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Juvenile Female Offenders: A Plan for Cook County

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, NOVEMBER 1996

Studies have shown that girls are treated differently from boys in juvenile justice systems. More girls are arrested for status offenses than boys, and their court records more often include information about their sexual activity. Girls are twice as likely as boys to be detained, with detention lasting five times longer than for boys. Although Cook County has one of the largest juvenile justice systems in the country, specialized services for adolescent girls are very limited.

A group of people concerned about girls in the juvenile justice system came together to develop a response to a Request For Proposals from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to improve the situation for adolescent girls in Cook County. OJJDP accepted the proposal and awarded a one-year planning grant to the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center to develop gender specific programming for young women in Cook County's juvenile justice system. The group who developed the grant proposal formed the Steering Committee for the project, and the grant officially began on November 1, 1995. This Steering Committee includes representatives of the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, the Juvenile Probation Department, Illinois Department of Corrections, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, the Judiciary, and service providers.

Recognizing the strength of partnerships at community and state levels, the Steering Committee elected to create a Task Force for further collaboration. The Task Force is composed of 30 government and community based organizations working to promote gender equity and fairness, such as the Chicago Police Department, Chicago Department of Public Health, Illinois Departments of Mental Health and Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, and large umbrella social service agencies such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Catholic Charities, and others. Task Force members have been a critical resource, providing feedback on current services and identifying new ideas and perspectives on how girls might best be served. These two groups combined their energies and commitment to girls to develop a comprehensive strategy to promote systemic change and gender specific programs as set forth in the project's mission statement:

- Increase the visibility of girls in the Cook County juvenile and criminal justice system.
- Effect change in the way the system treats girls by encouraging a shift in attitudes.
- Articulate the specific needs of girls.
- Design and implement policies and programming developed specifically to meet their needs.

Accomplishments

To fulfill this mission, the Steering Committee planned and coordinated accomplishment of key tasks, to which many individuals and organizations contributed hundreds of hours of their time. The tasks accomplished were significant, and they could be even more significant if further funding would enable further developments in each area:

- Developed gender specific risk assessment and needs assessment instruments with the assistance of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. These assessment instruments are built on data from girls in the Cook County juvenile justice system. The needs assessment instrument was designed by individuals representing 13 public and private agencies. It is an excellent tool for identifying gaps in services for girls. The risk assessment instrument used data from girls involved in court proceedings.

Further needs: For the risk assessment and needs assessment instruments to be successfully implemented, policies and procedures for their use should be developed as well as a training curriculum. A "training of trainers" should take place. Ideally, information should be gathered on a computer system to broaden the usefulness of the information obtained from both assessments to facilitate planning for the girls.

- Created the first resource directory of programs for girls in Cook County which includes programs on addictions counseling, girls in gangs, victims of abuse, mentoring, teen parenting, group counseling (education and support groups), residential/ independent living and teen mom residential placement.

Further needs: Programs for Adolescent Girls: 1997 Resource Guide was produced and distributed on a limited basis. A first effort, further funding would enable the directory to be revised and updated and distributed more widely throughout Cook County.

- Presented training on how to implement gender specific programming. In three training sessions, Linda Albrecht, nationally recognized for her expertise on girls in juvenile justice systems, trained more than 450 staff from over 100 public and private organizations.

Further needs: Agencies that received training requested additional gender specific training. There is also a need for written standards and protocols for providing gender specific services for girls.

- Assessed the strengths, modes of interaction and areas for improvement among the five custodial agencies -- Chicago Police Department, Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and Juvenile Probation Department, and the Illinois Departments of Corrections and Children and Family Services. The result has been a commitment to share information more effectively and to continue to devise productive opportunities for improving programs and services for young women.

Further needs: The agencies' commitment to continue focusing energies on improving the handling of girls in the juvenile justice system could be maintained through further support of programs for girls and sharing of information. For example, the custodial agencies might consider jointly investing in the case management continuum of care described below.

Case Management System

These accomplishments contributed to the culminating task, a design for a community-based case management system. A Case Management Subcommittee reviewed numerous case management models and held focus groups with girls in detention, on parole, and on probation. A full continuum of care was developed, incorporating a variety of organizational perspectives, that considers the girl, her personal problems, problems with the justice system and the goal: positive outcomes. Girls currently enter the juvenile justice system from multiple points; in this case management system at any point a girl could be assigned a case manager who would stay with her as long as she remains in the juvenile justice system.

Although the grant formally concluded on October 31, the Steering Committee is determined to continue its work to implement this case management system. The Steering Committee will seek funding to establish a private, not-for-profit organization that would fund case managers who would be based in interested agencies. This organization would raise funds and select agencies through a competitive bid process to receive case managers. Agencies receiving case managers would become part of a collective supported by the not-for-profit organization, which would also coordinate or provide training in case management; standards and protocols; ongoing case reviews; central intake; technical assistance in designing gender specific programs; advocacy; policy development; monitoring and training in the use of the risk and needs assessments; development of a quality assurance system; and MIS to support case management activities and the quality assurance system.

The case management model this new organization would implement is unique in two respects. It is both client and system focused. As a client focused model, it would advocate for the girls and help them negotiate the system and find access to the best services available with a goal of reduced recidivism and improved outcomes. As a system focused model it helps to coordinate the efforts of agencies serving and comprising the juvenile justice system to improve organizational efficiency, resource management and cost containment.

Funding

As a second unique feature, the model helps solve the problem of fragmented funding. Currently, female juvenile offenders follow funding sources. Where many juvenile females require specialized case planning, this is nearly impossible as every government agency has unique funding categories. If the offender fails to fit a category, she fails to receive services, or she receives services ill suited to her needs. Under the proposed case management continuum of care, funding would follow the girl and ensure she receives the most appropriate services.

Ongoing efforts of the new organization would also include establishing a Girls Network of service providers to continue the dialogue about at-risk girls in Cook County, share information and resources, and work together to empower girls to achieve their greatest hopes and dreams.

For further information about the juvenile female offenders project, please contact the Honorable Sophia H. Hall, Administrative Presiding Judge, 312-629-3733; or Leslie Balonick, BHS Management Corp, 312-663-0817.