

# *Appropriate Programming for Female Offenders*

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When creating or evaluating juvenile justice programs designed for young women, it is critical that one begin with an understanding of female development and of the specific issues which young women bring into the treatment setting. It is not enough for practitioners to strive to provide similar services as are provided to young men. Further, it is often not enough for services to simply focus on traditional techniques for meeting the needs of young offenders. Young women present unique treatment issues which stem from their own processes of growing up and developing, and programs and services must reflect an understanding of these issues in order to be effective. A discussion of the development needs of young women and how these needs are reflected in programming, must take into consideration the following four basic assumptions (Maniglia, 1994).

■ **Good Gender Specific Services Begin with Good Services**

In order for a program to effectively serve the needs of young women, it must first have as its base, solid programming techniques. Poor programming will never become good gender specific programming simply by adding specific components designed to serve the unique needs of young women. Effective programs share many basics in common no matter who their clientele. For instance, it is essential to have a well trained and competent staff which is involved with and knowledgeable about the youth in the program. Programs should have effective and ongoing evaluation mechanisms and focus on well thought out treatment approaches that have some basis in current adolescent development theory. Further, they must use sensitive assessment techniques which take into consideration not only offense history, but issues of gender development and must present the youth involved with an atmosphere of highly structured activities with specific treatment goals. If these basics are in place, then a program can begin to address specific treatment components which may be effected by the gender of the clientele.

■ **Young Women are Different than Young Men So Their Services Must be Also**

Psychological research continues to confirm that while there are similarities between the genders, there are also issues unique to the process of development in young women. Further, juvenile justice research reflects young women's patterns of offending which are often different in scope and motivation than those of their male counterparts. Therefore, service providers must take these differences into account when designing specific components for treatment programs. The result of such consideration is sometimes substantially new and different approaches to traditional treatment modalities and sometimes only slight adaptations in content or approach.

■ **Equality Does Not Equal Sameness**

In juvenile justice programming, equality of service delivery is not simply about allowing young women access to services traditionally reserved for young men. In fact this falls far short of what is necessary. Young men and women must have sameness only in terms of the most basic requirements. For instance equality might be reflected as sameness in the quality of line and administrative staff, in financial support of programming, and in the quality of physical structures. In the particulars of treatment, however, equality must be redefined to mean providing opportunities which mean the same to each gender. In this way, treatment services, while equal in quality, may appear very different depending on to whom the service is being delivered. When equality is redefined in this manner, it not only allows for the understanding of developmental differences, but also legitimizes them as valuable indicators of the type of programming necessary.

■ **Services for Young Women Cannot Be Viewed in Isolation From Society**

It has been said that "girls need to see their lives as a metaphor for the roles and experiences of women in the culture" (Pipher, 1996). In other words, the specific needs presented by young women in juvenile justice treatment are very often issues which have their basis in society's expectations of both girls and women. Therefore, part of effective juvenile justice treatment programming for young women is to recognize the connection between women's role in society and societal barriers to women's growth and development and the specific issues which need to be addressed in the treatment environment. However, recognition is not enough.