

ISSUE BRIEF

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Correctional & behavioral treatment services for adolescent girls

The unique needs of adolescent girls

Providing correctional and behavioral treatment for female youth offenders is an ongoing challenge for juvenile justice.

Adolescent girls have unique issues and needs based on their sensitivity to and rate of exposure to risk factors. They have different pathways to juvenile justice than young men and more complex problems, frequently the result of trauma and abuse.

Trauma for these adolescent girls often becomes the root cause that can lead to mental health issues, school failure, use of substances, and affiliation with anti-social older males often with gang ties. As a result, adolescent girls have greater – and different – needs than boys: they require enhanced gender-responsive psychiatric, psychological and medical assessments and interventions.

OYA has sustained an unwavering commitment to the responsibility bestowed upon it by the Equal Access Law (ORS 417.270) to ensure a range of gender-appropriate services for all youth offenders.

Services for adolescent girls

OYA has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to gender-specific programs by developing and refining a comprehensive continuum of care designed for adolescent girls.

The highest risk adolescent girls are committed by the court to an OYA close custody facility. In February 2008, Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility (OCYCF) in Albany was opened as an all-female facility designed for young women from 12 – 25 years of age, providing them with a gender-specific spectrum of evidence-based treatment programs to reduce their risk to reoffend and to increase their skills to be contributing citizens. OCYCF has 75 close custody beds.

The Young Women's Transition Program is also considered close custody. It was established in 1999 to provide adolescent girls with a safe and secure setting to help them transition back into the community and succeed in today's society. Adolescent girls transitioning out of close custody continue participation in gender-responsive treatment, educational, and vocational programs. Additionally they are given the opportunity to hold jobs in the community.

In 2008, a community-based program for OYA adolescent girls with co-occurring, mental health and substance abuse disorders was opened by Looking Glass, a private, nonprofit organization in Eugene. The program accommodates 15, providing them stabilization and treatment readiness for 60 to 120 days.

Additionally, OYA contracts with community residential providers and works in collaboration with county juvenile departments for gender-specific programs for youth on parole or probation.

Dialectical Behavior Treatment

In the 2007 planning for the opening of Oak Creek as an all-female facility, OYA and community partners began looking at evidence-based/evidenced-informed gender-specific program options that fit the criminogenic risks and needs of adolescent girls committed to OYA close custody. Dialectical Behavior Treatment (DBT) was selected to be the foundation for all correctional treatment at OCYCF.

DBT is a research-supported treatment that combines cognitive-behavioral therapy and methods with meditative principles and practices. DBT in balance with behavioral management models provides the framework for correctional and behavioral treatments services for adolescent girls and young women.

Developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan and her colleagues at University of Washington, DBT assists adolescent girls to address problems managing emotions, behavior and thinking. It is an evidenced-based gender-specific modality designed and tested on females and focuses on the reformation needs of adolescent girls.

DBT integrates well with treatments for other behaviors such as substance abuse, sex offending, fire setting, or aggressive and assaultive behaviors.

DBT is also a highly effective treatment modality for adolescent girls with a history of suicidal behavior and/or difficulty regulating

their emotions. It focuses on problem solving, interpersonal effectiveness, emotional self-regulation and coping skills.

OYA's goals for adolescent girls

OYA's ultimate goal for youth is reducing recidivism. For adolescent girls, that requires reducing the likelihood of their being victims of violence and abuse along with expanding their problem solving, coping and social skills.

As a dynamic agency, OYA will continue to seek the most effective ways to enhance the continuum of services for adolescent girls. OYA is committed to providing effective correctional services for adolescent girls with positive measurable outcomes.



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