



The Girls' Advocate

Published by the Coalition of Advocates for Equal Access for Girls

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<http://www.equalaccessforgirls.org>

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Are girls accessing appropriate services?

Volume 7, Issue 3

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The Girls' Advocate is published quarterly. Submissions and calendar events may be e-mailed to laura.eccles@morrisonkids.org or sent to:

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For more information about *The Girls' Advocate* or to become a member of the Coalition of Advocates for Equal Access for Girls, contact Pam Patton at 503.258.4302. Help us be a voice for girls and girls' needs in Oregon!

Check out our new website!

www.equalaccessforgirls.org

Editing, design and layout by:
Laura Eccles

Homeless and Runaway Girls: A Hidden Epidemic

Jean Lasater M.A.

Angelina's Story

Angelina has drifted in and out of shelter care since she was 13. Her earliest years were spent with her mother, who had a history of child neglect and drug abuse. At age 8, Angelina was sexually abused by one of her mother's boyfriends. After that, she was removed from her mother's home and placed in foster care. Throughout the rest of her childhood, Angelina moved in and out of various foster homes. She began running away and using drugs. At age 13, during one of her many admissions to treatment centers, Angelina was diagnosed with several significant mental health disorders. Her runaway episodes continued. By age 16, Angelina was homeless and living on the streets with a succession of adult men whom she called her "boyfriends". Eventually, caseworkers lost contact with her, finally dropping her from their caseloads. In her last shelter visit, she stayed 3 nights, then left, and has not been seen since.¹

On any day across the United States millions and in Oregon thousands of older children and youth find themselves sleeping under awnings, on a neighbor's couch, in a shelter with twenty other youth, or in a predator's bed. They come from families that have fallen on hard times, don't have the resources, skills or where-with-all to keep them safe and at home, or some combination there of. They are any where from 10 to 21, lonely and resourceful survivors. In Oregon and nationally, girls represent a slight majority of the homeless and runaway population.

What if you had been sexually abused by a family member for years? What if you knew that if you told ANYONE, your family would break apart and blame you for what had happened? What would you do?

Coping with family tension, duress, and violence is the primary reason young women and girls run from their homes. If they are not met with resources and interventions in the form of caring, healthy adults, a supportive community, or educational or social service intercession, they are left with the lesser of two evils: Return to a home that they feel unwelcome or alienated from at best or are violated and victimized in at worst OR build relationships on the streets that they realize are unhealthy and hurtful in order to survive and belong. From one trap to another...

Based on interviews with 361 female homeless and runaway adolescents in four mid-western states, a recent study revealed a high prevalence of drug use, especially use of cocaine among youths with sexual abuse histories. Path analyses showed that early sexual abuse indirectly affected drug use on the streets via

running away at an earlier age, spending more time on the street, and use of deviant strategies to survive (e.g., affiliation with deviant peers, trading sex, and use of nonsexual deviant subsistence strategies).²

Here in Oregon we are working to change these horrific circumstances. Forums are being held across the state, giving communities a chance to speak to the barriers and solutions to this growing problem. The League of Women Voters of Oregon has had dialogs and interviews with leaders and youth around Oregon, trying to shed light on the issue and the solutions. The Oregon Commission on Children and Families and its partner agencies have come together to address system and resource barriers, and the state university system has taken renewed interest in the practices used to support these young people and provide effective services. There is hope and there is momentum and if at the end of the day, there is one more safe bed and one more warm heart and one more kind word added to the life of these girls, we have made progress.

¹ From Out of the Shadows. Report to the Interim Committee on Health and Human Services. February 2005.

² Journal of Drug Issues Winter 2004 EARLY SEXUAL ABUSE, STREET ADVERSITY, AND DRUG USE AMONG FEMALE HOMELESS AND RUNAWAY ADOLESCENTS IN THE MIDWEST, Chen, Tyler, Whitbeck, and Hoyt.

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The Coalition is now a ONLINE!!

www.equalaccessforgirls.org

The Coalition is pleased to announce that we are officially "Online"! Our new website address is www.equalaccessforgirls.org. We have been working over the last year with students at Portland Youth Builders to create and build our website. We were fortunate to have been chosen as a non-profit recipient of free website creation by Portland Youth Builders.*

The Coalition sends out its heartfelt gratitude to all the students and staff at Portland Youth Builders for creating this site for us!

We are now able to post our newsletters online, announcements and trainings, and keep the latest resources updated on the web. Please take a moment to visit our new website and send us feedback on it. If you have suggestions or ideas that you might find helpful about our website, please send them to us! laura.eccles@morrisonkids.org

Portland Youth Builders offers a holistic approach to youth development that incorporates high school education, job readiness training, community leadership and vocational education. Every week, students spend time learning in the classroom, helping community organizations and practicing their skills in the workshop and in the field. If you are interested in finding out more about the excellent work they are doing, you can visit their website at: <http://www.pybpdx.org/>



Girls throughout State, Learning to Advocate for Themselves!

The Coalition began distribution of our long awaited *Girl's Advocacy Toolkit* in March of 2006. Thanks to a grant from the Equity Foundation, we were able to have the *Toolkit* professionally designed by graphic designer Natalie Turner and were able to print facilitator guides and girl's workbooks for over 35 sites and schools working with girls throughout the state. The Coalition provided the recipients with a free copy of the complete *Toolkit* with the request that both the participants and the facilitators would fill out an evaluation upon completion. We had a great turnout of people interested in implementing the *Toolkit* at their sites. Girls in schools, treatment centers, juvenile justice facilities and girl scout troops, are all learning about girl's advocacy! We are also proud to report that we had excellent representation from around the state: Bend, Portland, Salem, Medford, Albany, St. Helens, Hillsboro, Ontario, Silverton, Pendleton, Madras, Tillamook, Corvallis, Redmond and Baker City were all represented.

Many evaluations have been received and we are pleased to find that the *Toolkit* is being well received throughout the state. Some girls really appreciated the stories of girl advocates that are included in the *Toolkit*:

"It was clear and had examples. It's easier to be excited about doing something when you know other people have done it and been successful."

"The stories were easy to relate to. Having examples made it easier to understand the whole purpose"

While others really enjoyed the opportunities to express themselves.

"That I'm able to fill out what my thoughts are about things and then I'm able to realize things that I never knew about myself."

"You get to say what you need to say and take action."

Excerpt from Chapter 3 of the Girl's Advocacy Toolkit: Girl's Workbook

In this chapter, you will identify what matters enough to you to get involved and make changes. We, as girls, deserve to have confidence in ourselves and to be safe in the world. There is nothing standing between you and your dreams that you cannot overcome. You see opportunities for change every day. It is crucial to learn what is important enough to you to get you involved and become active about, and what you are going to let go of. My friend Shakilah will tell you her story of confronting racism in her school. Every day you are presented with choices in your life. Knowing what matters to you and when you are willing to get involved will leave you better prepared to be an advocate for yourself and others.*

**Girls Inc. Girls' Bill of Rights*

If you are interested in purchasing a copy of the *Girl's Advocacy Toolkit* for \$40 (which includes postage) to use at your site, or you would simply like to find out more about it, please contact Laura Eccles at the Coalition: 503.258.4302 or email her at laura.eccles@morrisonkids.org.

President's Notes



I know I have said this several times during the eight years I have been writing the President's notes in the Girls' Advocate Newsletter, but it is hard to believe that in just 4 months the next Legislative session will begin and we need to start revving up our advocacy now. Before I talk about two of the Coalition's focus areas for this upcoming session I want to let you know that we are making a couple of changes. One is that The Girls' Advocate will go from quarterly newsletters to three annually (in January, May and September). Starting in January 2007 we will be raising our annual membership fee for individual members from \$25 to \$40 and adding an organizational membership fee, more about that in January.

Now for two of our main advocacy areas for 2006-2007:

1. Funding the two proposals from the OYA Young Women's Implementation Committee that will improve services to young women in OYA facilities and in the community.

* Provide a full range of close custody programming at Hillcrest Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF) and Corvallis House Transition Program for Young Women that provides:

- > single-gender (exclusive separation from males; there is a possibility that Oak Creek Correctional Facility if opened could provide an exclusive female facility.)
- > utilizes evidence-based practices that fully integrate a gender-responsive approach for young women

* Provide in the community a 90-Day Secure Mental Health and Addiction Stabilization and Treatment Readiness Program for Female Adjudicated Youth.

- > diverts inappropriate close custody commitments
- > frees up beds in Youth Correctional Facilities (YCF) for young women who are determined to be of high criminogenic risk/need
- > avoids the potential of prematurely releasing young women from YCF due to capacity issues
- > offers essential service in continuum of care to provide ability of flow between levels based on need of the young women and placement in service based on need.

These two proposals are included in OYA's Essential Service Level Budget within the Demand Forecast Growth for facilities and community programs that was sent to the Governor. **We need to start advocating with the Governor's Office now for these proposals to be included in OYA's Budget.** We will be contacting you by email to let you know how to advocate during September while the Governor is deciding what to include in his Budget. If you would like to be on our Advocacy Email List just email Laura.Eccles@morrisonkids.org

2. Ensuring equal access to gender specific residential shelter and foster care. To that end we are in the process of forming our advocacy position on girls and young women's access to and appropriate referrals to out-of-home services. This includes the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Child Welfare, Office of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Oregon Youth Authority.

Issues to be covered in our advocacy position:

- * Are the girl's levels of need changing and are they being referred to programs that match their level of need?
- * Is DHS referring Level 5 girls to Level 4 programs and are Level 4 girls being referred to foster care? Are Level 4 girls getting services in foster care placement that may not be appropriate for them? Many girls have a problem with attachment and tend to run away.
- * DHS needs to work with providers to update its policy for runaway girls and describe specifically how to best address this issue and girl's needs.
- * The state needs to clarify DHS policy for Level 4 girls and describe specifically what type of services they are willing to provide for them.
- * Is OYA referring Level 5 young women to independent living programs when they have a host of mental health and other problems that need treatment? Should providers be making decisions about whether independent living or treatment is the appropriate course of action?
- * OYA needs to provide appropriate placement options for young women who fail or run away rather than sending them home if the home is not a viable placement.
- * OYA needs to operate in an evidence-based way when placing girls who are exiting close custody.
- * Aggressive girls are more common than they used to be. There are also more girls with serious mental health and addiction problems today in both DHS and OYA. Is it possible that the increase in aggression and mental health issues results from postponing treatment?
- * State Agencies need to provide more flexibility around services. DHS should allow DHS-designated beds to be used for OYA youth and visa versa.
- * The state should hire a referral specialist for all girls' programs so they can get appropriate placements.
- * State Agencies (DHS, OYA) need to establish ongoing conversations with providers about planning for the most appropriate gender-responsive out-of-home care services for girls and young women. (I am happy to say that DHS Child Welfare in collaboration with providers will be starting a Girls Subcommittee on Out-of Home Care October 17th. And OYA has had a Young Women's subcommittee for several years.)
- * When OMHAS transferred intensive psychiatric residential and day treatment (ITS) services to county Managed Healthcare Organizations (MHO) there were no requirements that MHO's ensure access for girls or young women to services or provide for them gender-specific services. (It will be two years until Administrative Rules are written for these services and language about gender-specific services for children and youth (a DHS Policy) can be added to MHO's contacts).

If you would like to participate on this committee or if these issues are important to you and you would like to be a voice in advocating for the needs of girls in out-of-home care then contact Pam Patton at pam.patton@morrisonkids.org.

Calendar of Events

Coalition Meetings for 2006

September 27th: Presentation
October 25th: Discussion
November 15th: Presentation
December: No Meeting

12:00- 2:00 pm at Rosemont School
9911 SE Mt. Scott Blvd., Portland.

All members are welcome to attend! For directions, call
503.777.8090

November 9, 2006

Children First for Oregon is hosting Ellen Goodman, a fundraiser at the Portland Center for Performing Arts

for more info, contact childrenfirst@ccfo.org

November 17, 2006

Save the Date!

Sisters in Action for Power's 11th Annual Celebration at King Elementary cafeteria at 6:30pm

for more info contact Terenie Faison at (503) 331-1244

Contact Laura at the Coalition
for more information on any of these calendar items.

Phone: 503.258.4302 Email:

laura.eccles@morrisonkids.org

Behind the 'Boy Crisis'

Let's worry about educating all our kids

(Excerpt from The Oregonian, July 9, 2006)

By Ellen Goodman, Columnist for the Boston Globe

The "boy crisis" in education is not what it was cranked up to be... Now a Washington think tank, the Education Sector has performed a crisis intervention. "The real story," it reports, "is not bad news about boys doing worse; it's good news about girls doing better." Using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress—aka "the nation's report card"—the report found that girls score higher in reading and writing and boys score higher in math and science. But girls are closing the math gap faster than boys are closing the writing gap.

It turns out the boys aren't doing worse in school. They are doing better than ever before. But girls (with apologies to the grammar police) are doing more better...

The "boy crisis" isn't exactly a myth, says Sara Mead, author of the report. It's a "some boys crisis." Race and class are the real issues...

As the besotted grandmother of a 4 year old girl and a 3 year old boy, I'm not about to deny gender differences. But in the same grandmother role I see that differences among boys and among girls are greater than differences between boys and girls. I also don't think the "boy crisis" should let us stop worrying about why girls lose their interest in math or why women with those bachelor's degrees still earn less than their male counterparts...

We need to worry more about children one by one. And less about whether boys are losing their place at the head of the class.



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