

# Voices From the Field: Findings From the NGI Listening Sessions



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## About the National Girls Institute

The National Girls Institute (NGI) is a federally-funded partnership between the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). NGI is a research-based training and resource clearinghouse designed to advance understanding of girls' issues and improve program and system responses to girls in the juvenile justice system. For more information, visit [www.nationalgirlsinststitute.org](http://www.nationalgirlsinststitute.org).

## About the National Council on Crime and Delinquency

NCCD promotes just and equitable social systems for individuals, families, and communities through research, public policy, and practice. For more information, visit [www.nccdglobal.org](http://www.nccdglobal.org).

## About the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

OJJDP provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. OJJDP supports states and communities in their efforts to develop and implement effective and coordinated prevention and intervention programs and to improve the juvenile justice system so that it protects public safety, holds offenders accountable, and provides treatment and rehabilitative services tailored to the needs of juveniles and their families. For more information, visit [www.ojjdp.gov](http://www.ojjdp.gov).

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# Abstract



## Abstract

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has partnered with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) Center for Girls and Young Women to create the National Girls Institute (NGI). The purpose of the NGI is to provide training and technical assistance to prevention, intervention, treatment, and aftercare programs for at-risk and delinquent girls across the nation. In addition to training and technical assistance, the institute will disseminate information; collaborate with researchers and program developers; form partnerships with federal, state, tribal, and local agencies; and develop policy.

OJJDP and NGI are committed to listening to the voices of girls, parents/caregivers, and key stakeholders from diverse rural, urban, suburban,

and tribal communities to inform the priorities of the NGI. To that end, NGI representatives conducted 64 “listening sessions” across the country. One of the most critical aims of the listening sessions was to assess the current training, technical assistance, and informational needs of state, tribal, and local entities serving girls and their families. Through the listening sessions, the NGI also sought to identify strategies and practices that work best with girls—and those that are ineffective or even harmful—to inform development of standards of care. This report details the results and implications of the listening sessions, and sets forth a series of recommendations for NGI, OJJDP, and the field. NCCD’s partnership with OJJDP is a critical next step to expand and deepen work regarding girls within states and local jurisdictions as well as with private organizations.

# Final Listening Session Report

## Introduction

Research and practice over the last two decades has helped to advance understanding of girls' delinquency and specialized needs. The significance of the National Girls Institute (NGI) lies in the translation of current knowledge and research into practical application for the dedicated professionals who are committed to improving outcomes for girls. The NGI had an unprecedented opportunity to involve stakeholders across the country from diverse backgrounds and locations in this process. This report reviews the research conducted across the country with girls, their parents/caregivers, and key professional stakeholders. The purpose and methods of the listening sessions, and the results gleaned, are shared below. The report concludes with findings and recommendations for the field.

## Purpose of the NGI Listening Sessions

The listening sessions were designed to inform a national assessment regarding key topics and training needs while empirically evaluating stakeholders' receptivity to training, technical assistance, and information sharing. In addition, the listening sessions were tailored to inform the critical focus areas for the NGI. This included the improvement of standards of care, development of relevant resources for the NGI website, and the delineation of "what works," or what strategies/supports are effective for at-risk girls.

## Methods

The primary assessment approach was qualitative, where three distinct types of listening sessions were conducted based on the participants: at-risk or justice system-involved girls, their parents/ caregivers, and key professional and community stakeholders.

## Participants

Three key stakeholder groups participated:

- Justice-involved girls: Girls and young women currently or previously involved in the juvenile justice system, and/or at risk of entering the juvenile justice system or being served in a prevention or intervention program. Participants included girls in prevention, detention, probation, commitment, and re-entry services.
- Juvenile justice system stakeholders across the entire continuum of services. This included youth advocates, judges, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, public defenders, probation officers, detention workers, and staff from residential program/group homes, and girls' programs.
- Parents/caregivers of justice-involved girls: Parents, family members, foster parents, or caregivers connected to justice-involved girls.

## Research Questions

Several questions were asked of the listening session participants with the aim of answering the full range of overarching research questions. Each stakeholder group was asked specific questions (see appendix) in order to gain understanding and move forward the overall research goals of NGI. The guiding research questions were:

1. What are the priority training and technical assistance needs to improve the response to justice-involved girls?
2. What are the resource and information needs of girls, parents, and key stakeholders?
3. What support, practices, and policies are currently working for girls, parents, and key stakeholders? What are ineffective and/or harmful practices, policies, systems, structures, services, programs, etc.?



4. What should be NGI's critical focus areas?
5. What are the standards of care that should exist in all girls' programming?

### **Sampling Strategy**

NCCD coordinated the listening sessions across the country with at-risk or justice system- involved girls, their parents/caregivers, and key stakeholders representing the continuum of services. The United States was divided into distinct regions that included: Northeast, Southeast, South, Midwest, Northwest, Southwest, and West. Locations within these regions were selected using the following key indicators: high poverty, foreign born, rural households, infant death rate, high school drop-out, child victimization, children in foster care, adult crime, and high proportion of girls' incarceration. Listening sessions in each region were conducted in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities.

### **Recruitment**

Both NCCD staff and selected professionals in the field acted as facilitators of the listening sessions. It was the facilitators' responsibility to identify, recruit, coordinate, and convene sessions with key stakeholders through the following strategies: (1) securing permission to facilitate a listening session as part of a planned meeting or workshop, or

coordinating a new meeting based on the schedule needs of the stakeholders including tribal reservations; (2) identifying girls and young women in prevention and/or juvenile justice programs and coordinating the listening session with program staff and administration; and (3) identifying family members/ resource families of girls in or at risk of entering the juvenile justice system and coordinating a new meeting based on the schedule needs of parents/ caregivers.

### **Procedures**

#### *Facilitator Training*

After securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the listening sessions were scheduled and conducted from March through December 2011. NCCD facilitated two web-based training sessions for the facilitators. The training provided information regarding logistics, preparing for the listening sessions, reviewing the listening session questions, instructions and tips for facilitating the listening sessions, and procedures for documentation of listening sessions and submitting data reports.

Facilitators were provided a manual that contained the protocol and template forms to conduct the listening sessions. Within the manual was a standardized protocol that was administered by all facilitators, including procedures and listening session questions. The listening sessions were semi-structured with guiding questions but were flexible enough to allow participants to add additional relevant information. In addition, participants were administered a background questionnaire to supplement information collected during listening sessions, including demographic and other relevant information pertaining to the overarching research questions.

NCCD-trained facilitators were responsible for submitting all data to the research team as promptly as possible. There were three types of data which included (1) transcribed responses from the sessions, (2) the participant demographic questionnaires, and (3) facilitators' impressions/notes from the field

document. More specifically, for each listening session, facilitators were asked to type and submit the participants' responses (verbatim) from the note taker for each question using a standardized template. Participants were also given note cards to write down any information they did not want to share with the larger group. The participant survey information included a demographic questionnaire, tailored for each group, asking participants information such as race/ethnicity, age, background, etc. Finally, the Facilitator Impressions and Summary of Listening Session data provided information about facilitators' overall impressions from the listening sessions, group dynamics, and other pertinent information about the listening sessions (date, location, setting, etc.).

### *Listening Sessions*

Listening sessions consisted of approximately 6–15 participants and lasted between one and two hours. Listening sessions were convened in their natural settings (conference rooms, space used for scheduled meetings, rooms used for girls' groups) whenever possible with an emphasis on participant comfort and safety. For girls in juvenile justice settings, it was important to secure a space, preferably where therapeutic groups are held, that is private from passersby as well as program staff. An emphasis was placed on including sessions where particular topics related to justice-involved girls (gangs, LGBT, race, and

culture) were discussed at conferences and task force and community meetings.

Facilitators first reviewed the purpose of NGI and provided an overview of the guiding principles (i.e., only one person talks at a time, confidentiality is assured, etc.) of the session and asked if any additional principles should be added.

Using scripts, facilitators reviewed the goals of the listening sessions, issues regarding consent and confidentiality, the role of the facilitator, uses of the data, and the purpose of the note cards. Note cards were distributed to all participants as an opportunity for them to provide additional information they did not feel comfortable sharing in the larger group. The script noted that a demographic questionnaire would be distributed at the close of the session. The script also reiterated several times that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time without judgment or penalty. The facilitators then answered any questions and began the session. The manual included structured questions (approved by IRB and OJJDP) as well as suggested probes to encourage participation and/or clarify the intended meaning. As part of the procedure, a note taker was designated whenever possible so that one person facilitated the session and the other took notes. Additionally, facilitators were instructed to provide their feedback and impressions of the session to evaluate overall engagement of the participants and address issues or concerns.

### **Data Management and Security**

Facilitators were given specific instructions regarding the labeling and submission of these three data sources. Standard procedures were followed to ensure data security. Each listening session facilitator signed a confidentiality agreement. Additionally, only authorized research staff had access to the data. The data was stored on NCCD's file server, backed up using a zip drive that was stored in a locked file cabinet. Hard copies were secured in a locked file cabinet.





## Data Analysis

A mixed methods approach was utilized to analyze the three data sources collected from the listening sessions. While a mixed methods approach was employed, the listening session data, which is the primary data source for this report, was analyzed using a qualitative approach. Participants also completed demographic questionnaires and facilitators completed a Facilitator Impressions and Summary of Listening Session form. The supplemental data from these two additional sources were entered and analyzed using quantitative methods.

### Listening Session Analysis

The verbatim transcripts from the listening sessions were analyzed utilizing the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti. Codebooks were developed whereby teams of three coders first individually coded session data and then met to discuss and reach agreement. All of the transcripts were reviewed and coded by a member of the research team using the codebooks. Codes and themes were continually reviewed by other members of the research team to reach consensus and new codes were added as needed. Finally, coders used memos to note any important theoretical, methodological, and thematic observations.

Data were aggregated by stakeholder group and analyzed for general themes and patterns rather than descriptions of individual views and experiences. After the data from the selected research questions were coded, queries were run in ATLAS.ti to determine the most common codes. These were reviewed for conceptual similarities, differences, and patterns. These results form the basis of what is reported as the main themes that emerged from the listening sessions. The appendix shows the overarching research questions and the specific listening session questions asked of participants.

### Demographic Questionnaires Analysis

The data from the demographic questionnaires consisted primarily of closed-ended questions that asked about general demographic and background information. The descriptive data was entered into SPSS and analyzed. Additionally, open-ended questions asked professional stakeholders and girls to rank top staff training topics, and asked parents to rank the resources they need most. In addition, girls were asked about what adults should focus on if they really want to help girls. Using the listening session codebooks, new variable labels and values were created for these open-ended questions. They were subsequently entered into SPSS and analyzed to supplement and provide context for the listening session findings.

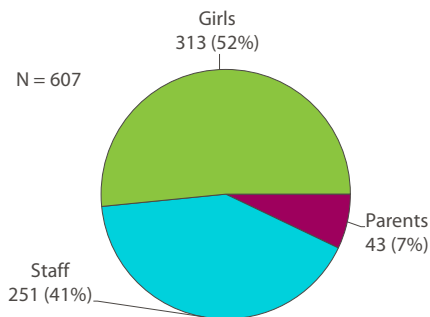
### Facilitator Summary Analysis

Given the many factors that could influence the listening sessions, it was important to build into the methodology a means of capturing perceptions about the listening sessions from the facilitators. Therefore, facilitators completed a facilitator summary form for each listening session. These facilitator notes from the field were used to provide additional information in order to augment the results from the listening sessions. General information about the listening session (number of participants, location, challenges, logistics, etc.) were entered and analyzed in SPSS. Facilitators also were asked open-ended questions about their overall impressions, and if they perceived participants felt comfortable sharing their opinions. Facilitators were given the opportunity to include comments and make suggestions. This information was coded by theme and aggregated to provide context to report findings where applicable.

## Participant Demographics

A listening session was defined as having four or more participants. Sixty-four listening sessions were held across the United States in 2011. Of these, four were topical listening sessions (education, gangs, LGBT, and tribal police). In addition, due to various challenges that prevented the convening of traditional listening sessions, 16 small-group sessions (known as supplemental interviews) were held with 1–3 respondents during this timeframe. In all, 607 people (313 girls, 251 staff, and 43 parents) took part in a listening session or supplemental interview (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Participant Demographics**



Twenty-one different facilitators conducted listening sessions and supplemental interviews; 38% of facilitators were NCCD staff who are knowledgeable about justice system-involved girls, and 62% were non-NCCD staff with similar experience. The largest proportions of girls, staff, and parents (61%, 42%, and 33%, respectively) were from urban communities. Of important note is the overrepresentation of the tribal population (girls, 12%; staff, 11%; and parents, 19%). In terms of geographic region, the largest proportion represented varied by stakeholder group (girls, 23% from the Southeast; staff, 32% from the Midwest; and parents, 35% from the Midwest).

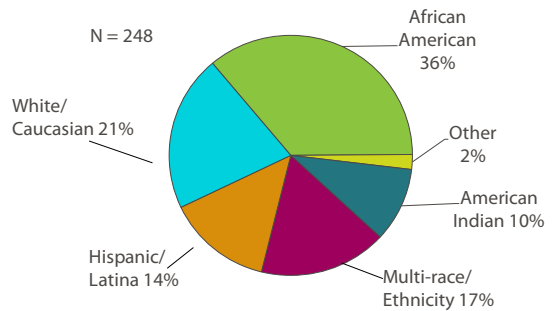
### Profiles of Participants by Stakeholder Group

The profiles in this section are based on listening session participants who completed demographic questionnaires; for various reasons, not all participants completed questionnaires. Therefore, sample size (or N) for each stakeholder group may vary when compared to total sample size reported above (in Participant Demographics).

### Girls

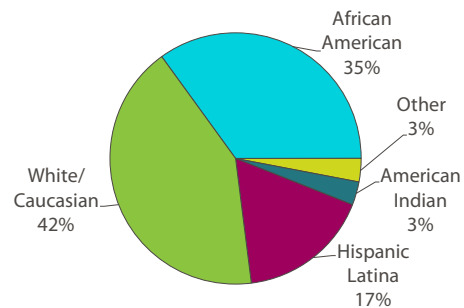
Girls under age 21 (N = 269) had an average age of 15 years. Regarding race/ethnicity, 36% were African American, 21% were White/Caucasian, 14% were Hispanic/Latina, 17% were more than one race/ethnicity, and 10% were American Indian. Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, and other each accounted for 2% or less of respondents (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Profile of Participants by Stakeholder Group Race/Ethnicity of Participating Girls**



This group was fairly representative of African American and Hispanic/Latina girls involved in the juvenile justice system (representing 35% and 17%, respectively); however, White/Caucasian and American Indian girls account for 42% and 3%, respectively (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzanchera, 2011). See Figure 3.

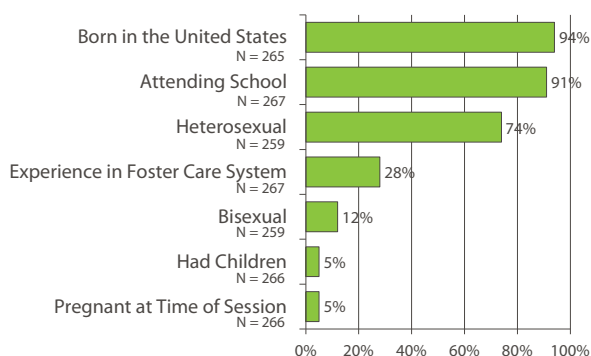
**Figure 3. Justice-Involved Girls National Percentages**



Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Kang, W., & Puzanchera, C. (2011). *Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement*. Online. Available: [www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/](http://www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/)

The majority of girls in the study were born in the United States (94%) and reported attending school (91%). Nearly three-quarters (74%) of girls identified as 100% heterosexual and 12% as bisexual. Almost one-third (28%) of girls reported having experience in the foster care system, 5% had children, and 5% were pregnant at the time of the session (see Figure 4). See Table 1 for girls' self-reported juvenile justice involvement.

**Figure 4. Profile of Participants by Stakeholder Group Participating Girls**



**Table 1. Juvenile Justice Profile of Girls (Lifetime Experience)**

Juvenile Justice Involvement	Percentage "YES"	(N)
History of arrest	64%	(N=267)
History of probation	59%	(N=267)
History of detention	65%	(N=263)
History of placement in residential/ juvenile justice program	47%	(N=263)

### Key Professional Stakeholders

Staff (N = 228) were 73% female. In terms of race/ethnicity, 65% were White/Caucasian, 12% were African American, 8% were Hispanic/Latino, and 7% were American Indian. Alaskan Native, Asian, Pacific Islander, more than one race/ethnicity, and other each accounted for 3% or less of respondents. Regarding staff's areas of focus along the juvenile justice continuum, major areas included residential juvenile justice programs (15%), community-based organizations and private providers (14%), juvenile probation (14%), education (9%), social services

(6%), and prevention (6%). Seventeen percent of respondents were categorized as other. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of staff reported that they have worked with girls for 10 or more years.

### Parents/Caregivers

Parents/caregivers (N = 39) were 82% female and 18% male. Regarding participants' relationships to girls in the juvenile justice system, a little more than half (55%) identified themselves as parents, 18% as other, 11% as an aunt or uncle, 8% as foster parents, and 8% as grandparents. In terms of race/ethnicity, 41% were White/Caucasian, 18% were African American, 18% were Alaskan Native, 8% were other, and 5% were Hispanic/Latino. American Indian and Pacific Islander each accounted for 3% or less of respondents.

### Listening Session Results

As part of the national assessment, the listening sessions provided an unprecedented opportunity to hear from hundreds of stakeholders nationwide, representing diverse backgrounds and life experiences. The results from the listening sessions have been used to inform the next steps of NGI and provide valuable information for the field in general. More specifically, they provide critical information about the training, technical assistance, and resource needs of stakeholders. Since NGI will be providing national TTA, these results were used to develop relevant TTA topics and formats and were incorporated into planning the NGI website, which will provide the field with a clearinghouse of information. In addition, the results will inform NGI's critical focus areas, including standards of care and examination of policies and practices affecting girls. The results are first organized by research question and stakeholder group. Quotes from participants are included for illustrative purposes since they contextualize the themes and patterns that emerged.

### Training and Technical Assistance

To learn more about training and technical assistance needs, the following questions were posed to stakeholder groups:

- **Girls and staff:** Please list the topics in which you feel training for STAFF is needed to work with girls at risk of or involved in the justice system.
- **Key professional stakeholders:** 1) In which topics or areas do staff who work with girls need training? (2) What training format would be most effective? (3) What are areas in which you need technical assistance to better serve girls? (4) Which groups or professions most need training?

### Girls and Staff

To gain additional insight into the TTA priorities, girls were asked to identify and rank the most important staff training areas in their demographic questionnaires. The data from the questionnaires were analyzed to compare what staff and girls felt were the most important training topics (see Table 2). For girls who identified staff training topics, the results are as follows: listening/communication, valuing girls’ perspective, staff positive attitudes, respect, guidance, and training to better relate and understand girls’ problems. For staff, the topics of girls’ relationships, trauma, and mental health were consistently identified as top training areas. Training on girls’ issues was paramount regardless of staff gender, race/ethnicity, length of time working with girls, or region. Mental health was one of the most common issues for staff in rural and tribal communities. Interestingly, staff who reported a longer time working with girls also reported that staff approach to girls was a critical area for training.

**Table 2. Top Staff Training Areas Identified/ Ranked by Girls and Staff**

Girls N=181	Staff N=194
Listening/communication	Trauma
Relate/understand problems	Gender responsive/specific
Value perspective	Mental health
Staff positive attitudes	Trauma-informed care
Respect	Relationships
Guidance	Culture/cultural competency

### Key Professional Stakeholders

**Training areas.** Three main themes arose regarding the training needs of key professional stakeholders. First, participants named a wide variety of topics that were training priorities. These included girls’ trauma, mental health, communication and relationships, race and culture, sexual abuse, and teen parenting. Most broadly, staff asked for information related to both general knowledge about trauma as well as the impact of PTSD on justice-involved girls. Staff requested training specific to identification and assessment of abuse, along with information about its impact. Staff requested additional trainings aimed at increasing staff knowledge about teen parenting, and, importantly, asked that trainings be culturally responsive to the unique needs of pregnant or parenting justice-involved girls. Staff asked for more training focused on improving staff communication with the girls while also learning about technology and other unique ways in which girls interface with their peers. Additionally, staff requested training to help build the skills necessary to effectively communicate with girls and respond to girls with troubling or acting out behaviors.

*“Learning to work with girls who have been victims of domestic abuse, trauma, and rape.”*

*“Recognizing red flags of abuse, neglect, and trauma.”*

*“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.”*

*“How to deal with angry, acting out girls who say they don’t care; cuss everyone out including the judge.”*

Although the question posed was regarding training topics and areas, respondents also discussed the approach to training and staff responses to girls. To illustrate, participants said the training approach should be gender-responsive, trauma-informed, strengths-based, simple, and basic, as well as involving families.

*“Need training as it relates to unique gender issues.”*

*“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.”*

Training that focuses on how staff respond to girls and staff behaviors such as listening, communication, and appropriate boundaries emerged as important. It was noted that this type of training needs to be delivered in a supportive manner. Finally, there was discussion regarding external and internal barriers and themes related to training challenges. For example, system issues, lack of staff training opportunities, program environment, and provider challenges acted as barriers to training.

*“Recognizing burn-out.”*

*“Creating developmentally responsive programming.”*

*Who needs training and training format.* When asked who should receive training, the data showed an important trend. The most common response was school personnel, followed by law enforcement, then judges, and attorneys. *Interestingly, this reflects the key gatekeepers* in what is often the typical order in which

girls move through the justice system. Then juvenile justice and social service professionals were named. Parents were also identified as a group in need of training, which reinforces how problems at school and at home often precede justice system involvement. A face-to-face training format was identified as effective; this approach includes conferences, onsite, regional, and district trainings. Numerous responses also supported the use of online trainings and webinars, and some respondents reported that a combination of formats would be most effective.

*Technical assistance.* Although there were areas of overlap between the priority technical assistance and training areas, most of the technical assistance priority areas were distinct. In addition to desiring skills to better inform their responses to acting out behavior, staff also wanted technical assistance in programming and curriculum development aimed at decreasing/addressing girls’ behaviors and guided by best practices. The other technical assistance area priorities included data/research, program development and implementation, assessment, program evaluation, and funding. Several facilitators commented that technical assistance questions were challenging for participants to answer. Training may be needed prior to asking about technical assistance needs.

*“Physical set-up of program (e.g., patdowns, certain tasks that might be triggering—how can we do it best without causing more trauma?)”*

*“Data collection— knowing what to collect, how to use the information, interpret it, and present it.”*

## Topical Session Feedback

In addition to girls and staff providing input, participants from the topical sessions were asked, “What are the implications of these issues [critical issues facing their population] for staff training and technical assistance?” The responses from the topical sessions reiterated similar technical assistance needs such as resources, as well as training/best practices regarding prevalent issues such as abuse and trauma, anger, bullying, and how to engage girls and families. Other training implications included the need for staff to examine their values and to increase cultural competency.

### Information and Resource Needs

One of the main goals of the listening sessions was to gain awareness regarding what information and resources are needed by stakeholders. Through its website, listserv, and conferences, NGI is positioned to provide information about a variety of topics related to girls, as well as a catalogue of useful resources.

To learn more about this topic, the following questions were posed to the stakeholder groups:

- Girls: NGI is creating a website with a special section for girls. What kind of information would be helpful or would you want to have?
- Key professional stakeholders: What information or materials do you need?
- Parents/caregivers: (1) We want to have information that will be useful for parents. What should be on this website? Please list what information and/or resources would be the most helpful for parents/caregivers of girls at risk of being, or already, involved in the justice system. (2) What would have helped you better understand the process of your daughter’s involvement in the juvenile justice system? What information did you want/need?

## Girls

When girls were asked what information would be helpful, an important theme emerged. Although girls named a wide range and variety of topics, their desire to share advice and hear girls’ stories, and their need for professional help were most prominent. They were seeking empowerment, affirmation, understanding, and opportunities. The girls wanted information about a wide range of topics including communication, education, family help, drugs and alcohol, health, arts and expressing themselves, STDs, relationships, pregnancy, and safe dating. They wanted very basic resources in the areas of jobs/employment, mentors, state resources, crisis, shelters, legal, sex, and medical. Girls also shared preferred formats for website information and resources, which included chats, videos, blogs, and hotlines. The importance of confidentiality emerged repeatedly.

*“We need advice columns and blogs that let us anonymously share our experiences so we can help each other.”*

*“Chat line to share things with other girls who are not in your school and who would not spread your business, needs to be confidential.”*

### Key Professional Stakeholders

When staff were asked about the information or materials they need, the most common responses were for data trends/research, funding, and best practices for working with girls. Participants also named community guides and information about girls’ agencies as areas in which they required more resources. The participants expressed a need for tools to more effectively work with girls, including girls’ curricula and materials.

*“Gender-specific community resource guide—who is serving what ages.”*

*“Informational resources for the girls—how to apply for a job, life skills, balance a checkbook.”*

*“Group curriculum dealing with adolescent girls’ social and emotional needs.”*

*“I would like to have brochures to give to girls and their families on eating disorders and PTSD.”*

*“Evaluation and assessment tools.”*

*“Map to show what organizations are doing with girls.”*

### *Parents/Caregivers*

When asked what information would be useful for parents and what they would want on a website, parents/caregivers reported wanting advice on how to help their daughters, parent education, and support. In particular, they expressed the desire to understand their daughters’ experiences as well as the language girls use in today’s society. This extended to the Internet, whereby parents expressed need for more information about social media, such as Facebook. A common response was that parents want information about community resources, especially prevention and intervention programs, and also need information about general activities they can do with their children. Regarding system involvement, they need help navigating the justice system and information about systems in general. Importantly, some parents/caregivers noted challenges to helping their daughters such as peer influence, lack of system understanding, and lack of Internet access. Parents’ written responses on their demographic surveys corroborated these findings, where the need for parent support and

education emerged as critical areas. Parents requested support groups and other mechanisms for connecting with other parents. They also asked for education and training that would increase their parenting skills in areas such as communication and discipline. Also important is the need for resources in areas including mental health and prevention, and for parents to obtain information about the justice system.

### **What Works and Ineffective/Harmful Practices**

The listening sessions provided a platform to explore both what is working with girls’ programming, services, and treatment, and what needs to change. The information gained from these sessions can help to inform policy and practice in the justice system as well as in related systems such as education.

To gain insight on these topics, the following questions were posed to the stakeholder groups:

- Girls: (1) What do you think about the way girls who get into trouble are treated in [city/state]? Is it fair/unfair? (2) Did you feel comfortable speaking with staff in your program(s)? Why or why not? (3) What are some program rules that you think are/were good? Why? and (4) Which program rules or things that happen in programs need to be changed? Why?
- Key professional stakeholders: Are there policies, laws, or rules that negatively impact girls?
- Parents/caregivers: Did you feel that your daughter was helped? In what ways did your daughter change as a result of being in the juvenile justice system?

### *Girls*

When girls were asked about what works and what needs to change in programming and treatment, a number of themes that have implications for policy and practice emerged.

Girls’ treatment. Girls noted differences in how they were treated as compared to boys, and discussed what they considered to be fair and unfair treatment

in general and by decision makers in particular. Some girls felt they were treated fairly. For example, they stated that the judges were fair, listened, and gave them chances. Fair treatment was also described as being treated with respect, care, and leniency. Girls also named a myriad of ways in which they felt they were treated unfairly, including receiving negative treatment by law enforcement and program staff.

*“Girls get judged too much—it is OK for guys to get into trouble because they’re guys, but not for girls; this is not fair.”*

*“I have always felt comfortable talking to staff members in the facilities I have been in because I know that they are here to help and listen to me, not hurt or ignore me.”*

*“Most girls here have not been to court in years. We don’t get to talk to the judge because we never know when we have a court date because our caseworker does not call us or see us.”*

*“Getting restrained too much and putting their hands on you too much.”*

Comfort level with staff. Many girls stated that they felt comfortable talking with staff, though a large number had mixed feelings depending on the staff member or did not feel comfortable at all. Girls stated that staff were understanding, and listen and communicate well, while other respondents reported that staff could not be trusted; they judge the girls and often violate confidentiality.

Positive program rules. Rules regarding safety and structure were considered positive. In general, rules regarding privilege/point systems, confidentiality, respect, and substance use were also considered positive.

*“The cameras are good—especially the camera rooms because they are good if someone is having seizures or trying to kill themselves.”*

*“Rules about no weapons, no fighting, no putting your hands on others are good.”*

*“I like the rule about confidentiality... what is said here, stays here.”*

*“Respect others and yourself is a good rule that should be in all programs.”*

*“Random drug testing helps me stay sober.”*

Negative program rules. Rules for contact with family and non-family were by far the most cited rules that girls thought need changing. Girls also identified rules that were not consistently implemented or followed as areas for improvement.

*“More phone calls—only once a week now and our parents have to call us.”*

*“Visiting hours longer and we should be able to bring food in on visits from parents.”*

*“If we curse we get kicked out of group and it is the girls who curse who need the group.”*

*“Staff make up their own rules, their own handbook.”*

*“Have to always be with staff. I would just like to step outside and be in the air to breathe without someone deducting points away from me.”*



### Key Professional Stakeholders

Stakeholders who work with girls are well-positioned to speak on what works and what should be changed in our efforts to improve response to girls.

Positive policies and practices. An interesting result was that participants spoke to both the need for girl-only space and for women to work with girls in certain capacities such as counseling and case management. However, they also reinforced the importance of both genders working with youth.

*“My agency assigns all girls to female counselors.”*

*“It’s so important making sure that people of both genders are working with the youth—so they have both role models.”*

Negative policies and practices. It is critical that we not only determine what is working, but also those policies and practices with negative consequences. Professionals cited numerous policies and practices that intersect with family, foster care, school, and justice systems. For example, regarding the family, policies related to domestic violence and running away from home were considered negative, as was an emphasis on funding foster care rather than strengthening families. School policies and practices that were considered negative were related to zero tolerance, reentry, and discipline. Participants also noted numerous justice system policies that were harmful to girls, including lack of same-sex protocols for strip searches and interviewing; lack of gender-responsive services and resources, including risk assessments; issues related to sexuality, including the assumption that girls are heterosexual; and regulatory areas.

*“In my community, when there is a call of domestic violence and an adolescent girl is involved it is 90% that the girl will be the person arrested. We need to educate LEO’s on why girls are emotional.”*

*“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).”*

*“In my school, girls are suspended more than boys because girls are unable to gather and check their emotions as fast as boys can.”*

*“The new law that charges a person attempting suicide has a negative impact on the girls.”*

*“Labeling a girl a sex offender when it is reactive behavior based on years of sexual abuse herself.”*

*“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.”*

### Parents/Caregivers

Parents/caregivers shared their thoughts about whether their daughters were helped, and how they changed as a result of being in the juvenile justice system. A lack of family involvement in the process was cited as important. Parents/caregivers described a lack of knowledge of the system and system processes as being harmful to girls. Parents/caregivers also mentioned the lack of consistency between what different providers and professionals across the system said to girls and their families. Similarly, a lack of

consistent care and follow-through was identified as problematic for girls in the system. Some respondents even labeled the juvenile justice system “traumatizing” for girls especially those with mental health needs.

*“The system did not realize that the whole family was scared and did not understand what was happening.”*

*“There is no consistency in what professionals say to parents and what they say to their daughters.”*

Of note, parents/caregivers had difficulty reporting the positive policies and practices affecting girls. Rather than identifying specific policies or practices, many respondents identified specific individuals that were helpful (i.e. court staff, social workers).

*“Really like their social workers that now work with them.”*

*“I can call the court staff anytime I need their help.”*

### **NGI’s Critical Focus Areas**

Several questions were asked of stakeholders in order to elicit ways OJJDP and NGI could better respond, either through specialized TTA or other activities, resource development/funding, or through system decision making/policy development.

The following questions were posed to the stakeholder groups:

- **Girls:** (1) What do girls need to stay on a positive track? (2) What do you wish program/probation staff knew about you when they make decisions? (3) What should adults focus on if they want to help girls? (4) What about now; what will help you to get back on track [or to stay on

track]? What helped you when you needed the help? (5) What kinds of services/activities should programs offer to meet girls’ needs?

- **Key professional stakeholders:** What are the most serious issues facing girls at risk of being involved, or currently involved, with juvenile justice?
- **Parents/caregivers:** (1) What could have helped or prevented your daughter from entering the juvenile justice system? (2) What support systems or resources helped you get through the time your daughter was locked up?

### **Girls**

Girls provided perspectives regarding what NGI’s critical focus areas should be, with several key themes surfacing.

**Adult Response to Girls.** First, instead of discussing a particular area of focus, the majority of girls’ responses mentioned a need for adults to change the way they “respond to girls.” This included focusing on their feelings, their communication needs, and a desire for increased understanding. For example, girls stated:

*“They should focus on girls—we have different feelings—all girls are not the same.”*

*“Sensitivity of girls.”*

*“Think about how we feel—focus on what is good and build on that—recognize we have feelings.”*

The issue of communication was very salient and surfaced in a variety of ways. Having trust in communication, listening skills, and communication with parents and staff were some of the areas in which communication was discussed. Girls overwhelmingly talked about their need for understanding. They seek understanding from others regarding their background and life history as well as their present circumstances and problems.

Another prevalent theme was judgment. Girls expressed a desire for a clean slate and non-judgmental approach, which was illustrated by comments such as:

*“Don’t judge us without knowing us.”*

*“Not judging us and making assumptions—they need to learn to listen.”*

*“Not judge us because of charges.”*

In addition to not being judged, the emphasis in the listening sessions was on girls’ need for support, respect, guidance, good advice, fair treatment, individual treatment, trust, positive affirmation, and encouragement regarding their strengths and goals.

Educating Staff. When asked what they wish staff knew about them before making decisions, girls’ responses clustered around three main themes. They wanted staff to understand their emotions and feelings, their families, and their goals and plans for the future.

*“I wish they knew that I am torn. I love my mother, I don’t want to be taken away from my little brothers. But I also don’t want to live the way I had to live. I wish they knew my mom needed help. I wish they knew I worried about my little brothers. I did the best I knew how.”*

*“Wish they knew actually what was going on in our home that we live in instead of making assumptions of why we do the kinds of things we do—we don’t do things on purpose.”*

*“What you are trying to do with your future, what your goals are.”*

*“I wish they gave me a chance to succeed.”*

Recognition of Larger Structures. Girls shared the need to recognize larger family, program, and system issues that also require serious emphasis by adults. Girls discussed problems in their families, negative adult behaviors, and program and system issues. Girls identified several behaviors that appeared particularly harmful, such as a lack of family support, disrespect from staff, medical neglect, criminalization of survival behaviors such as sex trafficking, and racism in facilities and at the system level.

*“[Staff is] rude and disrespectful; they don’t care if you are sad or mad, they just say, ‘You’re here because it is your fault.’ We’ve been here because we’ve been abused—we didn’t do anything wrong.”*

*“They don’t treat you like a victim. Even if you have been part of human trafficking they stereotype - that is what you did, that is who you are.”*

*“Feel like girls are treated unfairly for what they do: I got jumped, knifed and because I am Latina they tried to arrest me for being in a gang, they were going to arrest me! Not looking for those that knifed me!”*

Other themes that surfaced included the girls' desire for alternatives to institutionalization. Girls also discussed practical forms of help such as education, jobs, and goal setting.

What Helped. The theme of maternal relationships surfaced as both what girls need and what helped them. Regarding what girls need, they said:

*"If my mom watched me, took care of me."*

*"To have relationships with mothers and to be able to tell mothers/grandmothers things that they would keep in confidence."*

*"More mother-daughter time, engaged mothers, listen to what your child is telling you."*

Family Support. When asked what had helped them and/or would help them, girls predominantly mentioned family support followed by opportunities for positive friends, caring adults, therapy, and staff support. Again, there was an emphasis on relationships with their mothers:

*"My mom lets me tell her my deepest things and she doesn't get mad and makes me feel better."*

*"I get most of my 'staying on track' help from my mom and grandpa. Sometimes I do have to count on myself."*

*"My mom is always there for me no matter what happens, even if we fight she is still there."*

*"My family and real friends help me stay out of trouble."*

Finally, there was an emphasis on their own agency where girls cited their individual choices as what helped them.

Girls' Program Services and Activities. Girls listed numerous activities and services that they thought programs should offer. The most frequently named was physical activity, such as sports and recreation. They also wanted creative or artistic activities and offsite/off campus activities. Also important were services that relate to mental health, such as counseling or therapy; groups for girls to share and learn from each other; and education/schooling services.

*"We need exercise programs like Zumba and yoga."*

*"Programs for girls such as music, stepping, cheering, acting, drama."*

*"More community stuff—just being locked up doesn't teach you what to do when you're out—rec center, show us places to go outside of the same neighborhood."*

*"We need programs where girls come together at least every other week to talk about 'girl issues' where we have experienced women who are willing to listen and have good advice."*

*"Education, college preparation."*

#### Key Professional Stakeholders

When asked to identify the most serious and critical issues facing girls, key professional stakeholder responses clustered into three main areas: (1) girls' issues, (2) programming issues, and (3) system issues. An extensive list of girls' issues was identified as focus areas for NGI; however, the most common were family problems (i.e. lack of support), abuse—particularly sexual abuse, sex education, pregnancy, and gangs.

Trauma, violence, and dating relationships also were identified as critical focus areas. Programming issues were related to specific challenges to meeting the needs of girls and included a lack of transition care, lack of staff training, funding, and lack of girls' programming with attention to gender differences. Respondents also named system level issues as critical focus areas. These included the differences in sanctions and treatment for girls based on charges, lack of family resources, and the overall system's response to girls.

*"There are not enough adequately trained people to effectively deal with child abuse and neglect issues. As a society, we don't do a good job of treating these issues; we don't do a good job of treating the whole being."*

*"There needs to be transition and independent living dollars to assist during the transition period."*

*"Gap in funding, tools, resources. There are political issues—funding nightmare."*

#### *Parents/Caregivers*

Parents discussed what could have prevented their daughters from entering the juvenile justice system in order to elicit ways in which NGI could support/replicate/advocate/make recommendations to improve the response to girls in the juvenile justice system.

Support/Lacking Resources for Parents. Parents discussed how the school and education systems should be critical focus areas. In particular, school care/support, involvement, and bully prevention programs were named as critical. Community involvement, resources, and programs, such as early prevention, also were cited as areas of needed

focus. Finally, parent-specific issues surfaced such as parents' need for support, parent education, activities, communication, and information. Parents stated that they felt challenged by their lack of control.

*"We are growing too—we need help with how to work with our daughters [and] to understand what life is like for them."*

*"The high school [needed] to care more about what she was doing or not doing. They need to do more for bullying."*

Recommendations for Continued Services. When asked what helped their daughters from their perspective and/or what helped them, parents identified people or services that had a positive impact including social services, counselors, and court staff. This included responses from parents who felt their daughters' attitudes in general had changed for the better as a result of their system experience. Family was also identified by parents as having a positive impact.

#### *Topical Session Feedback*

Topic specific listening sessions were held to gain a deeper understanding from particular factions about the needs of groups that may have unique experiences within the justice system. Two sessions included tribal police and education stakeholders who serve justice-involved girls, and another two sessions focused on gangs and LGBT youth.

The specific concerns relayed by education and law enforcement stakeholders echoed the same themes as the general listening sessions, such as abuse, sexual abuse, PTSD, aggression, anger, adolescent development, and bullying. Interestingly, education stakeholders repeatedly mentioned the need for judges, law enforcement, and the justice system to

receive training on sensitivity and girls' emotions and differential treatment. The sessions on gangs and LGBT youth generated much more specific responses; for example, regarding girls in gangs, staff said:

*"Girls value themselves by their associations with male gang members."*

*"Sexualization of female gang members."*

*"Violence for girls in gangs is relational and usually over boys."*

*"Families pass on the gang legacy."*

*"Often children of incarcerated parent."*

Three prevailing themes were dominant in the LGBT session: (1) gender expectations, (2) sexuality, and (3) heteronormative expectations. The intersection of gender, race, culture, and sexuality was salient throughout each of these themes and support the need to recognize within group differences:

- Gender expectations and conformity

*"Regarding rewards in custody—girls are excited about getting their fingernails painted; you get makeup or your hair done as a reward."*

*"They have groups about being a young lady, and you get points/credits if you complete that."*

- Sexuality and Identity

*"We know about girls and their need for intimacy and relationship and connection, and how that might play out in situations where they're literally confined. You hear the phrase "gay for the stay" where girls are relating intimately with other girls; they might not do this otherwise outside."*

*"Re: gay for the stay issue ... None of the girls I worked with wanted to identify as a certain identity. That was adults saying: Are you this; are you that? The girls didn't care."*

- Sexuality and heteronormative expectations

*"In terms of construction of gender, in terms of masculinity and femininity – it's been so safe to think about trauma and victimization for feminine girls. It's different as you move toward masculine girls – [people have] blinders around masculine behavior; this can't be associated with any sort of trauma background."*

*"A barrier to getting out is the perception that expressing oneself in gender non-conforming ways is acting out, or is a way to flaunt the rules or challenge authority; the kinds of things that end up explicitly or implicitly adding to people's time."*

## Standards of Care

For this topic, key professional stakeholders engaged in discussions aimed at soliciting information to begin to share with the field about what is being implemented, and what may be some emerging best practices to inform the development of standards of care.

- Key professional stakeholders: Has your agency/organization implemented any best practices for girls that are effective—regardless of having evidence?

### *Key Professional Stakeholders*

Program Models and Curricula. The overwhelming majority of responses cited different programs and models that practitioners were using and/or thought were effective. For example, many participants mentioned existing gender-responsive curricula and programming such as Girls Circle, Girls Moving On, and VOICES. Others mentioned general programming such as female mentors, wrap-around services, and therapeutic courts.

*“We are gender-responsive officers and our approach works—TARGET, the CARE Program, Voices, Girls Circle, Family Support Centers, Trauma Clinics, FFT, MTFC, Viewpoints, and some therapists that facilitate BSFT, FFT, and MST. But not all therapists who are trained in these models are good with girls.”*

Gender-Responsive Practices and Interventions. The second most common response was related to having a gender-responsive approach. For example, some responses cited:



*“Gender-specific programs, halfway, residential, or treatment including chemical dependency housed in a separate building than boys.”*

*“In my drug court, gender-enhanced services/coordination is effective. Girls are assigned to a female probation officer; the PO can identify with female issues.”*

*“We’re implementing a lot of gender-responsive interventions: Girls Circle in the detention facility, gender-specific programming at the evening reporting center, creating an emergency phone numbers booklet that girls take out of detention so they’ll have those numbers accessible to them.”*

Resources for Girls. Participants named numerous resources that had a positive impact on girls’ lives. Some resources were basic necessities such as medical, dental, and reproductive health care. Other responses named creative best practices that are free or low-cost considering serious budget constraints. To illustrate, participants said:

*“Understanding that needs aren’t being met like love, acceptance, shelter, and belonging—basic needs.”*

*“Longer showers (DT), allowing people proper time to clean up (i.e., when they are on their periods), having tampons/hygiene products in all of the bathrooms.”*

*“We have a girls’ library where we provide books specifically geared towards young females—empowering books”*

*“Bringing in off-campus groups for assemblies: music, saving money/financial planning.”*

*“Foundation that supports the extra activities because they couldn’t afford it otherwise.”*

Involving Families. Finally, an approach that involves families was paramount.

*“I think the family group conferencing is fantastic.”*

*“Tribal girls—family services.”*

*“Information on how to engage parents.”*

In sum, the results from the listening sessions confirmed and reinforced both existing research as well as the anecdotal experiences that many stakeholders have expressed as salient in girls’ programming. Many new insights were shared that make original contributions to the existing literature

on girls’ delinquency. Given the qualitative nature of the data, there is a wealth of information that informs the findings, lessons, and next steps in our work.

### **Facilitator Impressions**

The data show that the majority of listening session participants felt comfortable taking part in the discussion, shared openly (even when their comments may have been negative), and were engaged in the process, according to impressions submitted by the facilitators. As might be expected, a variety of issues or concerns emerged from the different stakeholder groups. For example, some facilitators of girls’ groups noted that trust issues (e.g., with adults or the system) were important to some of the girls; also, staff were present during some of the listening sessions, which may have impacted girls’ responses and also may be related to trust. The need for connection and support was apparent in several of the parent/caregiver sessions. In some of the staff groups, a key issue noted by the facilitators was gender-responsive services (including the need for training in this area). Across stakeholder groups, facilitators reported that a number of participants expressed their gratitude for being part of the listening session as well as their interest in staying informed about the National Girls Institute.

Logistical challenges cropped up in many of the facilitators’ notes, with key issues relating to time, group management, and listening session questions. Regarding time, some facilitators indicated that participants needed a substantial amount of time to process the questions or to become comfortable with sharing their opinions. In addition, some facilitators reported that they faced challenges in creating an environment that maximized sharing and inclusivity (due to issues such as tension between group members), or in keeping the group focused on the subject matter and questions. The questions themselves also presented some challenges. For example, some facilitators reported needing to rephrase questions or provide additional probes in order to increase participants’ understanding.



## Discussion and Recommendations

Some of the findings described above provide further evidence for and align with existing research about the needs of justice-involved girls, their families, and the professionals who work with them. The qualitative research design employed in this study allows for these findings to be contextualized and provides a more detailed and rich description of existing trends. These findings also highlight areas that warrant additional exploration or support outside of the NGI. Below, the results are synthesized and the themes that cut across stakeholder groups and specific questions are presented. The implications of the findings from the listening sessions for the NGI are included and set the stage for training, research, information sharing, and policy and practice recommendations.

### Communication

Communication surfaced as a theme across all stakeholder groups in a variety of forms. Girls expressed that communication needs should be a priority focus and that the NGI website should include information about communication. Girls want to talk to their parents and, just as importantly, parents and caregivers (particularly mothers) want to be able to talk with their daughters, but each identified the challenges of effective and meaningful communication and uncertainty with how to talk with each other in a way that is not argumentative or fueled by tension. Both girls and parents/caregivers expressed a desire to develop communication skills and ways to relate to each other. For parents it seemed this challenge was due to generational differences in girls' language, and for girls this was about feeling misunderstood by parents. Girls also spoke about the importance of effective and healthy communication with staff. Interestingly, staff also named communication as a main area for training. This signifies that while all of the groups agree that communication is a key area of concern, numerous barriers and challenges exist, and training, education, and support is needed to help facilitate positive communication across groups.

While the need to develop communication skills and facilitate communication is considered a central aspect of gender responsiveness, the frequency and diversity of ways in which it surfaced in this study suggest that more work is needed in this area. The strength of this finding also raises questions about how to define and measure effective communication. For example, staff and girls may differ in their views of what respectful, supportive, and appropriate communication looks like. Moreover, gender differences in adolescent communication show that girls use communication as a way to develop relationships, that they need time to process, and that their communication is linked to emotions. This divide between language, experiences, and expectations creates uncertainty for the adults working with the girls and for girls who have experienced trauma. Staff reported uncertainty with how to communicate holding girls accountable for their behavior while also affirming and empowering them. Communication can be easily stunted or cut short when there is miscommunication and/or lack of skills. Building skills to increase effective communication is essential in gender-responsive practice.

#### *Recommendations:*

- NGI TTA: Ensure that communication skills are given priority and considered an essential element of gender responsiveness. This includes skills training on effective communication, including gender differences in communication.
- In the future, federal government could support pilot initiatives with small workgroups whereby each stakeholder group works to understand the perspectives of others in terms of improving the processes (i.e., staff to hear from girls and parents, parents to hear from staff and girls, girls to hear from staff and parents) and evaluate and track the results.

### Peer Learning

The desire to learn from peers cut across all three stakeholder groups. One of the main themes for girls



was that they wanted to get and receive advice and hear other girls' stories. Parents also wanted advice from others regarding how to help their daughters. Staff echoed the same, reporting that opportunities to learn from their peers are crucial.

Several important implications relate to this finding. For girls, it may be that they feel more comfortable learning and sharing with similarly aged peers who are developmentally at the same life stage. Parents may also feel more at ease with other parents who have faced similar issues. It is critical to recognize the importance of peer-to-peer sharing and to provide opportunities for parents/mothers to share their experiences to foster understanding and support. This also would help parents to understand they are not alone and can learn from each other. Regarding staff, similar findings were reported by OJJDP, where peer-to-peer learning was in many cases the preferred type of TTA method (OJJDP, 2010).<sup>1</sup> Staff seek practical strategies and the application of theory and research to their day-to-day interventions with the girls. While training from "experts" is important, knowing what to do in stressful situations and what has worked for others in the field who encounter similar types of situations and challenges is equally essential.

<sup>1</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2010). *National needs assessment of juvenile justice professionals: 2010*. Washington, DC: Author.

### *Recommendations:*

- Provide website resources and information regarding opportunities that exist for peer sharing through NGI. Identify agencies that are already doing this in an effective way and engage them in expanding/focusing services to meet the needs of justice-involved families/girls.
- Provide peer learning opportunities as a standard component in NGI field-initiated TTA or regional trainings.
- Provide support for the field to create or disseminate information regarding parenting and girls' websites, blogs, and forums that facilitate peer sharing of advice and stories.
- Provide support for the field to maintain and monitor a chat line for girls and parents/caregivers. Create an equivalent website resource for staff so they have a forum to share success stories and strategies of what works with girls.

### **Gender Responsiveness**

The issue of "gender responsiveness" emerged consistently, albeit in different ways depending on the stakeholder group. Throughout the listening sessions girls referenced how they are different from boys. They spoke of their need to be understood, have their feelings validated, and be affirmed and loved. While girls shared specific topics on which adults should focus and areas where they would seek out more information, they revealed that getting their emotional and relational needs met was a central priority. Similarly, staff generated numerous training topics and informational needs; however, the approach to working with girls in a gender-responsive manner was of critical importance.

Feminist scholars posit that girls have unique needs that differ from boys primarily around their desire for connection with others and their emphasis on relationships. Girls' responses in the listening sessions overwhelmingly supported this assertion whereby the data show that relational concerns were of the utmost importance. This highlights the need to

be gender responsive when working with girls. A major contribution of this study is that it allows us to learn what being gender responsive means from the perspective of girls and parents. Scholars have struggled with defining gender responsiveness, and what is noteworthy from our data are the diverse definitions from staff on what gender responsiveness means. Staff easily named services but struggled with articulating the philosophy, values, and approach that are fundamental to a gender-responsive environment. This study provides a unique opportunity to include these voices that have historically been left out of this conversation. These points were salient and can build upon how we conceptualize gender responsiveness.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Through federally funded conferences and workshops, include girls and parents in the conversations, research, and theory building about what works for girls.
- Along with the NGI advisory board, include the voices of parents and girls/young women to inform the work of NGI.
- Include the perspectives of girls, parents, and staff in the OJJDP/NGI roundtable on evidence-based practice (EBP) and gender-responsive practice (GRP) to be conducted in 2012.
- Through NGI TTA, apply lessons learned from the OJJDP national conference on girls/families that include cutting-edge research and the translation of research to best practice at the programming and system levels.

### **Non-Judgmental Approach to Girls and Families**

Girls spoke in a very straightforward manner about feeling judged and their need for understanding from others regarding their background and life circumstances. Further, parents also felt judged by the system. Gaarder et al (2004)<sup>2</sup> found that “juvenile court staff often act based more on the perceptions they

<sup>2</sup>Gaarder, E., Rodriguez, N., & Zatz, M. S. (2004). Criers, liars, and manipulators: Probation officers' views of girls. *Justice Quarterly*, 21(3): 547–578.

have of girls and their families than on the realities that girls face, including both individual and societal factors” (p. 572). The importance of judgment and girls' life context was a strong theme and provides further empirical support to the gender-responsive literature.

Interestingly, both parents and girls identify support from their families as helpful in getting back on track. This is significant given that most of the juvenile justice programs exclude families or present barriers to engaging families (i.e., distance from the community, lack of transportation, etc.) Stakeholders see parents as a problem/risk factor and girls see mothers as the solution/protective factors. The result is a lack of congruency between what girls see as protective factors and the design of juvenile justice programming. This gap in perspective demands our attention and the importance of including girls/families.

Staff also recognize family issues as a barrier and express the need to know how to engage families. These indicators show the need for engaging staff to understand family strengths and to reframe how families are involved in the intervention process. When the system views and labels the family as the problem, there is lower likelihood of engaging families or creating family-focused care management. That can further result in the isolation of girls from their families. This is not conducive to building on the strengths of families.

#### *Recommendations:*

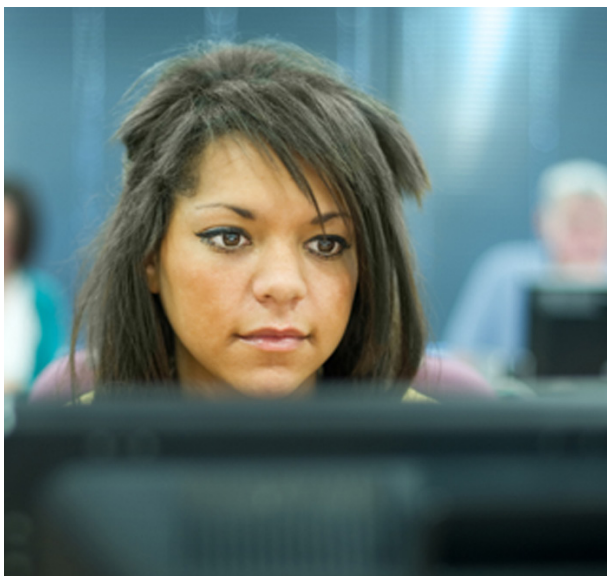
- Include parents as co-facilitators in NGI workshops and trainings to challenge staff to look at their values about families and how this influences their day-to-day interactions with girls/families.
- Integrate information learned from girls and parents about a non-judgmental approach into the development of standards of care to guide programming during the roundtable meeting.
- The federal government to provide additional funding for piloting of family-focused interventions.

- The federal government to provide funding for research inquiry as to effective strategies to engage mothers/families/caregivers in the day-to-day treatment milieu.

### **Multi-System Approach**

Girls and parents spoke about how problems within the school, family, and justice system require attention if we are to truly help girls. It was recognized and acknowledged that individual-level solutions are grossly inadequate. From the stakeholders' responses, it is clear that the focus of NGI cannot be on individual-level girls' issues or training solely on topics, but must be multi-level and focus on program- and system-level issues as well. For example, we learned that many people "outside" of the juvenile justice system were identified as needing training (e.g., educators, law enforcement).

This finding supports the need for early prevention programs. Juvenile justice staff who work with girls need to know how other systems work and what other resources are available. There is often a lack of awareness regarding how to access and utilize available resources and to connect girls/families to these resources. Parents expressed frustration with having to tell the same story over and over because the "system people" did not talk to each other.



### *Recommendations:*

- Through OJJDP/NGI partnerships, convene a roundtable of leaders/decision makers from the various disciplines to identify strategies for breaking down silos of child welfare, education, mental health, public health, recreational opportunities, etc., and increasing communication and collaboration.
- Provide funding and support to integrate services and move away from the compartmentalizing of girls'/families' lives.
- In the future, partner with organizations that can provide accurate advice, guidance, and support, including the medical and legal community to stakeholders.
- Through communication networks, involve schools, law enforcement, families, and gatekeepers in awareness efforts and develop/provide specialized training for these groups.
- The federal government to provide funding for piloting of training models that include parents, girls, and professionals and create a format for states and jurisdictions/long-term sustainability to include Training of Trainer models.
- The federal government to fund/support evaluation of policies and practices across agencies and systems that can be streamlined while maintaining confidentiality.
- Provide NGI website resources regarding national providers, existing resources, and organizations.
- Include diverse representation of various stakeholders on the NGI advisory board.

### **Individual and Universal Needs**

An important discovery was the many ways girls and parents spoke of unique needs and experiences related to their justice-system involvement, as well as a desire for information that is typical of most girls and parents in the United States. For example, the girls' resource needs differed from the general

population of girls and demonstrated a higher level of need, which is noteworthy given the girls' developmental stage. Girls also expressed a desire for other information about topics that are very common for most teenagers, such as dating, STDs, education, jobs, and their goals. Parents expressed the need for information about how to navigate the justice system, but also wanted general ideas for activities to do with their daughters, which again is typical for most parents and caregivers of teenagers.

This finding has important implications for how we work with girls and parents. In particular, it highlights the need for focused staff training on understanding strategies to address the high need, versus the historical juvenile justice practices of controlling behaviors and neglecting what is driving the behaviors. Through improved system response, training, technical assistance, and resource provision, these issues can be addressed.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Provide a clearinghouse of information that is responsive to these unique and universal needs. The resources must be easily accessible, developmentally appropriate, and specific to unique needs as well as general needs, including parenting and teen resources.
- The federal government to support research that continues to track the profile of girls entering the juvenile justice system, and their families, to monitor changes over time.

### **Technology and Social Networking**

One listening session was dominated by the topic of Facebook. Girls engaged in an intense discussion around what is posted on Facebook, and that Facebook activity often results in fighting. Moreover, girls reported Facebook "is used to spread rumors," "ruined friendships," "results in bullying," and that "girls mean to hurt other girls" with their Facebook activity. With this information comes an opportunity to further explore the impact of social networking on girls' experiences with the juvenile justice system.

Girls' preferred format for receiving Internet-based information included chats, videos, and blogs. Given the widespread use of the Internet in general and social networking sites in particular, this is not surprising. Problematic, though, is that parents reported they want more information about girls' Internet use including Facebook. There are important implications to this finding since cyber bullying can be harmful and dangerous, and parents may lack the information and resources they need to appropriately intervene.

#### *Recommendation:*

- The federal government to support research to increase the understanding of the impact of social media and girls' involvement in the juvenile justice system.

### **Within-Girl Differences**

The importance of recognizing differences among girls surfaced most strongly in the topical sessions, particularly regarding issues of gender expectations, sexuality, and identity. Also mentioned was how issues related to race and culture require attention.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Ensure that all NGI TTA (e.g., individual field-initiated requests, regional trainings) acknowledge differences among girls and provide training that does not reinforce gender stereotypes.
- Disseminate information and resources for the field that address differences within gender.
- Provide support to continue the dialogue regarding the intersection of better serving girls in gangs, LGBT girls, girls in tribal communities, etc.

### **Balance Recognition of Past With Future Orientation**

An interesting finding is that while girls felt the need to be understood and for their background and circumstances considered, they also maintained a

focus on their future. They said they wished staff asked about their goals for the future and encouraged them to meet those goals. Future orientation is an important factor and is related to positive outcomes.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Include resources on NGI website for girls, parents, and stakeholders that acknowledge girls' future goals and reinforce positive future orientation.
- OJJDP to assist with collaboration efforts with Department of Education and Department of Labor to develop strategies and accessibility for education/vocational resources.
- The federal government to provide funding for local organizations to provide resources at the state and local level including alternatives to institutionalization, educational/vocational programs, and employment opportunities.

### **Examination of Policies and Practices Impacting Girls**

Girls noted several differences in how they were treated as compared to boys, both by decision makers and while in programs. Girls also identified positive and negative rules that warrant our attention. Although standards have not been formally developed and disseminated, practitioners are in the position to share what they have learned from experience regarding best practices. At this stage, the field would benefit from standards of care in working with girls.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Use the information learned as a guide for the advisory board to discuss policy development and resource sharing.
- Use the information to guide a platform for next steps by participants of the EBP and GRP roundtable.
- Develop NGI resources for the website

## **Conclusion**

Given the qualitative approach employed in the listening sessions, we have a wealth of descriptive information that contextualizes and complements existing research. These findings can guide next steps in working with at-risk and justice system-involved girls and their families. Girls, their families, and professional stakeholders generously shared invaluable information, feedback, and suggestions that collectively provide a map to guide the work of OJJDP, NGI, and other federal agencies on behalf of justice-involved girls. This includes developing specialized training protocols, sharing information and relevant resources on the NGI website, and guiding the recruitment of advisory board members with related expertise. One of the clearest messages and most profound lessons learned is that we must include in this process these key stakeholder groups in a respectful and inclusive manner that recognizes both the unique and the more universal challenges faced by girls, their families, and those who serve them.



# Appendix

## NGI Research Questions by Stakeholder

NGI Research Questions by Stakeholder			
Overarching Research Question	Stakeholder Asked	Specific Listening Session Question	Listening Session/ Supplemental Data
What are the priority training and technical assistance needs to improve the response to justice-involved girls?	Girls	Please list the topics in which you feel training for STAFF is needed to work with girls at risk of or involved in the justice system.	Supplemental Data
	Staff	In which topics or areas do staff who work with girls need training?	Listening Session
		What training format would be most effective?	
		What are areas in which you need technical assistance to better serve girls?	
		Which groups or professions most need training?	
		Please list and rank the topics in which you feel training is needed in order to respond effectively with girls at risk of or involved in the justice system.	Supplemental Data
What are the resource and information needs of girls, parents, and key stakeholders?	Girls	NGI is creating a website with a special section for girls. What kind of information would be helpful or would you want to have?	Listening Session
	Staff	What information or materials do you need?	
	Parents	We want to have information that will be useful for parents. What should be on this website?	
		What would have helped you better understand the process (arrest, probation, detention, court, commitment, release) of your daughter's involvement in the juvenile justice system better? What information did you want/need?	
			Please list what information and/or resources would be the most helpful for parents/caregivers with girls at risk of or involved in the justice system.

# Appendix

NGI Research Questions by Stakeholder			
Overarching Research Question	Stakeholder Asked	Specific Listening Session Question	Listening Session/ Supplemental Data
What support, practices, policies are currently working for girls, parents and key stakeholders? What are ineffective and/or harmful practices, policies, systems, structures, services, programs, etc.?	Girls	What do you think about the way girls who get into trouble are treated in [city/state]? Is it fair/unfair?	Listening Session
		Did you feel comfortable speaking with staff in your program(s)? Why or why not?	
		What are some program rules that you think are/were good? Why?	
		Which program rules or things that happen in programs need to be changed? Why?	
	Staff	Are there policies, laws, or rules that negatively impact girls?	
Parents	Did you feel that your daughter was helped? In what ways did your daughter change as a result of being in the juvenile justice system?		
What/should be NGI's critical focus areas?	Girls	What do girls need to stay on a positive track?	Listening Session
		What do you wish that program/probation staff knew about you when they make decisions?	
		What should adults focus on if they really want to help girls?	
		What about now; what will help you to get back on track [or to stay on track]? What helped you when you needed the help?	
		What do you wish that program/probation staff knew about you when they make decisions?	
	Staff	What kinds of services/activities should programs offer to meet girls' needs?	Supplemental Data
	Staff	What are the most serious issues facing girls at risk of/or involved with juvenile justice?	Listening Session
Parents	What could have helped or prevented your daughter from entering the juvenile justice system?		
	What support systems or resources helped you while your daughter was locked up?		
What are the standards of care that should exist in all girls programming?	Staff	Are there any best practices that your agency/organization has implemented for girls that are effective regardless of having evidence?	Listening Session