

National Girls Institute Brief

(April 2013)

What Direct Service Providers Want: Voices From the NGI Listening Sessions

In 2011, the National Girls Institute (NGI) conducted listening sessions with over 600 stakeholders (including justice-involved girls, juvenile justice professionals across the continuum, and parents/caregivers) to determine key topics and training needs that would inform NGI's agenda and vision.

This brief, the fourth in a series, will reveal some of what direct service providers and other staff shared about what program providers and staff want.

What Direct Service Providers Say They Want Regarding Resources

Direct service providers and other staff want training for themselves in a variety of areas.

- Training in trauma and mental health was identified as important. *"Physical set-up of program (e.g., pat downs, certain tasks that might be triggering—how can we do it best without causing more trauma?)"*
- Training on effective communication and how to improve staff responses to girls with troubling behaviors was highlighted as a priority need. *"How to deal with angry, acting out girls who say they don't care; cuss everyone out including the judge."*
- Training on relationships was requested, including staff relationships with girls (e.g., listening skills, communication skills, boundaries). Also noted was the importance of delivering trainings on staff relationships with girls in a supportive manner.
- Trainings on race and culture, sexual abuse, and teen parenthood were also identified as important areas. Staff emphasized that all trainings should be culturally responsive to the needs of pregnant or parenting girls in the justice system. In being culturally responsive, trainings should allow space for staff to examine their own cultural values as a means to increase cultural competency.
- Training in technology and ways that girls communicate with their peers was also desired.

Overall, training approaches should be gender-responsive, trauma-informed, strengths-based, simple, and should involve families. *"We see organizations moving toward...involving the family. This is a positive change—get the whole family unit involved in the healing process. Change the whole family unit."*

Direct service providers and other staff want training for other professionals working with girls.

- The first priority was for school personnel, law enforcement, judges, and attorneys to be trained in the areas outlined in the previous section. Training for juvenile justice system and social service personnel was identified as a beneficial next step.
- Regarding training format, a face-to-face format or a combination of face-to-face training with some online/webinar opportunities was considered ideal.

Direct service providers and other staff want information on a range of issues.

- Information about the impact of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on girls involved in the juvenile justice system was identified as a need. *"I would like to have brochures to give to girls and their families on eating disorders and PTSD."*
- Information about how to identify abuse and bullying was requested. *"We don't know enough about developmental stages; we don't seem to know much about bullying, understand that concept, or even know to what extent it occurs."*
- Information about community guides and other agencies that serve girls was also requested. *"Gender-specific community resource guide—who is serving what ages."*

Direct service providers and other staff want technical assistance in several areas.

- Technical assistance in programming and curriculum development, particularly around addressing girls' acting out behaviors and best practices, was discussed. *"Group curriculum dealing with adolescent girls' social and emotional needs."*
- Technical assistance in data/research, program development and implementation, assessment and evaluation, and funding were also given priority. *"Data collection—knowing what to collect, how to use the information, interpret it, and present it."*

Direct service providers and other staff want to identify (and eradicate) policies and protocols that have a negative impact on girls and their families.

- Policies that negatively impact girls in systems, schools, and services included the system emphasis of using foster care over strengthening families, zero tolerance policies in schools, lack of same-sex protocols for strip searches and interviewing, and assumed heterosexuality in available resources for girls.

"Judges think they have to protect girls so they send them to programs for running away, etc. (things that they do not do to boys)."

"Risk assessments are not gender responsive and this is the gatekeeper, unless there is a diagnosis, we cannot treat girls."

"HIPAA impedes ability to share some parts of social history."

Direct service providers and other staff want to acknowledge the critical issues and challenges affecting girls on various levels.

- Girls' challenges included lack of family support and resources, abuse (such as sexual abuse), sex education, pregnancy, gangs, trauma, violence, and dating relationships.
- Program challenges included lack of transition care, staff training, funding, and girls' programming that takes gender differences into account. *"There needs to be transition and independent living dollars to assist during the transition period."*
- System level challenges included differences in sanctions/treatment of girls (based on charges), as well as the overall systems' response to girls.

To read more about the NGI Listening Sessions, please visit

<http://www.nationalgirlsinsitute.org/events/ngi-published-listening-sessions-report/>