

GEMS Program

Project Abstract

Briefly summarize the proposed project. Should be understandable by a lay person.

The Mission of the Collin County Juvenile Girl's Court is to help female juvenile offenders who have been traumatized and may be acting out or violating the law as a result of the negative experiences of their past. Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach, the team will effectively address underlying trauma associated with at-risk behaviors and related to delinquent conduct. Collin County Girl's Court aims to hold participants accountable for their actions and building on their strengths while reconnecting them to healthy peers, family, and adult relationships as well as prosocial activities.

The Girl's Empowerment Mentoring Support (GEMS) Program will work with at-risk girls and juvenile offenders and ensure that they are adequately considered in policy and programming. We provide trauma-informed care for participants and their families, and seek to create places of healing for the family.

The Girl's court approach differs from the approach of traditional court proceedings in which the court officers represent and argue different sides of an issue. In Girl's court, the judge, prosecutor, and defense attorneys discard adversarial roles. In Girl's court, members of the team are dedicated to helping young people. The probation officers, substance abuse counselor/LCDC, mental health counselors, defense attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, and the Judge share in the decision-making process rather than direct treatment decisions. Court sessions provide positive reinforcement of their strengths and accomplishments as well as a method for imposing graduated sanctions and creating accountability.

Problem Statement

Describe the nature and scope of the underlying problem the proposed project will address. Include aspects of the problem relevant to the project's approach and activities.

Youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system are more likely than their peers to have been exposed to not just one or two traumatic stressors, but multiple types of traumatic victimization (Abram et al, 2013). These are not just incidents, but types of adverse stressors (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, community violence, life-threatening neglect) that impact youth before they first come to the attention of law enforcement. These youth experience what has been described as "poly-victimization," which is defined as prolonged or multiple exposures to traumatic events (Finkelhor, Ormond, & Turner, 2007). The brain and nervous system are altered by poly-victimization in childhood (Teicher & Samson, 2013) in ways that increase stress reactivity, anger, and impulsivity while reducing the youth's ability to self-regulate. Youth who have been poly-victimized are at high risk for involvement in delinquency and contact with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system (Ford et al., 2010).

A trauma-informed juvenile justice system contributes to restoring order and safety by enabling juvenile justice staff to effectively participate in a youth's recovery from traumatic experiences. This benefit includes potentially substantial long-term economic and social cost savings, as well as the more immediate satisfaction of being able to effectively contribute to the public's safety

and welfare. Trauma-informed juvenile justice systems help youth and families better understand childhood trauma and its impact on behavior and health. This understanding can help restore relationships by providing a new way for youth and families to understand the trauma they have experienced. A third benefit is the strengthening of the safety net for traumatized youth by providing a basis for a partnership between systems that serve and supervise children, including the education, child welfare, mental health, and justice systems. Aligning their often-different missions around the shared goal of protecting children and youth from victimization can actually shrink, rather than widen, the net in which children are caught if they engage in problematic or delinquent behavior. A shared understanding of psychological trauma and PTSD can provide an alternative explanation for what may otherwise be diagnosed as a psychiatric disorder or sociopathic character flaws (Ford, Chapman et al., 2012; Ford et al., 2013). Protecting children and youth from harm and helping them recover and become successful and productive citizens are points of convergence for all child-and family-serving systems. This can be a basis for developing administrative structures and processes that bring educators, child welfare workers, juvenile justice administrators and staff, and court professionals together as a team on behalf of traumatized youth.

Supporting Data

Provide supporting data for the Problem Statement. Data should be relevant to the project and its target group. For example, do not use statewide data for a local problem or national data for a statewide problem.

Along with the county population, the number of referrals to Collin County Juvenile Probation Department (CCJPD) has increased annually, increasing by 38% overall from FY 2015 (n=1,462) to FY 2019 (n=2,011). During this same time period, the number of felony referrals has disproportionately increased by 71%, going from 221 in FY2015 to 378 in FY2019.

The nature of the felonies committed has also increased in degree of violence, as opposed to just statutory element. The number of youth referred for aggravated assault, sexual assault, murder, deadly conduct/discharge firearm, and injury with intent has increased 98% from 57% in FY15 to 113 in FY18. The number of misdemeanor assault charges has more than doubled over the same period.

Project Approach & Activities

Describe the methodologies, approaches, and activities to be employed by the project. This should logically tie back to the Problem Statement.

The Collin County Girl's Court is a court-centered, outpatient treatment program. The program will work through five levels and is open to 12 youth between 12 to 17 years of age. Females who are involved in juvenile justice system and have suffered trauma or abuse are the focus of this program. Reasons for exclusion include adjudication for a sex crime, severe mental or emotional problems and are not stable on medication at the time of admission, requiring inpatient mental health care, and youth whom have a history manufacturing and/or distribution of illegal and synthetic drugs (drug dealing).

The four levels are the following: Level 1: Sapphire, Level 2: Ruby, Level 3: Diamond, Level 4: Emerald which will consist of the commencement and Level 5: Platinum (Aftercare)

We provide trauma-informed care to the girls and their families, and seek to create places of healing for them. By guiding the girls to discover what their gifts are, we aim to identify ways to help them overcome the impact of past trauma in their life. The positive changes are a result of the trust and commitment of the girls and their families, Girls Court team, and the community partners that work with the program.

The GEMS program will provide Home-based Services Program to help connect some of the more chaotic families with resources and services in their homes to empower them to be more independent and do better with their children. As we know, when they are living in chaos - struggling to pay utility bills, put food on the table, or get from one place to another, or dealing with an abused child or suffering from trauma, and has MH problems . The GEMS program will assist families in breaking down barriers to be successful.

The treatment will be individualized, meaning that needs will be considered when developing the treatment plan. The goal is to provide tools to live a healthy lifestyle along with the skills to be a productive member of the community. The GEMS Program will provide the following tools to aid in making the change:

- Individualized Treatment/Case Planning
- Court Status Hearings
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Incentives/Sanctions
- Family Activities
- Random and Observed Drug Testing
- Life Skills
- Employability Skills
- Community Service
- Mentoring
- Counseling
- Intensive Supervised Probation
- Healthy Lifestyle Education
- Coping Skills

Girl's Court is different because the approach differs from the traditional court proceedings in which the court officers represent and argue different sides of an issue. In Girl's court, the Judge, prosecutor, and defense attorneys discard adversarial roles. In Girl's court, members of the team are dedicated to helping young people. The probation officers, substance abuse counselor/LCDC, mental health counselors, defense attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, and the Judge share in the decision-making process rather than direct treatment decisions.

Capacity & Capabilities

Describe the applicant organization's background as well as any organizational and staff capabilities and qualifications necessary to carry out this project using the approaches and activities provided above, including any essential collaborative partnerships.

The girls support team will conduct weekly home visits to ensure that they are taking proper steps to reach treatment/case goals. The team is committed to working with the youth and family to help them complete the program and terminate them from probation. Each week the Girl's court team meets to discuss the progress towards program goals.

The support team will consist of the following:

The Judge: the Judge will conduct status hearings as ordered. The Judge will encourage the girls to do well and stay on target. The Judge will hold them accountable if they fail to comply with the program and/or probation requirements. The Judge will speak with them and the family about treatment. The Judge will also ask what else can the team do for them to keep their child on track.

Program Coordinator: The Program Coordinator is responsible for coordinating all of the court activities and services as a member of the GEMS team. The Coordinator also works directly with the Judge to ensure that the activities of the Girl's Court are coordinated which include preparing dockets, scheduling, and notifying all staff members of review hearings, meetings and screenings.

Probation Officer: The Probation Officer will meet with each one to create an individual case plan that will work for you and your family so that you remain focused on completing your goals. The probation officer will be tracking your progress within the program and assist you when necessary in order for you to complete the program successfully. The duties of the probation officer also include providing intensive supervision to ensure that they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. The probation officer will conduct random and observe drug testing on participants and parents. They will also conduct home visits, school visits, field visits, treatment visits and curfew checks on participants based on their level of participants. The probation officer will also attend team meetings, weekly staffing and weekly status hearings

Treatment Provider: The treatment provider will help put a treatment plan together that works for the participant and family that is based off the assessment.

District Attorneys: The defense attorneys will serve as members of the Girl's Court Team and assist in assessing cases that appear appropriate for Girl's Court. The Assistant District Attorney will have a non-adversarial approach when serving as a Girl's Court Team Member.

Defense Attorneys: The defense attorney will advocate for the participant and assist with legal matters the participant may have that relate to the GEMS Program. They will advocate for the participant in court and during GEMS team staffing. The attorney will help to make sure the participant is on track to reach treatment and plan goals.

Performance Management

Describe how the applicant organization will measure success for this project. Describe the overall goals, objectives, and strategies for this project and how the organization will collect, track, and maintain the relevant data needed to determine if the project is achieving these standards throughout the grant period.

Performance will be tracked via the department's case management software applications; Techshare Juvenile Case Management System. The software applications also provides a

platform (Noble Software Application) to enter all screenings and account for recidivism rates to track program success, number of youth screened, identified, and served in the program. The department's case management system also tracks and records all demographic information for youth including race, age, gender and educational status.

Target Group

Describe or list the agencies, individuals, or other groups to whom you expect to provide services, including any relevant data.

The program will use a multidisciplinary approach to service delivery, working with all community-based stakeholders serving youth throughout the community. Some of the agencies that will be utilized will include but not limited to:

Collin County Advocacy Center to provide counseling services to both the juveniles and family.

Traffick 911 to provide counseling and education services for juveniles.

LifePath Systems to provide mental health services.

Stride Services to provide outpatient IOP/Substance Abuse services.

The Alliance of Elite Youth Leadership/AEYL – to provide mentoring, tutoring, and community based services.