Gender-specific Programming for Girls

a presentation by
Greene, Peters & Associates
1018 16th Avenue, North
Nashville, TN 37208
615-327-0329
615-327-1422 (FAX)
greenpet@worldnet.att.net

GENDER-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING

Gender-specific programming refers to unique program models and services that ***comprehensively*** address the special needs of a targeted gender group. An essential ingredient is the fostering of positive gender identity development, particularly during the formative years of the gender group.

PROFILE of FEMALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS:

- 14 -16 years of age (older adolescent)
- Marginal student or academic failure
- Victim of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse
- Status offender
- Living in poverty stricken environment
- Instability in living arrangements
- History of family incarceration
- Substance use and abuse
- High incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and chronic health conditions
- Likelihood of demonstrating heightened levels of relational aggression as compared to overt aggression
- Girls of color

Addressing Girls' Victimization

- Girls need to develop an understanding of their victimization and how they may continue to view themselves as victims.
- Girls need to begin to understand that they can accept the power to not participate in abusive situations in the present and future.
- Girls need opportunities to address their feelings of anger and frustration that might have contributed to their involvement in criminal activity.
- Girls need opportunities to systematically explore their reluctance to trust others.
- Girls need opportunities to learn how to develop and maintain appropriate, healthy boundaries in relationships.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE GENDER-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING

- **Gender-specific programs should be holistic in approach and address all relevant domains, such as individual, family, school, community, and peer group.**

- **Gender-specific programs should include a strong family intervention component.**

- **Gender-specific programs should be designed to address the individual needs of female adolescents; therefore, an individual assessment should be performed prior to developing a treatment plan.**

- **Gender-specific programs should contain empowerment strategies that focus on building relationships and improving self-esteem.**

- **Gender-specific programs should offer information about and/or treatment for victimization issues.**

- **Gender-specific programs should include a sexuality/family planning component.**

- **Gender-specific programs should provide mentoring relationships rooted in the realities of girls' own lives.**

- **Gender-specific programs should include substance abuse prevention and intervention components.**

- **Gender-specific programs should involve the participants in programming decisions.**

- **Gender-specific program components should be culturally appropriate.**

- **Gender-specific programs should include a monitoring and/or evaluation component.**

- One caseworker throughout system.

ASPECTS OF PROGRAMMING

The discussion of self-esteem development was grounded in research but crucially connected to examples drawn from a wide variety of programs and projects. The combined information led us to a number of conclusions regarding program development and evaluation of projects benefiting adolescent women.

1. Girls need space that is physically safe, removed from those who depend on them, and removed from the demands for attention of adolescent males.

2. Girls need time for talk, for emotionally "safe", comforting, challenging, nurturing conversations within ongoing relationships.

3. Girls also need programs that potentiate relationships of trust and interdependence with other women already present in their lives. Friends, relatives, neighbors, church and social group members can be critical providers of insight, strategy and strength.

4. Programs need to tap girls' personal and cultural strengths (such as building on Afro-centric perspectives of history and community relationships) rather than always focus primarily on the individual girl. The development of programmatic partnerships with Black and Hispanic churches is one response to this need. Programs that explore girls' inner knowing of who they are and who they want to be is another.

5. Girls need mentors that reflect a rootedness in realities of the girls' own lives. They need mentors who exemplify survival and growth, as well as resistance and change. Such role models must be drawn from the girls' particular communities as well as resistance and change. Such role models must be drawn from the girls' particular communities as well as from the wider world of women.

6. Girls need education about how their bodies function, about pregnancy and contraception, and about diseases and their prevention. OF EQUAL importance is the opportunity to explore the meaning and value of sexual pleasure, the establishment and nurture of committed relationships, and the exploration of conflicting cultural messages about sexual behavior. Such programming can help girls to "take back" their bodies to suit purposes of their own defining.

7. Ideally, all social programs for girls would contain three components: individual change (i.e. girls in drug treatment), relational changes (i.e. work with significant relationships that affect drug abusing girls), and community change (i.e. working to alter the cultural and material contexts surrounding the girls which may contribute to their problems and/or solutions.

8. Girls need a voice in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs if the proposed benefits are to have relevance for them.

9. "Self-sufficiency" is an illusory and ill-defined goal, often used to convey "no longer on welfare." "Self-sufficiency" as it is usually understood negates the value of networks and support systems of interdependence, the development of which would be more appropriate and realistic for low-income young women.

10. Programs need to be comprehensive, integrated, and sustained over time, or linked so as to achieve such criteria. Substantial evidence documents that young women tend to be very positively influenced by social programs – as long as those programs are sustained long enough for the participants to integrate the benefits. Man programs labeled a failure have simply not been funded long enough for the girls to achieve the program goals. This is a financing problem, not one of program design or inability of girls to respond.

11. Programmatic involvement with schools is critically needed. Curriculum must be reshaped to reflect and value the experience and contributions of women. Re-evaluation of school/community relationships and exploration of possibilities for collaboration are urgent priorities. The role of the low-income adolescent girl as childcare provider for a single employed parent or for her own child must be addressed if schools are to be responsive to girls' needs.