wraparound advocacy services model to close the girls' wing of its Detention Center and bring sexually exploited girls safely home.

In Las Vegas, YAP Advocates provide mentoring, family reunification activities, community service opportunities, job training, and safety planning, among other activities. Mental health and trauma needs are addressed through counseling from a clinical psychologist. Each young lady also participates in Girls' Circle, an evidence-based peer-on-peer program for girls proven to increase their self-efficacy, body image, and social support.

A critical component of this program also connects the girls with Supported Work, a YAP subsidized job training opportunity that helps meet the economic needs of the young person. These opportunities often result in long-term paid employment.

80% lived in community

92% had no new adjudications while in the program

100% were connected to school or meaningful employment

"They range in age from 12-17. Some cry, some stand blank-faced, some fume, some smile demurely-almost flirting. Different youths with the same problems: Many are repeating vice offenders, are addicted to drugs, are victims of childhood abuse, are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, are in love with their pimps, are combative and uncooperative, and are utterly without family. Many are teen mothers, too." – Clark County Courtroom Staff Member



Supporting Girls Post-Adjudication in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Since 1978, Philadelphia Youth Advocate Programs (PYAP) has provided a community-based support for high-risk youth referred by the Family Court and funded by the Department of Human Services. In 2012, the program noted a spike in the number of girls being referred, primarily for assault. To better meet the needs of these young women, DHS allowed YAP to open a girls unit.

94% lived in community

94% had no new adjudications while in the program

95% were connected to school or meaningful employment

The program combines individual work with an Advocate with structured groups that occur four evenings a week. Each night's topics vary: anger management addressed through the evidence-based Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations (PATTS) Curriculum; current events; community service activities that the girls help choose; and life skills training that emphasizes physical and mental wellness.

The Philadelphia Fashion Show is one empowering activity for the girls that builds a sense of cooperation and empowerment. Said Assistant Director Taiwana Reed, through the planning process, "...the girls bloom: the meanest becomes the softest, and the quietest opens up."

This life skills group also engages the girls in journaling. Journaling encourages the girls to look honestly at themselves and their own feelings and behaviors. Ultimately, as the girls get to know one another, they share their thoughts and feelings with the larger group and former "enemies" become friends. Despite the fact that these same girls were getting into weekly fights before their involvement in YAP, there has not been one fight or incident between girls in the program.

Special Supports for Teen Moms in Orlando, Florida

YAP's Orange County program in Orlando, Florida saw an increase in the number of pregnant teens referred to their program. These youth were experiencing significant emotional and physical turmoil, as well as conflict with their parents/caregivers. With the support of both the Departments of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and Children and Families (DCF), the program shifted its focus with these young women to better support their needs as they approached motherhood.

96% lived in community

96% had no new adjudications while in the program

100% were connected to school or meaningful employment

Much of the initial work consists of engaging the young woman and family to discuss and accept the pregnancy. The Advocate brings educational material, including information on community resources that are available for the teens. Most importantly, the Advocate reassures the girls that they are not alone and that they will support them throughout their pregnancy. A main focus of the Advocate's work with each young woman is to ensure that she is involved in prenatal care. The Advocate often attends these (and other) appointments with her youth, especially if no one else can accompany her. Advocates further connect youth with other supports in the community via various workshops, community resource fairs, and guest presentations that provide information or material support that they will need for the care of their unborn child.



YAP, DJJ and DCF work together to ensure that each youth receives the appropriate services at the needed dosage. Though most youth receive services for six months, there are occasions when needed services are extended to ensure appropriate support. This flexibility is critical, as it treats the youth as an individual and shows her that she and her unborn child are cared for and important.

Detention Alternatives in Savannah, Georgia

Savannah, county-seat of Chatham County, Georgia, works with a number of youth referred for probation violations as an alternative to detention. Most of the youth are runaways who are sexually active with multiple partners and come to YAP needing guidance and a better vision for themselves and their future.

100% lived in community

100% had no new adjudications while in the program

100% were connected to school or meaningful employment

YAP matches each girl with a female Advocate who assumes the role of a positive role model and works to heal the trauma, hurt, disappointment, abandonment and rejection pervasive in their youth. Advocates work with their girls with a blend of individual and group time that emphasizes the following key concepts: developing healthy relationships; self-awareness; self-esteem; self-respect; and life skills.



Brunch with Jordan Riles, 2013 Miss Black Georgia

Along with using the evidence-based Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations (PATS) Curriculum, program staff employ creativity and community outreach to organize hands-on activities that help each girl make the connection between her thoughts, feelings and behavior. By recognizing the feelings and thoughts that drive their behavior, Advocates are able to help youth challenge negative self-perceptions and replace them with beliefs in their beauty, value and potential. The young ladies are consistently exposed to positive women who reinforce the same messages through activities such as brunches with community leaders, to presentations from the local Health Department, to "make-overs" from Mary Kay Consultants. Finally, while the girls come to the program with survival skills, they leave the program with

life skills. Advocates work with each girl individually and in a group setting to address core life domains, such as employment, health, safety, and finances.

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About YAP

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization founded in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1975. YAP has programs in over twenty counties throughout PA, and serves over 13,000 families a year in more than 100 programs across 19-states in rural, suburban and urban areas. Since our founding, 100% of our programming occurs in the home communities of the people we serve.

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For more information

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*Outcomes reflect 187 girls served between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2013 in YAP programs with gender responsive programming in New York, Philadelphia, Georgia, Las Vegas and Florida.

**All other outcomes are from fiscal year 2012-2013.