

**STANISLAUS COUNTY**  
**GIRLS JUVENILE JUSTICE INITIATIVE:**  
**IMPROVING SERVICES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED GIRLS**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**DECEMBER 2010**



## **Mission**

To promote public safety by creating a gender-responsive, culturally competent continuum of services that provides opportunities for girls and young women to lead safe, healthy, and productive lives.

## **Vision**

Community providers, educators, state agencies, legal professionals, the Court system, concerned citizens, parents/legal guardians and girls will collaborate, utilize training and technical assistance, and maximize resources to improve outcomes for the girls in or at risk of entering the juvenile justice system in Stanislaus County, California.

## **Goals**

1. To divert girls who do not pose a public safety risk from the juvenile justice system and refer them and their families to appropriate community based services.
2. To align out-of-home placement decisions with the assessed needs of justice-involved girls.
3. To identify or develop gender-responsive and culturally competent treatment options aligned with the assessed needs of justice-involved girls and include these services in their probation plans.
4. To document the process and outcomes of the initiative to assist other counties to identify the most effective ways to meet the needs of their young women at-risk of being involved, currently involved, and previously involved in the juvenile justice system.

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# Acknowledgements

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Spearheaded by the Prison Law Office in Berkeley, CA, the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative was made possible due to the generous support of the Sierra Health Foundation and the State Bar of California's Equal Access Fund. We are grateful to their commitment to improving the lives of girls and young women in Stanislaus County, California.

We would like to thank the many stakeholders in Stanislaus County who participated in the numerous community meetings, focus groups, individual interviews and telephone conference calls that helped shape the development of this strategic plan. The following is a list of organizations whose representatives have participated in the strategic planning of the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative.

- Alliance Worknet
- Aspiranet Counseling Center
- Christ Unity Baptist Church
- CSU Stanislaus
- Community Services Agency
- Health Services Agency
- Keyes Union Elementary School District
- Modesto City Schools
- Modesto Police Department
- Parent Resource Center
- Safe Communities
- Sierra Education & Counseling Services
- Sierra Vista Child & Family Services
- Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services
- Stanislaus County Center for Human Services
- Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors
- Stanislaus County Children and Families Commission
- Stanislaus County Juvenile Court
- Stanislaus County Office of Education
- Stanislaus County Office of the District Attorney
- Stanislaus County Probation Department
- Stanislaus County Public Defender's Office
- The Resource Group
- United Way

Special acknowledgements are extended to those who contributed significantly to the drafting and completion of this strategic plan (NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women, Prison Law Office, the Youth Justice Institute, and the Stanislaus County Probation Department).

### **About the NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women**

Founded in 1907, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) is the nation's oldest nonprofit criminal justice research and policy organization. The mission of NCCD is to promote effective, humane, fair, and economically sound initiatives to prevent and reduce crime and delinquency. The Center for Girls and Young Women, the newest division of NCCD, expands this mission. The Center was launched in Jacksonville, Florida in October 2008 in response to the growing population of girls in the juvenile justice system. Guided by their courageous life experiences, the Center is the passionate voice for activism to ensure equitable, humane, and gender-appropriate responses to improve outcomes for girls and women in the justice and child welfare systems. The Center focuses on advocacy, research, assessment services, staff training and evaluation to address juvenile justice and child welfare systems that are designed for boys and ill-equipped to meet the gender-specific needs of girls and young women.

### **About the Prison Law Office**

For over 30 years, the Prison Law Office, a nonprofit public interest law firm, has been in the forefront of legal efforts to enforce the Constitution and other laws inside the walls of California's prisons. With a small staff of attorneys and support personnel, the Prison Law Office represents individual prisoners, engages in impact litigation, educates the public about prison conditions, and provides technical assistance to attorneys throughout the country. Over the past few years, the Prison Law Office has increased its focus on juvenile justice public policy advocacy. This includes writing and supporting legislation, clarifying relevant laws, and collaborating with counties who lack the expertise, but are interested in and committed to improving the services they provide to at-risk and detained youth.

### **About the Youth Justice Institute**

The Youth Justice Institute, originally the Girls Justice Institute, was founded in 2002 as project of the United Way of the Bay Area to address the growing population of young women involved in the juvenile justice system. GJI quickly detected gaps in services in San Francisco that contributed to young women's cycles of incarceration and made it difficult for them to make meaningful change in their lives. GJI connected girls to appropriate services, strengthened the capacity of service providers, and documented youth's progress. GJI's success in providing gender-responsive intervention services for young women led to the expansion of their work to include addressing boys' gender-specific issues. In 2007, the organization was renamed the Youth Justice Institute (YJI) to reflect the broader scope of work. In addition to providing direct services in San Francisco and Alameda County, YJI now provides technical assistance and training to assist other counties in developing and implementing strategies that make the juvenile justice system more responsive and rehabilitative for youth and families.

### **About the Stanislaus County Probation Department**

The Stanislaus County Probation Department is committed to innovation, creativity, and collaborative partnerships to provide community safety and services. The Department is committed to promoting responsible behavior and offender accountability and partnering with community to provide direct services to offenders, families, and victims.

A draft of this strategic plan was distributed to stakeholders who participated in the meetings listed above with an invitation to review and provide feedback or recommendations. We would like to thank the stakeholders for reviewing the draft, especially those who provided written feedback and recommendations.

Most importantly, we want to express our gratitude to the justice-involved girls in Stanislaus County who participated in focus groups and individual interviews to reflect upon their experiences and share their ideas for improving the juvenile justice system.

We have sought to create a strategic plan that includes the voices of community stakeholders, including family members and young women directly impacted by the juvenile justice system. Our intention is to develop strategies that ensure public safety while providing the opportunity for all girls in or at risk of entering the juvenile justice system to lead safe, healthy, and productive lives.

# Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative

## Background

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With the passage of Senate Bill 81 in 2007, California counties can no longer rely on the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) as a last resort commitment for lower-risk girls who have exhausted local resources. The new law prohibits counties from committing all but those youth who have committed the most serious offenses to DJJ. While the number of girls committed annually to the DJJ has been relatively small, addressing the elimination of this commitment option has underscored counties' overall lack of resources to serve the female population.

The Prison Law Office published a report in 2009 that highlighted the need for gender-responsive services and began looking for a probation department with whom to partner to create a model for counties in California. The Prison Law Office chose to work with the Stanislaus County Probation Department because Probation administration and staff demonstrated eagerness to better meet the needs of justice-involved girls, willingness to be transparent about the Department's shortfalls, and capacity to collaborate with community partners to develop gender-responsive programs for girls diverted from the juvenile justice system and those returning home or going to out-of-home placements from juvenile hall. In addition, the number of justice-involved girls (approximately 230 individual girls in 2009) is a significant enough population to demonstrate a need, but manageable for a pilot project.

### **Definition of Gender-Responsiveness**

Starting with a clear definition of gender-responsiveness is critical when creating or evaluating juvenile justice programs designed for girls.

The National Institute of Correction's report (2005) provides the following definition:

*Gender-responsiveness means creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's lives and addresses the issues of the participants. Gender-responsive approaches are multidimensional and are based on theoretical perspectives that acknowledge women's pathways into the criminal justice system. These approaches address social (e.g. poverty, race, class, gender inequality) and cultural factors, as well as therapeutic interventions. These interventions address issues such as abuse, violence, family relationships, substance abuse, and co-occurring disorders. They provide a strength-based approach to treatment and skills-building. The emphasis is on self efficacy.*

Furthermore, Stanislaus County is the largest county in California without a juvenile commitment facility. In 2008, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors was approved to

build their first commitment facility using Senate Bill 81 Youthful Offender Block Grant funds. The new 60 bed juvenile commitment facility in Modesto is scheduled to open in summer 2013 and will have a dedicated 15 bed girls unit. The Probation Department is dedicated to pursuing additional funding to provide gender-responsive programming and services to the girls that will be housed there. This includes purchasing and implementing a gender-responsive assessment and case planning tool, gender-responsive training for staff as well as partner agencies, and implementation of evidence-based gender-responsive programming, treatment, and aftercare services.

The goal of the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative is two-fold:

1. To better serve young women in Stanislaus County who are at-risk of being involved in the juvenile justice system, are currently in out-of-home placements, including detention, or have recently been released from such placements by providing gender-responsive programming and services to reduce the need to remove these young women from their homes and to increase the likelihood of successful re-entry for those who have been removed, and
2. To document the process and outcomes of the initiative to assist other counties to identify the most effective ways to meet the needs of their young women at-risk of being involved, currently involved, and previously involved in the juvenile justice system.

This will be accomplished by working closely with partners in Stanislaus County, and then using the lessons learned in this pilot county to create a dissemination model to facilitate other counties in identifying and meeting the particular needs of the girls in their systems.

# The Need for Gender-Responsive Services and Assessments in the Juvenile Justice System

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## Overview

Girls make up the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population, now representing nearly one in every three juvenile arrests (OJJDP, 2008). As a group, their reasons for involvement in the juvenile justice system are different than those for justice-involved boys. Girls who are chronic runaways often have significant levels of sexual and physical victimization, suggesting that a main cause of their justice-involvement has to do with fleeing unsafe environments. Girls who are physically assaultive often do so to stop their own victimization. Family problems are a major contributor to involvement for girls, more so than for boys. Furthermore, justice-involved girls have more extensive trauma histories, mental health needs, and substance abuse problems than their male counterparts.

Since justice-involved girls and boys have different reasons for becoming involved in the delinquency system, they also have different needs that arise from these delinquency-contributing factors. Treating justice-involved girls and boys in a generic manner does not meet the needs of girls and may even leave them worse off, leading to deeper involvement in the juvenile justice system. Without gender-responsive assessments, programs, and services, an opportunity to address the issues that lead to justice-involvement for girls is missed and their issues are consequently left unaddressed.

This section (reprinted with permission from the Prison Law Office) draws from research and studies done in many states and a few other countries. This is because there are not enough studies of California youth that compare justice-involved boys to justice-involved girls to alone present a comprehensive picture. The possibility, however, that California justice-involved youth differ from the youth in the research and studies cited here exists.

## Girls Account for a Larger Proportion of Justice-Involved Youth than Before

Girls make up the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population, now representing nearly one in every three juvenile arrests (OJJDP, 2008).

- From 1980 to 2005, arrests of girls increased while arrests of boys decreased (FBI, 2006).

- From 1997 to 2006, arrests for simple assault declined 4% for boys and increased 19% for girls (OJJDP, 2010).
- From 1997 to 2006, arrests for aggravated assaults decreased more for boys (24%) than for girls (10%) (OJJDP, 2010).
- The greatest proportion of arrests for girls is for minor offenses (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 10-11).

### *Policy Changes*

Evidence suggests that girls now account for a larger proportion of justice-involved youth largely because of policy changes that criminalize minor offenses by young women, not because of increases in major delinquent acts (OJJDP, 2008; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005).

Girls, nationally, are twice as likely as boys to become involved in the delinquency system for status offenses and technical violations and are often detained for their own safety, not because they pose a danger to the community (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 11, 29-30; Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2004). This remains true after controlling for factors like criminal history (McGuire, 2002 as cited in Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 30). The practice of “bootstrapping” for the “protection” of girls occurs when girls with status offenses or minor charges are detained on a contempt finding because they violated a court order like one ordering a minor not to run away from a group home. It is unclear whether this practice is widespread in California, but when it is used, research shows that it impacts girls far more than boys; a Florida study revealed that the chance of a formal referral for a female status offender increased from 32 to 70 % if she was referred for contempt, compared to an increase from 38 to 46 % for male status offenders referred for contempt (Bishop & Frazier, 1992, 1181). Girls who experience early onset puberty are at increased risk of substance abuse, running away, truancy, and intimate partner violence (Caspi & Moffitt, 1991; Flannery, Rowe, & Gulley, 1993; Graber, Lewinsohn, Seeley, & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Kaltiala-Heino, Marttunen, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2003; Lanza & Collins, 2002; Stice, Presnell, & Bearman, 2001). Girls who are chronic runaways often have significant levels of sexual and physical victimization, suggesting that a main cause of their justice-involvement has to do with fleeing unsafe environments (Feitel, 1992; Stiffman, 1989). The practice of “bootstrapping,” therefore, leaves the causes of girls’ delinquency unaddressed and results in punishing girls for fleeing unsafe environments. It also results in over-detainment; a study of delinquent youth in Oregon found that while boys had more prior offenses, girls spend an average of 131 days in detention compared to 72 days for boys (Chamberlain, 2002 as cited in Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 12).

Girls may also be detained so they can be referred to services, including for mental health, or to protect them from sexual victimization. While these reasons for detention are given to promote the “best interest” of the girl, they still result in the over-detention of girls because appropriate, less restrictive alternatives are not identified or available.

### **Boys and Girls Differ In the Causes of Their Justice Involvement**

Gender differences related to biological functions, psychological traits, and social interpretation can result in different types and rates of justice involvement (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001 as cited in OJJDP, 2010). Boys often become involved in the delinquency system as a result of delinquent lifestyles or peer influences, while girls more commonly become involved as a result of traumatic family experiences (Dembo, Williams, & Schmeidler, 1993 as cited in Veysey, 2003). For example, more girls than boys referred to the delinquency system for violent acts have suffered from sexual abuse (Snell, 1994).

Child abuse and neglect have been found to be stronger predictors of delinquent acts for girls than for boys (Makarios, 2007). Prior victimization is also a significant predictor of violence for girls (Molnar, Browne, Cerda, & Buka, 2005; Song, Singer, Anglin, 1998). One study found that girls who had experienced severe child abuse were more than seven times more likely than non-abused girls to commit a violent act that was referred to the delinquency system (Herrera & McCloskey, 2001). Evidence suggests that girls fight out of hopelessness and a belief that justice-involvement could not make their current situations worse (Ness, 2004).

Justice-involved girls experience higher rates of family issues than boys, and those who fight, often do so at home with family members more than boys do, who more often fight with strangers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 34; Bloom, Owen, Deschense, & Rosenbaum, 2002). Girls who are physically assaultive often do so to stop their own victimization (Brown, 1998, Belknap, Dunn, & Holsinger, 1997 as cited in OJJDP, 2008) and for these girls, family members constitute the target in 20% of assaults versus 6% for boys (OJJDP, 2008, 10-11). When girls engage in physical violence at home to defend themselves, they can end up being arrested when law enforcement, following mandatory arrest laws for domestic violence, find it easier to arrest and remove the youth, rather than the primary caretaker who may have other dependents (OJJDP, 2008; Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2004, 565-6). Although the systematic prevalence of this has not been documented, its anecdotal value reinforces the concern that girls often become involved in the juvenile justice system for policy reasons.

Strong family connections can serve as a protective factor for girls, but when these connections are damaged or severed, girls from unstable and unnurturing families may be more sensitive to traumatic events that occur at home. Thus, girls from unstable families are more likely than boys to engage in risk-taking behaviors, like engaging in relationships

with older males or joining gangs, to meet their basic needs (Robertson, Bankier, & Schwartz, 1987, Widom, 1991, Gilligan, 1982, Leonard, 1982 as cited in OJJDP, 2010). Girls in a study of 444 incarcerated youth in Ohio were significantly more likely to be involved with partners much older than themselves than boys (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Gang-involved girls are significantly more likely than gang-involved boys or at-risk non-gang-affiliated girls to report having experienced family problems (Miller, 2001 as cited in OJJDP, 2010; Moore, 1991 as cited in OJJDP, 2008).

Nationally, a greater proportion of justice-involved girls than boys are detained for warrants, probation or parole violation, or program failures which often result from girls running away from home or placements where they are experiencing abuse or where caretakers fail to address the underlying causes of girls' behavior (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 31, 33). A study of four sites in Oregon, California, New York, and Illinois revealed that of youth that return to detention within a year, 53% of girls (41% of boys) do so for warrant, probation or parole violation, or program failure and the gap between girls and boys increases with the number of returns. For youth returning twice within one year, the gap was 19% (66% for girls versus 47% for boys) and for youth returning three times within one year, the gap was 23% (72% for girls versus 49% for boys) Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 33). These types of family problems can lead to further victimization of girls and deeper involvement with the delinquency system through their participation in survival crimes (Ness, 2004; Miller, 2001, Fishman, 1995, Gilligan, 1982, Leonard, 1982 as cited in OJJDP, 2010).

At least one study found that girls in detention are more likely than boys to identify as lesbian/gay or bisexual. Girls were six times as likely as boys to identify as bisexual and three times as likely as boys to identify as lesbian/gay (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). While there is no conclusive data from this study regarding causation between sexual orientation and delinquency involvement, other literature is clear that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth often face harassment that leads to their delinquency involvement (Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009).

### **Justice-Involved Girls Have Different Needs**

Since justice-involved girls and boys have different reasons for becoming involved in the delinquency system, they also have different needs that arise from these delinquency-contributing factors.

#### ***Trauma Histories – Abuse and Neglect***

Large numbers of justice-involved girls have experienced trauma, particularly abuse and neglect. One study of justice-involved girls found that they experienced sexual and physical abuse at 200-300 times that of the national population; 93% had experienced physical or sexual abuse, 63% had experienced both, and 76% had experienced at least one act of

sexual abuse before turning 13 (Smith, Leve, & Chamberlain, 2006, 350). An Oregon study found that the average age of first sexual encounter for justice-involved girls was 6.75 (Chamberlain, 2002 as cited in Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 21). A majority of girls surveyed in California's Ventura Youth Facility were exposed to multiple types of trauma; 74% reported being badly hurt or in danger of being hurt; 76% had witnessed someone severely injured or killed, and 60% had been raped or been in danger of being raped (Cauffman, Feldman, Waterman, & Steiner, 1998, 1212).

Justice-involved girls suffer from traumatic experiences, particularly sexual abuse, at higher rates than justice-involved boys (Berlinger & Elliot, 2002; Teplin, Aram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002). Delinquent girls in Cook County, IL were 44% more likely to have been involved with the child welfare system than delinquent boys (Keller, 2002 as cited in Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 34). Another study found that girls in foster care in New York City were more likely to be detained compared to non-dependent girls (17.6%) than boys in foster care compared to non-dependent boys (4.8%) (Conger & Ross, 2001 as cited in Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005, 19).

### *Mental Health*

Various studies of youth in detention reveal a disturbing prevalence of mental health illness among girls in detention. Girls are more likely to develop psychological disorders after experiencing trauma and unsurprisingly, large numbers of justice-involved girls suffer from mental health problems associated with past sexual and/or physical abuse and/or neglect (Veysey, 2003; Rowan, Foy, Rodriguez, & Ryan, 1994; Foa & Rothbaum, 1998 as cited in Underwood, 2007).

Girls are more likely to internalize traumatic experiences, leading to low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, disassociation, compulsions, flashbacks and higher rates of serious mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and attempts at self-harm, including suicide (Friedrich, Urquiza, & Beilke, 1986; Eme, 1979; OJJDP, 2010; OJJDP, 2008; Teplin, Aram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002; McLeer, Callaghan, Henry, & Wallen, 1994; Underwood, 2007; Murray, 1993; Nordness, Grummert, Banks, Schindler, Moss, Gallagher, & Epstein, 2002). A study of 1,829 Cook County youth found that 74% of girls (66% of boys) had at least one mental disorder, while another study of 49 youth in two secure facilities near Toronto, Canada found that 82% of girls (58% of boys) had more than one disorder (Teplin, Aram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002, 1136; Ulzen, 1998). 84% of justice-involved girls (27% of justice-involved boys) in Ohio had significant mental health needs, as determined by a comparison to a normed prevalence rate of mental disorders in non justice-involved youth (Timmons-Mitchell, Brown, Schulz, Webster, Underwood, & Semple, 1997).

Sixty-five percent of girls studied in the California Youth Authority suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at some point in their lives, a rate six times that of justice-involved males, and 49% were exhibiting symptoms of PTSD at the time of the study, 50% more than comparable males (Cauffman, Feldman, Waterman, & Steiner, 1998, 1212, 1214).

A study of Ohio youth found that girls were more likely than boys to report trying to harm themselves (54% versus 46%), thinking about committing suicide (52% versus 29%), and trying to commit suicide (46% versus 19%) (Belknap and Holsinger, 2006, 60).

### ***Substance Abuse***

The elevated rate of trauma for girls is linked to higher rates of substance abuse among justice-involved girls than justice-involved boys (Underwood, Stewart, & Castellanos, 2007). It has been estimated that up to 70% of youth in detention have substance abuse problems (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2003). A study of 54 girls in detention in California found that 80% had symptoms of an emotional disorder or substance abuse problem. Sixty-three percent of these girls had a history of recidivism and of those girls, 82% had a history of substance abuse problems and 47% had used mental health services before (Kataoka, 2001). Another study of co-morbidity of substance abuse/dependence and another psychiatric diagnosis among justice-involved youth found that 99% of girls (69% of boys) met co-morbidity criteria (Randall, Henggeler, Pickrel, & Brondino, 1999, 1120).

### **Treating Justice-Involved Girls Like Boys Is Ineffective**

In recognition of the fact that treating justice-involved girls like boys is ineffective, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, reauthorized in November 2002, requires that state plans include “an analysis of gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency, including the types of such services available and the need for such services for females” and “a plan for providing needed gender-specific services for the prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency” (42 U.S.C. 5601 223(8)(B)(i-ii)).

### ***Developmental Differences***

Boys and girls follow different patterns of development and socialization and thus have different needs. During adolescence, female development focuses on socialization, self-consciousness, pubertal changes, social peer competence, identity, self-concept, and sexuality (Underwood, Stewart, & Castellanos, 2007). Traumatic experiences during this time, particularly those involving sexual abuse, hinder healthy development and increase the chance that these girls will develop emotional and behavioral difficulties.

### *Justice-Involved Boys and Girls Have Different Risks and Strengths*

Girls' delinquent acts are typically less chronic and less serious than boys (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Sheldon & Chesney-Lind, 1993). For example, violent delinquency among girls peaks in middle school (OJJDP, 2008). Also, boys are more likely to remain involved in gangs into young adulthood while girls' involvement is usually of shorter duration and limited to adolescence (OJJDP, 2008).

Not only do justice-involved boys and girls tend to have different risk and strengths, but protective and risk factors may mediate their likelihood of delinquency involvement differently in boys and girls (Resnick, Ireland, & Borosky, 2004; Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004 as cited in OJJDP, 2009). School attachment, measured by relationships with teachers, and academic achievement have been found to be stronger protective factors against delinquency for girls than for boys (Crosnoe, Erickson, & Dornbusch, 2002). One study examined whether particular protective factors (caring adult, school connectedness, school success, and religiosity) protected girls from involvement in delinquent activity and concluded that connectedness to a caring adult and school success were protective factors against many types of delinquent behavior for girls, but school connectedness, measured by perceptions of school and interactions with peers and teachers, and religiosity were not (OJJDP, 2009).

The same study also inquired as to whether these protective factors operated differently in girls with risk factors (OJJDP, 2009). In many cases, protective factors seemed to overcome the negative impact of risk factors (OJJDP, 2009). For example, for girls who had been physically assaulted as children, the presence of a caring adult was correlated with a decreased chance that she would be involved in property crime. Being connected to school was correlated with a decreased chance that she would commit simple assault, suggesting that school connectedness may not be a protective factor for all girls, but it may be for those physically assaulted during childhood. Girls who had been sexually assaulted as a child were less likely to commit simple or aggravated assault if they experienced school success or religiosity. For girls who had grown up in disadvantaged neighborhoods, the presence of a caring adult, religiosity, and school success were correlated with decreased chances that those girls would sell drugs or commit simple or aggravated assault. In some cases, however, the existence of protective factors was correlated with an increased chance of engaging in delinquent activity, suggesting that protective factors could not overcome particular risk factors (OJJDP, 2009). For example, for girls neglected as children, religiosity and the presence of a caring adult were correlated with an increase in the chance that they would join gangs and for girls who had been physically assaulted as a child, these protective factors were correlated with an increase in the chance those girls would commit aggravated assault.

### *Lack of Gender-Responsive Training*

Probation and court personnel seem to understand that what works for boys does not work for girls. A majority of respondents in a survey of California probation chiefs, detention supervisors, juvenile court judges, commissioners, referees, and program providers indicated that they want more information about what works for girls and recognize a need to identify best practices and program models (Bloom, Owen, Deschense, & Rosenbaum, 2002).

When probation staff do not receive training that allows them to empathize with and understand these experiences, they are likely to misinterpret girls' behavior. A review of 174 case files of justice-involved girls in Arizona revealed that there is a large gap between how probation and court personnel perceive girls and the realities of the lives of the girls (Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2004). Staff often perceived girls as lying about past abuse, whining, acting promiscuously, and manipulating others to get their way. The study also revealed a lack of probation staff's understanding of gender-appropriate treatment and the limited existence of services for girls (Gaarder, Rodriguez, & Zatz, 2004). A similar study with 19 youth workers in Australia revealed similar attitudes with girls' needs perceived as more complex, time-consuming, and difficult to address than boys' needs (Baines & Alder, 1996). Workers were also likely to assume that girls had been sexually assaulted even when there was no evidence to support that assumption. They also, however, felt ill-prepared to deal with the needs of girls who had been abused (Baines & Alder, 1996). Although there may be differences between youth and staff attitudes in California and other countries and states, these findings underscore the importance of taking the time to learn about individual needs as opposed to making assumptions about all boys or all girls, while also keeping in mind many of the challenges that justice-involved girls may face when interacting with them before fully understanding their individual needs.

Girls who have been traumatized have difficulty developing trusting relationships and for youth who have experienced multiple traumatic experiences, trust with a therapist is often strengthened after a real or perceived conflict with the therapist (Underwood, Stewart, & Castellanos, 2007; Rothschild, 2000 as cited in Underwood et al., 2007). However, if this conflict is misinterpreted by untrained staff, girls may be punished when engaging in this healthy conflict. Furthermore, by responding inappropriately, staff increases the chance that girls will permanently incorporate feelings of worthlessness into their self-view if they do not provide a nurturing environment in which girls can learn to trust others again and develop a healthy self-identity (Underwood, Stewart, & Castellanos, 2007).

### *Inadequate Gender-Responsive Screening Tools, Services, Programs, and Facilities*

Lack of proper mental health screening and treatment can exacerbate girls' existing conditions (Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002). Juvenile court judges, defense attorneys, and justice-involved girls in a 2003 survey identified mental health

diagnosis and treatment as the most significant gap in detention services (Sherman, 2003). Girls with PTSD are particularly susceptible to re-traumatization during detention (Hennessey, Ford, Mahoney, Ko, & Siegfried, 2004). When staff are not trained to respond to the challenges that girls have experienced pre-detention, they risk re-traumatizing girls who are trying to cope with their past trauma who staff believe are engaging in manipulative and defiant behavior.

A statewide probation services report from California confirmed that girls' programs are the least frequently available programs in the state: less than 40 percent of all counties offered girl-specific programs (AOC CFCC, 2006). Underscoring this point, all groups in a California Juvenile Delinquency Court Assessment that included feedback from delinquency court judicial officers, administrators, prosecutors, public defenders, alternate defenders, contract panel attorneys identified as working in juvenile delinquency courts, and juvenile probation officers, highlighted the need for programs that specifically address the needs of girls (JCC/AOC CFCC Volume 1, 2008).

Participants of a focus group that was part of the California Juvenile Delinquency Court Assessment acknowledged that the lack of a locally run girls' camp or ranch means that girls are more often and more quickly sent to out-of-home placement than boys. Some counties also have fewer, if any, local groups home for girls, resulting in girls being sent further away from their communities than boys and placement programs usually take longer than camp/ranch programs, so girls remain out-of-home for longer periods of time than boys (JCC/AOC CFCC Volume 1, 2008, 52). Probation officers are also dissatisfied with the availability of options for girls. In interviews and focus groups, probation officers noted the lack of space in camps, the juvenile hall, and other placements for girls. Without a full continuum of options available for girls, some courts are forced to order girls to placement more quickly than they would boys when there are no alternatives (JCC/AOC CFCC Volume 2: Part 3, 2008, 8). Focus groups with Ohio juvenile justice professionals identified lack of facilities and funding for girls as barriers to providing adequate care to girls in custody (Belknap, Holsinger, & Dunn, 1997). In the same study, focus groups with girls in detention revealed that girls perceived boys as getting more privileges, space, equipment, programs, and better treatment. They also felt disrespected by staff and that they did not have an opportunity to discuss their feelings about their pasts and being in detention (Belknap, Holsinger, & Dunn, 1997).

In addition, many characteristics of detention, like seclusion, staff insensitivity, loss of privacy, and physical confrontation that are meant to establish order, can exacerbate negative feelings resulting from past trauma. The use of restraints and isolation is particularly problematic for girls given that twice as many girls as boys attempt suicide (Annie E. Casey foundation, 2005, 25). These concerns are particularly important given that girls are over-detained as a result of paternalistic attitudes.

# Stanislaus County Community Needs Assessment

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## Stanislaus County Community Data

- An estimated 19.4% of children in Stanislaus County live in poverty and 57.7% of all school aged youth are eligible for free or reduced lunch in public schools (California Department of Education, 2009).
- 45% of the total number of youth in foster care placement are ages 11-17 (Needell, B. et al., 2009).
- There are 33,459 girls ages 11-17 living in Stanislaus County
- 12% of births in 2007 in Stanislaus County were to teen mothers.
- Girls in Stanislaus County are more likely than boys to be diagnosed with sexually transmitted infections. The rates for females ages 15-19 for gonorrhea are 29.2% vs. 18.8% of males and for Chlamydia are 23.7% vs. 10.3% for males. This may be attributable to diagnostic disparities, but regardless warrant attention (CDPH, 2010).
- In comparison to 25% of boys, 44% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade girls in Stanislaus County reported depression related feelings (SCHSA, 2008).
- In 2008, girls made up 25% of arrests for juveniles in Stanislaus County (CA Dept of Justice, 2008).
- Based on a December 2010 snapshot, there were 75 girls on formal probation, accounting for 10% of all juveniles placed on formal probation by the Stanislaus County Juvenile Court. Of these, the most serious charged offense for 51% was a misdemeanor and for 49% was a felony.
- Of girls charged with misdemeanors (n=38), 63% were for violent offenses, 29% for property offenses, and 8% for “other” offenses.
- Of girls charged with felonies (n=37), 30% were for violent, 49% for property, 13% for drug, and 8% for other offenses.

## Statewide Comparisons

Compared to the State of California, Stanislaus County has higher rates of:

- School Drop Out (22.8% of youth drop out compared to 18.9% state average) (Kidsdata, 2008). The race/ethnicity breakdown shows that 41% of black students, 31% of Native American students, 30% of Hispanic students, 28% of Pacific Islander

students, 15% of White students, and 10% of Asian students dropped out. Unfortunately, this data was not easily available by gender (SCHA, 2008).

- Teen Births (44.9% teen birth rate in Stanislaus County compared to 37.1% state average) (Kidsdata, 2008).
- Alcohol and Marijuana Use (Rates of lifetime and 30-day use of alcohol and marijuana were higher in Stanislaus County than in California, particularly for girls enrolled in community day schools or continuation education (lifetime alcohol use: 71.9% vs. 56.0%; lifetime marijuana use: 76.0% vs. 69.8%)) (CSHK, 2006).

### **Preliminary Needs Profile of Girls in Detention**

As part of the community needs assessment, an assessment of girls in detention was conducted to provide a preliminary “profile” to understand the circumstances that led to their detention and to identify their needs. The information below comes from nine girls in detention who were interviewed using a semi-structured interview assessment created by the Youth Justice Institute and may not be statistically representative of the Stanislaus County justice-involved female population. It is likely, however, that their experiences are similar to those of many justice-involved girls in the County.

Fifty six percent of the girls in the assessment self-identified as Latina, all of whom reported they spoke Spanish at home. The majority of the girls in the assessment reported residing in Modesto, the largest city in the county.

### ***Causes for Detention***

Eighty nine percent of the respondents had a prior arrest and 67% were on probation at time of current arrest. Over half (56%) of the girls interviewed in the hall were there on a probation violation, usually related to having a dirty drug test or not showing up for appointments with their probation officers. Two girls were charged with grand theft auto and another two girls were charged with burglary and attempted burglary. The girls in the study also reported high exposure to community violence and physical violence in their homes (67% and 44% respectively).

### ***Familial Justice-Involvement***

Although the majority (67%) of the girls in the assessment did not claim gang affiliation, over half (56%) reported they had family members in gangs. Forty four percent of the girls in the assessments reported at least one sibling was also in probation at time of the interview, and 89% reported at least one parent had ever been incarcerated.

### ***Substance Abuse***

In terms of drug use or risky behaviors, all of the interviewed girls reported using drugs and drinking alcohol on a regular basis, with some reporting binge drinking at least once a week. The most common drugs used among this sample were crystal meth and marijuana.

About half of the respondents (56%) reported they also sold drugs to maintain their drug and alcohol use.

### ***Education***

School was a challenge for the girls interviewed. Eighty nine percent of the girls reported they had been expelled or suspended from school at least five times in the last year, and over half reported they performed poorly in school. Thirty three percent of the girls reported participating in special education classes at school. Alternatively, only 33% reported they felt they had an adult to trust or to go to discuss school challenges.

### ***Trauma***

About a fourth of the girls interviewed reported they had been sexually abused (22%) and about 44% reported that they had experienced physical abuse from a parent. One third of the girls (33%) reported they had contact with the dependency system and 22% had been removed from their home at least once. The majority of the girls (78%) had run away from home at least seven times. The average age for the first time girls ran away was 13, and the reasons most frequently reported for running away were sexual assault from a step parent, physical abuse from parents/guardians, and drug and alcohol use by parents/guardians. These girls suffer from a great deal of depression: 89% reported feeling suicidal in the last six months and 44% reported trying to hurt themselves.

Overall, these preliminary statistics mirror the profile of girls involved in the juvenile justice system across the country. Specifically, the prevalence of runaway behavior, the number of “crossover” girls in dependency, parental incarceration, academic disconnection and failure, and high levels of drug use, have implications for this strategic plan’s recommendations to address these issues. (Patino, Ravoira, and Wolf, 2006).

## **Stakeholder Feedback**

### ***Stakeholder Survey***

The Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative Planning Team developed and disseminated two online surveys to stakeholders in the fields of criminal justice, education, child development, public and mental health in Stanislaus County.

Survey recipients unequivocally (100%) recognized the need for gender-responsive services. Their reasons for this belief and the depth of their comprehension of gender-responsive issues varied widely. This demonstrates that while the need for gender-responsive services is clear, more education regarding how to meet the particular needs of the target population is necessary. The majority of survey respondents do not believe that the needs of the target population are being met. Among those who do, no school/district believes that it is the primary entity that is meeting the needs of the target population. Responses varied widely between surveys regarding why respondents believe the needs of

the target population are not being met. This indicates that further research should be done regarding the varied perspectives of the respondents of each survey to understand the cause of this discrepancy.

The following suggestions were provided by respondents asked for suggestions for improving gender-responsive programs and implementing the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative.

***Organizations that should be primarily responsible for meeting the needs of the target population***

- Probation Department (most commonly cited)
- School districts
- Social services agencies

***Organizations that should be involved in meeting the needs of the target population***

- Behavioral Health/Mental Health
- Center for Human Services
- Child Protective Services
- Community Services Agency
- Drug and alcohol abuse programs
- Girls Scouts
- Health Services Agency
- Other juvenile halls (to share best practices)
- Kiwanis
- Local businesses
- Modesto Junior College
- Sherriff's department
- Sierra Vista
- Soroptimists
- Stanislaus State University
- Women's Haven
- YWCA

***Suggestions for improving gender-responsive programs available in Stanislaus County***

- Provide more training to staff.
- Provide more staff to administer programs.
- Provide more staff coverage to allow one-on-one interactions with the target population.
- Increase funding for gender-responsive programming.
- Purchase updated program materials
- Deliver services in minors' neighborhoods – ideally at school after school hours
- Have law enforcement and probation identify students for schools so that schools can provide targeted services
- Increase the participation of fathers in the lives of children and young mothers

***Suggestions for the implementation of the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative in Stanislaus County***

- Create a community task force to review and discuss the unique needs of this population.
- Involve youth in making decisions.
- Increase funding for gender-responsive programming.
- Expand mental health care and increase time available for group therapy.
- Provide one-on-one counseling.
- Use community based organizations to provide services and be clear about expectations for the organizations.
- Address broader community issues – not just those in probation or school
- Have probation communicate with schools so that schools can support efforts being made by other agencies, including law enforcement

***Stakeholder Meeting***

A community stakeholder meeting was held on July 27, 2010 at the invitation of the Prison Law Office and the Stanislaus County Probation Department. The participants were concerned about the services available to the girls in their community who were at risk of becoming or already involved in the juvenile justice system. With plans well underway for the opening of a juvenile commitment center in 2013 and Chief Probation Officer Jerry Powers' commitment to improving services for girls, community stakeholders recognized that this is an opportune time to come together and outline a comprehensive community strategy for girls in Stanislaus County. The Strategic Plan is designed to utilize available resources and develop an effective continuum of services to most effectively address the

needs of girls. In addition to the stakeholder meeting, individual meetings and focus groups were held with community service providers, Judges, attorneys, educators, funders, justice-involved young women, parents/legal guardians, and concerned citizens.

## Major Concerns

The following summarizes the major concerns expressed during the stakeholder meeting, individual meetings, and focus groups regarding factors negatively impacting the health and wellbeing of girls and young women in the community and that increase or perpetuate their risk of involvement in the justice system:

- Prostitution/Human trafficking
- Substance abuse
- Homelessness
- Educational failure (drop outs, suspensions, etc)
- Teen pregnancy and parenting
- Gang involvement (mixed feedback regarding girls' involvement in gangs versus girls being victimized by male gang members)
- Lack of services, recent program cuts and cutbacks
- Lack of information for parents regarding accessing available services
- Lack of appropriate referrals by Probation to families and justice-involved girls for services
- Lack of knowledge of existing services and referrals by Probation officers
- Lack of family involvement in services for justice-involved girls
- Limited contact between girls and their families while in detention
- Justice-involved family members
- Cost of detention for financially struggling families
- Mistreatment of girls in detention
- Need for gender-responsive training for custody staff
- Poor relationships between girls and family members and their Probation Officers and Public Defenders
- Lack of comprehensive data to document current success and concerns
- Compromised ability for collaboration by juvenile justice professionals (in the past systems were in place where agencies worked together but budget restraints and personnel changes resulted in decreased communication and collaboration)

# Strategic Plan

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The following strategic plan is targeted at improving outcomes for girls at-risk of being or currently involved in the juvenile justice system. It is organized around a set of focus areas identified in focus groups and interviews with community stakeholders, parents/legal guardians, and girls currently or previously in custody. These focus areas are:

1. Assessment of policies and practices negatively impacting girls at-risk of being or currently involved in the juvenile justice system
2. Improvement of gender-responsive, including trauma-informed, services for these girls
3. Provision of gender-responsive training for juvenile justice staff and other service providers
4. Improvement of collaboration between stakeholders to meet the needs of these girls
5. Implementation of assessment and data collection systems to understand girls' profile and trends

To effectively address these key focus areas, the strategic plan is divided into the following parts:

Part 1: Focus Areas and Recommendations for Strategic Priorities

Part 2: Next Steps

Part 3: Documenting the Progress

# Part 1: Focus Areas and Recommendations for Strategic Priorities

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## **Focus Area One: Assessment of Policies and Practices Negatively Impacting Girls**

### *Challenge*

A number of specific policies and practices were identified by the stakeholders as negatively impacting the outcomes of girls and their family members. The issues that directly impacted the disposition of girls (including girls on probation or in juvenile hall) included the overuse of detention due to a lack of diversion options for low-risk girls, overuse of out-of-home placements because of a lack of community based and in-home services for girls, and an inability to keep girls close to home because of lack of in-county out-of-home placements for girls committed to residential placement. Girls committed to residential placement are sent out of the county to Sacramento, Fresno or as far away as Maricopa County, AZ. Likewise, the lack of gender-appropriate probation sanctions was noted as contributing to the technical violations of probation that resulted in girls cycling in and out of the juvenile justice system.

Further, both families and professional staff expressed concern regarding the inconsistency in the availability and quality of legal representation. This issue was exacerbated by girls/families lack of understanding of the legal system and long term consequences of involvement. Concern was expressed by the parents/legal guardians that in some situations when they requested for resources, neither the court appointed attorneys nor the probation officers were knowledgeable regarding where they could seek assistance. Additionally, the financial burden of detention costs on families already grappling with insufficient resources was noted as a significant issue (i.e., fees for detention services, cost of court continuance, and difficulty accessing fee waivers). When girls were committed to detention, the high cost of collect calling fees often resulted in the youth being further isolated from the family if the family could not afford the fees.

For girls in custody who are mothers, not being able to see or communicate with their children/caregivers was discussed as a hardship on girls. Girls also expressed concern and feeling uncomfortable over being issued previously used underwear, although underwear are laundered in accordance with Title 15.

### *Recommendations for Consideration*

Create a local taskforce comprised of diverse stakeholders (including representatives from probation and detention, juvenile court system, public defenders, district attorneys,

education, dependency, community service providers, and girls) to identify and re-examine policies, procedures, and practices that affect the disposition of girls, including the lack of diversion options, overuse of detention as a sanction, lack of gender-responsive probation sanctions, use of technical violations of probation, policies for sexually exploited minors, and the quality of legal representation. The taskforce would also be charged with assessing the potential costs associated with the recommendations outlined for consideration and identifying potential funding sources. We recommend that once established, the taskforce consider the following recommendations:

1. Implement a gender-responsive assessment system to determine a youth's risk level, needs, and appropriate interventions to reduce the youth's risk factors and increase his/her protective factors.
2. Determine points in the judicial process where girls could be assessed and low-risk girls could be diverted prior to formal intake into the juvenile justice system and referred to services.
3. Review reasons for technical violations of probation and develop strategies to reduce the number of girls in secure placement for technical violations.
  - a. Develop and implement graduated, gender-responsive probation sanctions to be approved by judges that take into consideration economic, mental health, and legal barriers. These sanctions can serve as a guide for probation officers and allow girls and their families to know what to expect.
4. Identify strategies for public defenders and private bar defenders to provide legal representation that includes systematically explaining the court process, consequences of pleas, and available community resources and services to girls and legal guardians. Resources for bilingual services (translated materials, interpreter) should be available when possible.
5. Review juvenile hall practices and processes and change those confirmed to negatively impact the welfare of justice-involved girls (cost of collect calls to family members, cost of detention services and use of fee waivers; cost of court continuance policies, practice of girls being issued used underwear, child visitation).
6. Identify and address practices dictated by funding streams that adversely impact girls, such as the discontinuity of mental health provision.
7. Address funding issues and identify possible funding sources for these types of recommended policy and practice changes as part of the strategic planning process.

## **Focus Area Two: Improvement of Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Services**

### ***Challenge***

Interviews with juvenile justice professionals, community stakeholders, and justice-involved girls highlighted the multiplicity of needs of girls currently involved in the Stanislaus County juvenile justice system. These needs include emotional/mental health needs due to trauma and victimization, substance abuse/addiction, family conflict, ineffective parental supervision, family incarceration, school inadequacy, critical health issues, self defeating behaviors. Administrators and line staff in programs across the continuum report that the treatment needs of girls are complex and they are not equipped to intervene effectively. Girls require individualized services based on varying levels of needs balanced with their risk level. Further, it appears that when mental health or substance abuse needs are identified, staff are challenged to connect girls to these services in the community. With the exception of juvenile hall, there is no local residential treatment or group home for girls. The lack of appropriate gender-responsive services has reached a critical point and is negatively impacting the wellbeing of girls and young women.

The use of a validated gender-responsive assessment system that identifies a girl's risk level, intensity of need, and placement recommendations is required to ensure that placement decisions balance each girl's needs with any risk she poses to public safety. A validated assessment system will assist juvenile justice professionals in making informed decisions regarding the effective utilization of limited resources.

Based on the information gained from a comprehensive profile of girls' needs, gaps in services can be identified and requests for funding can be prioritized. Stakeholders have expressed that there are some services in the community to help girls in need, but connecting girls with this information and helping them access services that do exist remains a challenge.

### ***Recommendations for Consideration***

1. Implement a uniform, gender-responsive screening and assessment process that includes an interview protocol by utilizing an instrument that identifies risk level, intervention needs, and supervision strategies to determine appropriate placements for girls who require secure commitment and those who would be better served in less restrictive settings receiving community based or in-home services.
2. Identify and/or develop community alternatives to secure detention so that low-risk girls can receive pre-disposition services in a less restrictive environment.

3. Develop and implement a pre-disposition girls' court to ensure that juvenile judges, attorneys, service providers, probation staff, and girls are collaborating to best meet the needs of the justice-involved girls.
  - a. Secure approval from the appropriate authorities to implement girls' court in Stanislaus County
  - b. Identify local stakeholders for training and girls' court development
  - c. Schedule training session for stakeholders
  - d. Develop interagency protocols to guide girls' court operations
  - e. Identify strategies to provide ongoing technical assistance following training to assist with implementation and troubleshooting as appropriate
4. Identify and/or develop community alternatives to secure commitment so that low-risk girls can receive commitment services, violation of probation, and reentry services in a less restrictive community based or in-home family-based environment in or near Stanislaus County.
5. Develop gender-responsive services and programming for girls committed to juvenile hall based on needs identified by a validated assessment.
6. Determine the feasibility of a dedicated girls probation officer and dedicated juvenile hall staff and implement if feasible.
  - a. Reorganize caseload so all girls are supervised by one probation officer
  - b. Provide specialized training to all probation staff working with girls
7. Identify or develop a local resource book of services from prevention to aftercare services that includes information/knowledge about programs, resources, i.e., contact names, programs' phone numbers, etc. that can be used by probation officers, public defenders, contract attorneys, juvenile justice staff, school personnel, mental health professionals, faith community, child welfare professionals, family members, and girls.
8. Assess existing services for girls, identify gaps, prioritize needs, and seek funding for priority services.
9. Develop standards for gender-responsive services and programming with input from national experts and providers and ensure that service providers are meeting these standards

## **Focus Area Three: Provision of Gender-Responsive Training for Juvenile Justice Staff and Other Service Providers**

### ***Challenge***

Research and experience tell us that gender-responsive training can have a strong positive effect on improving outcomes for girls in juvenile justice systems. Yet, a common thread that runs through the entire spectrum of juvenile justice is the lack of available gender-responsive training. In order to reduce the numbers of girls involved in the justice system and to improve outcomes for justice-involved girls, effective training is critical to keep pace with girls' intensifying needs. Specialized training is needed for judges, state attorneys, police officers, public defenders, community based service providers, educators, juvenile justice staff, volunteers, and other community stakeholders. Training that translates research to practice and provides strategies for designing programs differently to meet the needs of girls is critical to increasing satisfaction of juvenile justice staff and other service providers, as well as improving outcomes for girls.

### ***Recommendations for Consideration***

1. Provide gender-responsive training to stakeholders to be facilitated by the Prison Law Office, Youth Justice Institute, and NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women
2. Facilitate girls' court informational training and action planning with stakeholders to develop an implementation plan.
3. Conduct interviews or survey a comprehensive group of stakeholders regarding priority training needs and compile ranking data. From these results, develop a training calendar that offers annual or bi-annual regional training based on the top one or two areas.

## **Focus Area Four: Improvement of Collaboration Between Stakeholders**

### ***Challenge***

Due to the complexity of their needs, most girls and young women at risk of being or currently involved in the juvenile justice system require services from multiple agencies and organizations, including from mental health, medical/health, substance abuse, education, child welfare, and juvenile justice.

Accessing needed services can be a daunting task for both the girls and their family members. They may not understand what services are available or how to navigate the multiple systems, each of which may have different procedures, rules, and terminology. Justice-involved girls receiving services in the community prior to coming into contact with the justice system may experience disruptions or changes in medications and providers, and information about their medical and mental health history is often not shared. Girls who are in the juvenile justice system or returning to the community following commitment may also experience a disruption in services that can contribute to recidivism. Additionally, when community agencies are not collaborating effectively, they may impose requirements on families that are duplicative or conflicting, decreasing the likelihood that families will access services. Further, stakeholders may be unaware of available services and consequently fail to refer girls and their families to them. The result is a fragmented service delivery that can negatively impact the outcomes for the girls and their family members.

Likewise, staff can be frustrated by the lack of information specific to the needs of the girls committed to their care. Increasing collaboration can result in less fragmentation in services and an improved capacity for staff to access needed resources to meet the specialized needs of justice-involved girls, while conserving scarce resources by avoiding service duplication. Likewise, effective collaboration can create more choices in services and improved access to and information about available services for girls and their families.

Effective collaboration takes planning and commitment by multiple community agencies and organizations. This is especially critical during these challenging economic times where funding is limited and resources are scarce. An investment in collaboration can result in improved system relationships and serve to build trust between the multiple agencies and systems of care. Likewise, it provides the opportunity to reduce any duplication of services and better target limited resources.

### ***Recommendations for Consideration***

1. Create a local taskforce comprised of diverse stakeholders (including representatives from juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse, education,

child welfare, faith community, volunteers, families, girls' crisis intervention services, and other community service providers) to develop a formal structure for collaboration and specific strategies to develop coordinated interventions for justice-involved girls and their families.

## **Focus Area Five: Implementation of Assessment and Data Collection Systems to Understand Girls' Profile and Track Trends to Support Goals of the Girls Initiative**

### ***Challenge***

As part of the community needs assessment, focus groups were conducted with girls currently and previously in custody. The girls shared some of their histories, which include involvement in foster care, school problems, and histories of abuse and neglect that contributed to their involvement in the juvenile justice system. Currently, the Probation Department does not have a global needs assessment that can aggregate girls' needs to inform planning by probation staff. As described in the preliminary summary profile of girls in detention who were individually interviewed, there appear to be a high number of girls who run away, were or are in dependency, whose parents are incarcerated, who experience academic failure, and/or use drugs. Knowing the prevalence of these issues among justice-involved girls can help inform program and resource planning as well as staff's training needs.

Despite research documenting gender differences in offending and pathways to delinquency, juvenile justice systems have been slow to implement programs designed to target the needs of girls. Often there is limited monitoring and data tracking of involvement in the juvenile justice system by gender (i.e., reasons for referral, circumstances regarding involvement).

### ***Recommendations for Consideration***

1. Implement a gender-responsive assessment instrument that assesses risk and needs and provide training for staff for how to use the information to inform placement, treatment planning, and transition goals.
2. Use assessment data to better understand the profile of risks and needs of girls served in Stanislaus County.
3. Use juvenile justice system data to inform girls' offense histories/patterns, especially dispositions so that the taskforce has information about appropriate alternatives for girls as well as information to support funding requests.
4. Develop a system to track all incident reports in detention to ensure the safety and well-being of girls.
5. Develop interagency protocols and memorandums of understanding to share relevant information about girls' needs to streamline services provided by different agencies.

6. Conduct an outcome evaluation to track the impact/change in outcomes on justice involved girls in Stanislaus County as a result of implementation of strategic plan priorities.

## Part 2: Next Steps: Reaching Agreement on First Year Priorities

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With the completion of this initial community assessment, the next step is reaching agreement on the first year priorities, developing strategies and assigning responsibilities to the key stakeholders who are committed to the implementation of the strategic plan.

The first year priorities will be agreed upon by the local community stakeholders and should be reflective of the community's vision for girls in the juvenile justice system. Once the priorities are set, specific strategies will be developed to achieve specific improved outcomes for girls and young women. To transform these strategies to action, a detailed implementation strategy will be developed with stakeholders and will outline specific steps, timelines, roles and responsibilities, resources and collaboration between stakeholders. Each agreed upon priority will require targeted funding strategies (e.g., federal funding, local funding, private funding) and funding issues will need to be addressed in the work plan. Additionally, each priority task should have a measurable goal/outcome associated with it. Finally, a communication strategy will be developed that includes a reporting process and a plan to monitor progress.

Examples of first year priorities based on the community assessment and this initial strategic plan may include:

1. Convene a local taskforce
2. Facilitate a stakeholder training
3. Implement a girls' court

The following table can be used as a tool to prioritize the tasks within the focus areas outlined in the strategic plan. As stakeholders meet, responsibilities for coordination, implementation, and monitoring of the various tasks will be assigned as appropriate.

## Strategic Planning Tool: Priorities by Focus Area

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	ACTION	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	TARGET DATE	PRIORITY	MEASURABLE GOAL/OUTCOME
<b>FOCUS AREA ONE ASSESSMENT OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES NEGATIVELY IMPACTING GIRLS</b>					
<b>Convene Taskforce</b>	<p>Create and convene a local taskforce to assess the impact of current policies and practices on girls' outcomes (probation, courts, attorneys, education, service providers).</p> <p>Identify goals of taskforce, develop recommendations, and implement action plan.</p>				
<b>FOCUS AREA TWO IMPROVEMENT OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES</b>					
<b>Gender –Responsive Assessment System</b>	Investigate gender-responsive assessment options (e.g., JAIS) and implement system to be used with girls in probation and detention.				
<b>Girls' Court</b>	<p>Develop and hold overview training on girls' court.</p> <p>Develop goals for implementation of a girls' court in Stanislaus County.</p>				
<b>Alternative Placements</b>	Investigate feasibility of in-county alternatives to reduce out-of-county placements (group home, shelter, evening report centers).				
<b>Family Involvement</b>	Pilot a parenting group to provide opportunity for parents/legal guardians to express concerns and discuss challenges (e.g, Parenting with Love and Limits) and to increase in-home placements.				
<b>Probation Services</b>	<p>Revise probation sanctions to be gender-responsive.</p> <p>Develop all girls probation unit.</p>				

<b>Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services</b>	<p>Assess needs and identify gaps in gender-responsive and trauma-informed services.</p> <p>Seek funding for needed services.</p>
<b>FOCUS AREA THREE PROVISION OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE TRAINING FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE STAFF AND OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS</b>	
<b>Prioritize training calendar</b>	<p>Facilitate gender-responsive training for stakeholders.</p> <p>Facilitate overview of girls’ court and implementation planning.</p> <p>Facilitate training of newly implemented gender-responsive assessment system for court, probation, and detention staff.</p> <p>Assess other training needs.</p>
<b>FOCUS AREA FOUR IMPROVEMENT OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS</b>	
<b>Convene Taskforce</b>	<p>(See focus area one)</p> <p>Identify opportunities for collaboration and information sharing</p> <p>Develop collaboration procedures and processes.</p>
<b>FOCUS AREA FIVE IMPROVEMENT OF ASSESSMENT AND DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS TO UNDERSTAND GIRLS’ PROFILE AND TRENDS</b>	
<b>Data Collection</b>	<p>Implement a gender-responsive assessment to gain a profile of girls’ needs to inform decision-making, staff training, and resource development.</p> <p>Develop a tracking system to have a clear picture of dispositions and all related data for girls to inform decision-making.</p>

## Part 3: Documenting the Progress

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The process evaluation, conducted by the NCCD Center for Girls and Young Women, will document the implementation of the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative Strategic Plan, including stakeholder attitudes while collaborating to achieve the goals of the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative.

Simultaneously, the outcomes evaluation will measure changes in outcomes for justice-involved girls as a result of the interventions implemented through the Girls Juvenile Justice Initiative. We anticipate that there will be a reduced need to remove girls from their homes and an increase in the likelihood of successful re-entry for those girls in detention and out-of-home placements. By diverting girls and connecting them with appropriate community resources, we expect to address abuse and trauma, substance use, and improve educational and vocational resources, all of which are associated with improved health and well-being for girls.

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