



Girls Justice Initiative Final Report Executive Summary March 3, 2017

Introduction

The final report of the Iowa Girls Justice Initiative (IGJI) contains recommendations for policy and practices to better meet the needs of girls who are often referred to as “deep end” girls. These girls have accessed all available services in the juvenile justice system, cannot be at home, have committed many crimes, and are at a high risk to offend again. Prior to the closure of the girl’s home in Toledo, Iowa, these girls may have been residents of that facility.

This report was developed through a planning group initiative, employing the collective and thoughtful work of members that include Iowa judges, attorneys, juvenile court services, youth services providers, youth who were in the juvenile justice system, stakeholders from child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and other subject matter experts who contributed different perspectives from their daily work with these young women.

Deep end girls have a combination of high risk, high need, aggressive behavior, prior placement(s), and are a risk to public safety due to their serious, violent, chronic offenses, and social history. The planning group member’s deliberations established a common desire to provide an appropriate level of services to rehabilitate these juvenile offenders. Their recommendations were made with a focus on ensuring the safety of these girls and the public.

Service Recommendations

The report does not recommend the creation of a traditional locked, centralized facility. However, the planning group concluded that a “placement of last resort” is necessary for a very small number of young women involved in the juvenile justice system. Girls who need the highest level of service should have access to a placement that provides intensive therapeutic services with assurance of safety for all the girls in the placement as well as the public. This could be envisioned as a residential setting similar to the enhanced residential treatment facilities provided by contracted private agencies with the Department of Human Services that are currently available for boys. The services and treatment can be in one location or in multiple locations, but should not mix low risk and “deep end” girls. Multiple locations for these residential settings across Iowa would allow girls to remain near their families and communities.

The report recommends using a combination of secure and staff-secure options with a primary emphasis on providing the minimum level of security necessary to ensure resident and public safety. A setting for serious and violent offenders should have the ability and option to be secured should the situation arise to ensure the girls' safety and the safety of others.

The IGJI planning group members made broad placement recommendations to allow policy makers to further examine the possibilities. One example discussed by the planning group included using an existing private provider's setting, with a separate cottage from other group homes for the high risk girls. The cottage could be a dorm-like setting with girls having free passage within the building, with lockable exterior doors.

The planning group concluded that regional settings would be ideal, however due to the small number of "deep end" girls, it may be difficult, due to the cost of services and treatment.

The planning group determined its recommendations should be implemented and guided by the following best practices:

- Effective treatment approaches for female juvenile offenders that addresses past traumatic experiences
- Girls only placement
- Aware of and responsive to girls of all cultures
- Services and treatment are appropriate for the age and maturity of the girls
- Services address the causes for the girls' sense of reward for committing crimes.
- Access to sufficient education to maintain grade level, and provide additional resources, including special education programs and services.

Using these approaches will meet the girls' needs, increase positive outcomes, and protect both theirs and the public's safety. This can be achieved through an integrated system of support from family, community, a healthy environment, and society.