

Components of Gender-Specific Programming for Girls

Shaped by revealing statistical data and developmental research, the following eleven components are essential to any gender-specific program that attempts to holistically address the needs of adolescent girls who are involved with or at-risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system.

- Programs must provide emotional and physical safety.
- Programs must address the abuse in girls' lives.
- Programs must be strength-based.
- Programs must be culturally appropriate.
- Programs must be relationship based.
- Programs must address sexuality, including pregnancy and parenting.
- Programs must address the unique health needs of females, including nutritional concerns and regular physical activity.
- Programs must provide equitable educational and vocational opportunities.
- Programs must provide positive female role models and mentors.
- Programs must nurture the spiritual lives of participants.
- Programs must involve members of girls' families or supportive adults in their lives.

We address the whole girl in the context within which she lives and the influences that shape her life.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has."
Margaret Mead*

The Girls Court Team

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Hawai'i Girls Court

**Gender-Specific
Programming for Girls**



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The Hawai`i Girls Court Program

The Hawaii Girls Court is one of the first courts in the United States built on a full range of gender-specific and strength-based programming targeting female juvenile offenders. Court hearings are open and frequent with family participation.

Gender-specific programming seeks to recognize the fundamental differences between male and female juvenile offenders as well as their different pathways to delinquency and, in doing so, act efficiently, creatively, and innovatively to stem the quickly rising tide of female delinquency.

The explicit goal of this laboratory court is to promote the empowerment of girls involved in the Hawaii juvenile justice system as well as to pilot programs that may be of relevance to the wider community of girls in the islands. The Hawaii Girls Court works for Hawaii's girls.

We have had tremendous success at reducing runaways and reducing arrests. Girls have gotten diplomas; some are in community college and others in vocational training. Girls have become drug free, obtained employment, and healed troubled relationships with families and others.

In the girl's own words, "Girls Court gave me the permission to be good."

We acknowledge that gender makes a difference. We structure our program to address the unique needs of girls and create an environment where girls receive services while feeling physically and emotionally safe.

Purpose of Girls Court

- Develop a comprehensive continuum of gender-specific intervention and dispositional services for girls.
- Prevent and reduce female delinquency.
- Stress accountability and appropriate sanctions, growth in self-control, and responsibility.
- Reduce relapse into a previous mode of at-risk behavior by articulating the specific needs of girls in the juvenile justice system.
- Be more effective and efficient in meeting the special needs of at-risk girls by effecting systemic change and encouraging a positive, pro-active approach to providing services.
- Promote comprehensive, gender sensitive review and evaluation of policies and services provided on behalf of girls and their families.
- Bring quality training to those working with girls in the juvenile justice system, develop new programming and techniques, and test what works for female adolescents.

Girls and Their Families

Both the girls and their parents must agree to commit to attend group court sessions, family and individual counseling, and activities. Active family participation has been shown to increase the girls' growth and success.

We acknowledge the unique strengths that live within all of us. We work to identify and nurture them in each of our girls. We believe in focusing on and building upon strengths, rather than weaknesses.

Activities and Community Service

The Girls Court Program has received tremendous support from the community and cross-system of agencies. This support has made it possible for Girls Court to greatly and powerfully expand its services and activities and contact network. A number of dedicated individuals and agencies have given generously of their time and expertise to provide the girls and their families with a wide array of services as well as positive and healthy activities.

Girls Court introduces girls to new experiences with positive and inspirational role models. The girls can explore education, recreation, meet healthy women in a variety of jobs and roles, focus on their strengths and meet new goals.

Community Service is required of all the girls and their family members. Our activities have included projects such as, weeding and painting the facility at the Hawaii Fi-Do Service Center, planting native plants on Kahoolawe, environmental cleanup on Mokauea Island, taking pictures and mounting them in frames for mothers and their babies at Salvation Army's Women's Way residential treatment, (for which Girls Court received an award for Make A Difference Day), and serving foster families Christmas dinner.