

Tallahassee/Leon County Commission
on the Status of Women and Girls

Status of Girls Report 2017



#YEAROFTHEGIRL



The Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CSWG) serves as an advisory board to elected officials of the City of Tallahassee and Leon County. The CSWG collaborates with the community, raises awareness, and makes public policy recommendations regarding issues that impact women and girls in our local community. The driving force behind the CSWG's mission is to serve as the premier advocate for improving the lives of women and girls in the Tallahassee/Leon County community.

In 2016-17, the 21 women who serve on the Commission collectively volunteered, approximately 1,200 hours towards achieving Commission goals. Their valuable service, including personal contributions of time, talent and gifts of cash and goods, made the work of the CSWG possible. Major initiatives included hosting the "Igniting the Power Within: Women and Girls Empowerment Summit 2017," the 2016-17 #YearOfTheGirl initiative, and the completion of this report.

This Status of Girls Report (Report) reflects state and community data pertaining to issues experienced by girls. To provide qualitative evidence of these issues, girls in the community and those who serve them were interviewed or asked to submit articles for inclusion in the Report. The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed by the quoted individuals and authors of submitted articles from the public reflect their perspectives, alone.

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Due to the overwhelming response of materials to include within the Status of Girls Report, the Commission on the Status of Women and Girls felt it important that all submitted information be shared with our readers.

The Addendum to this report, which includes all articles submitted in the full version may be found on our website at: TallahasseeLeonCSWG.com

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Letter From the Chair(s)

“We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters around the world to be brave – to embrace the strength within themselves and realize their full potential.” —Malala Yousafzai

Greetings:

The primary purposes of the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls are to promote awareness of issues pertaining to women and girls in Tallahassee and Leon County, and to serve in an advisory role, providing input to the City and County Commissions, as needed. The enabling resolution by the City of Tallahassee and Leon County that formed the Commission acknowledges that progress has been made, but that “there is still work to be done before women and girls achieve economic, education and employment parity.” The resolution also acknowledges that “we must understand the current challenges that face our female citizens in order to best equip girls with the knowledge, skills, and equal access to reach for the promise of tomorrow.”

Like Nobel Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai, we believe that equipping all girls with the knowledge, skills, and equal access to reach for the promise of tomorrow is essential to the success of our community. Many girls in our community face significant barriers to achieving whatever their dream for tomorrow is—whether it is becoming a scientist or business owner; becoming a great parent; or simply being healthy, avoiding the criminal justice system, and graduating from high school. Our goal was to expand the conversation regarding girls in our community by taking a comprehensive look at the barriers they face, developing solutions that will improve the lives of girls, and celebrating the milestones and contributions girls achieve in our community every day. We are pleased that we were able to accomplish just that through The Year of the Girl initiative, but also recognize that the challenges facing girls and the triumphs that we celebrate with them do not occur within a isolated time period, such as a year. As a Commission and as a community, we are deeply committed to impacting lives and unlocking opportunities for girls in the Tallahassee/Leon County area.

We would like to thank the members of the CSWG for their hard work and dedication. Hundreds of volunteer hours from this body, community volunteers, and strong staff support from The Oasis Center for Women & Girls, as well as support from City and County staff, made our work possible and this Report a reality. Thank you for the opportunity to serve this amazing community!

In Solidarity,

Paula DeBoles-Johnson, MPA, CCM (2016-17 Chair)

and

C. Sha`Ron James, JD, MPA, APMC (2015-16 Chair)

Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

#YOTG Honorees

The “Year of the Girl” (YOTG) was established as an exciting project to highlight the accomplishments of 13 amazing girls who are positively affecting their communities and, in some cases, the entire State of Florida. These girls represented various schools in Leon County and were nominated by their friends, families, teachers or other persons, who submitted applications online. The application simply asked, “Why should this girl be selected as a YOTG winner?”

The nominations were plentiful and, frankly, all of the girls who were nominated could have been recognized for their accomplishments and impact on the larger community. However, the girls selected over the past year distinguished themselves as shining examples of what girls can accomplish when they are valued, supported, and encouraged to be the absolute best they can be for themselves, their families, their schools, and their communities.

The YOTG recognition project, which began in April 2016, was an excellent opportunity for citizens to celebrate the girls who make our community so special. While both the City and County are strong supporters of the Commission’s work, they were especially supportive of this initiative.

“The City of Tallahassee is thrilled to be a partner in the Year of the Girl initiative to highlight and honor outstanding young women in our community,” Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum said about the project. “These girls are already a driving force behind the dynamic growth of our city, and I look forward to watching them take the reigns as leaders of tomorrow.”

“There are so many girls in our County doing great things,” said Leon County Commissioner Bill Proctor. “Leon County is proud to support women and girls in our community. This initiative will help tell the stories of young women who will be our future leaders.” #YOTG

Meet the 2016-17 Year of the Girl Honorees

April 2016 – Khalia Denise Hinson, Raa Middle School
May 2016 – Samantha Crawford, Lincoln High School
June 2016 – Mia Owens, Gilchrist Elementary
July 2016 – Katherine Sorrell, Rickards High School
August 2016 – Haniah Edwards, Bond Elementary School
September 2016 – Faith Thomas, Florida High School
October 2016 – Fischer Sinclair, Fort Braden School
November 2016 – Ana Marie Wallace, Chiles High School
December 2017 – Alexis Mercedes, Campbell Home School
January 2017 – Paloma Rambana, Maclay School
February 2017 – Imani Walker, Holy Comforter Episcopal School
March 2017 – Wren Liliana Xue Ge Cavano, Swift Creek Middle School
April 2017 – Samantha Diane Ellrich, Cobb Middle School

Community Conversations

In an effort to learn directly from girls in our community about their perspectives and experiences, Commissioners and local organizations hosted a series of Community Conversations throughout 2015-16. The Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls engaged with 87 girls in elementary, middle school, and high school who ranged in age from 10-17. Conversations were held at 13 sites including community organizations and schools. Community Conversations were facilitated as small-group discussions that covered various topics, including free time, struggles at home and school, role models, reaching goals, and relationships.

Girls who participated in the Community Conversations were diverse in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and region of residence within the City of Tallahassee and Leon County. Through these discussions girls shared with Commissioners their stories of life’s joys and challenges.

Quotes excerpted from Community Conversations held with girls in response to the questions below are integrated throughout this report and are designated by green and blue boxes.

1. If you had an hour or afternoon of free time, how would you spend it? What do you enjoy doing?
2. What was the best part of 2015 for you? If there was something you could do over again this past year, what would it be? Why?
3. Are there any rules at school or in other parts of your life that are unfair to girls? If so, can you tell us a little bit about that and how that makes you feel? What would be a better rule for that situation?
4. What is one struggle that you’ve had in the last year?
5. Who in your life will be able to help you accomplish your goals? Who is helping you at this moment in time? When you need advice, who do you ask?
6. If you had a magic stick, and could change something to make your life or other people’s lives better, what would you change?
7. What is one thing the community could do to help you reach your goals?
8. What are some things that cause you to feel stressed or pressured?
9. What would be signs of an unhealthy relationship to you?
10. What do you think is a big issue facing girls that grown-ups don’t know about or don’t talk about?
11. What question didn’t we ask that you think we should have or wish we had? #YOTG

Education *By Commissioner Jane Johnson*

In the 2015-16 school year, the Leon County school district received a “B” for the overall district grade—a 7% point decrease from the district’s A grade in 2014-2015. Leon County girls’ enrollment in K-12 public schools is mostly similar when compared to the statewide rate, with two exceptions: Leon County consistently enrolls higher rates of Black girls (2,656 versus 1,681 per 100,000 in the population) and far fewer rates of Hispanic girls (347 versus 2,360 per 100,000 in the population) than statewide.

Leon County’s overall high school graduation rate (87%) surpassed the statewide rate (78%) in 2015-16. Girls in Leon County have experienced an 18% increase in graduation rates between 2011 and 2016 and are currently about 10% ahead of the statewide graduation rate for girls. There are, however, significant differences when girls’ graduation rates are nuanced by race.

Black girls in Leon County continue to have the lowest graduation rates when compared to White and Hispanic girls. Graduation rates have steadily risen for all girls in Leon County, regardless of race. However, Hispanic girls have experienced significant jumps in graduation rates, especially in a single year, from 81.3% in 2013-14 to 97.9% in 2014-15. Of all races, Black girls have the highest growth during this time span, with 64.1% in 2011-12 and 88.9% in 2015-16—a 24.8% increase over five years.

The graduation rates for female high school students statewide in 2015-16

were better than the rates for male students of the same races. Only among Asian students and students with one or more races, did males have a higher graduation rate than females. Fewer high school girls opted to earn a General Education Diploma (GED) than did boys.

Additionally, girls have a better disciplinary record than boys and comprise only 31.9% of all disciplinary actions taken in Leon County in 2013-14 (compared to 32.5% statewide). In the 2014-15 school year, female students in Leon County experienced 56 in-school suspensions compared with 179 male students, and 873 female students received out-of-school suspensions compared with 1,754 male students. Leon County schools, however, do discipline their female students at higher rates than the state in regard to out-of-school suspension (1.4% higher), placement in alternative educational settings (5.1% higher), and expulsion with services (6.9% higher).

In addition to the generally positive performance of the school system, gender does not appear to be a limiting factor for female students in Leon County public schools. In fact, according to data collected by the Florida Department of Education, female students in Leon County outperform their male counterparts on nearly every standardized test measure. However, while the overall education data appear promising for girls, this reports only a part of the story. In fact, public education in Leon County is in some respects a

“One of my greatest strengths is being funny, but sometimes people misunderstand it as trying to be cool, which makes me feel bad.”

“tale of two cities.” The overall district grade earned by the county’s public schools must be considered at more nuanced geographical and economic levels. Access to quality public education in Tallahassee significantly depends on where a student lives.

Out of the 24 public elementary schools in Leon County, 12 received C, D, or F grades in 2015, 15 received C, D, or F grades in 2016, and 13 received C, D, or F grades in 2017. All of these schools are Title I schools that have high numbers of children from low-income families, foster homes, who experience neglect or delinquency, from families receiving temporary assistance from state governments, and/or that are located in areas of the county with lower than average household incomes. By comparing U.S. Census Bureau poverty measures and Leon County’s elementary school grades, there are significantly more families and single mother households with children under 18 living below the poverty level in poorly graded school zones.

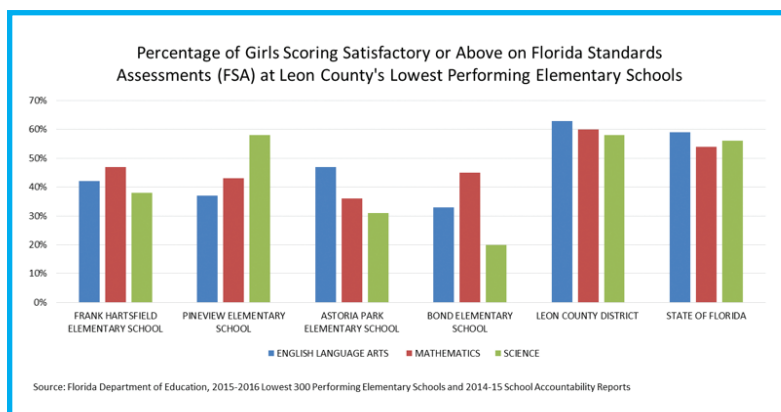
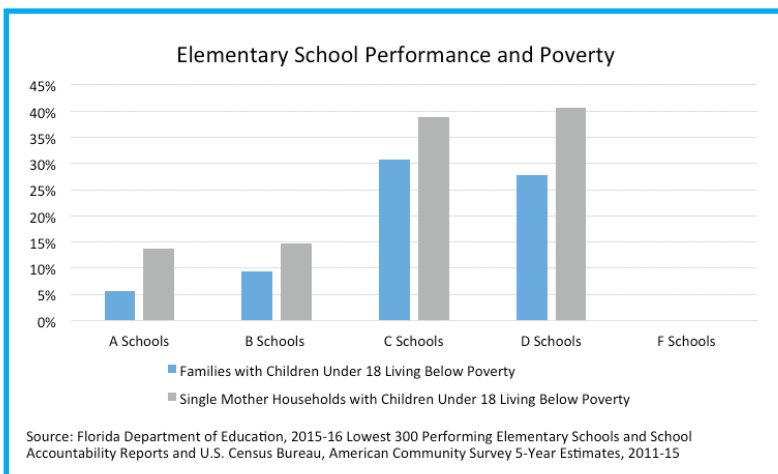
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The Florida Department of Education released lists of Florida's 300 Lowest Performing Elementary Schools for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, which both included three Leon County public schools: Astoria Park, Pineview, and Bond Elementary Schools. In 2016, the list included Frank Hartsfield Elementary School and in 2017 was replaced by John G. Riley Elementary School. Scores on the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) at these schools show that while girls scored lower than Leon County and Florida, they outperformed their male peers in all areas.

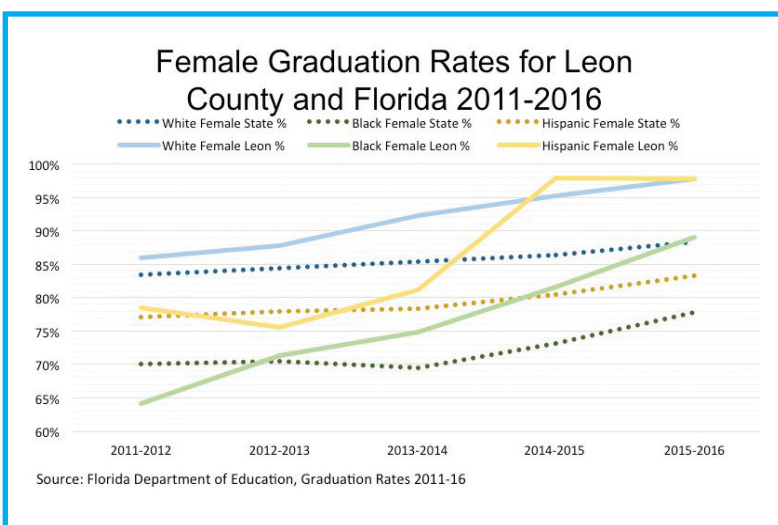
Interestingly, in the 2014-15 school year girls at Pineview Elementary outperformed both Leon County and the State of Florida in science! We contacted administrators at Pineview to inquire about their high performing girls



in science. Their dedicated team of science teachers, supported greatly by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program goes above and beyond the science curriculum to include weekly experiments and interactive science storytelling to get the younger students interested in science and technology. Some of their experiments include engineering challenges, building towers, constructing periodic tables of elements, and interacting with planetary lessons to explore our solar system. Girls represent the majority of the students in the gifted program at Pineview, where they are empowered and energized to learn about science. Since the Department of Education focuses its test preparation largely on mathematics and language

arts, science programming at the school level requires significant creative freedom to build engaging and innovative strategies for delivering science curriculum. Administrators at Pineview attribute their girls' high performance on the science FSA to a continued commitment by their faculty and the community to expose girls to the practice of scientific experimentation and the representation of women professionals in STEM fields. They also emphasized that district level grades do not accurately reflect how hard their girls work in every area and certainly do not convey the difficulties girls face in their homes and neighborhoods that motivate them to pursue academic success.

The grades for Leon County's eight public middle schools are more promising. In 2016, three received As (Swift Creek, Montford, Deerlake—they also received As in 2017), three received Bs (Cobb, Fairview, Raa), one



Insights

"Yes, [I would change the] dress code. In high school, they are very strict with what we wear and it's often unfair. I can wear something like shorts, but someone else will have shorter shorts and I get coded. They don't catch her, they catch me. It makes me feel offended. I feel like they're coming after me. I feel like it's because of the color of my skin. They should be equal and look at everybody."

—High School Student from Dare to Dream Young Girls Network Summer Program

"Grown-ups don't talk about preparing for the world, like college and studying. What if I [choose] a major and I don't want to do that job anymore? Do I have to go back to college? Parents don't ask [about] what is going on in life. [They] don't ask how my day went."

—Girl in The Oasis Center for Women & Girls' Girls Can Do Anything! Summer Camp

received a C (Griffin), and one received a D (Nims—which improved to a C in 2017). The two lowest-performing middle schools are also Title I schools located in areas with a lower-than-average annual household income; making the correlation between lower income neighborhoods and lower performing schools consistent for elementary and middle schools.

Public school performance increases when we consider Leon County high schools. In 2016, one high school received an A (Chiles), two received Bs (Leon and Sail), two received Cs (Lincoln and Godby), and one received a D (Rickards). All Leon County public high schools improved or remained stable in the 2016-17 school year, with three, Leon, Lincoln, and Rickards High Schools, improving a letter grade from last year. It should be noted, however that performance grades for high schools can be misleading and should not be directly compared to those of elementary and middle schools. At the high school level, Leon County offers several “alternative education options” for struggling or lower performing students. This can result in removing outlier scores from the overall public school grade calculations, thus increasing a high school’s total score.

There is a correlation between poverty and lower academic grades at the school level. Resources for public schools depend, in part, on local taxes. When schools are located in areas with higher property values, they have the ability to provide resources that affect the quality of facilities, teachers, and curriculum.



Additionally, the number of students who are absent more than 21 days during the school year in low-performing schools is more than double the rate for students in the higher-performing, non-Title I schools. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention categorizes school connectedness and school success as protective factors for adolescent girls. They state that “School connectedness appears especially important to adolescents who experience adversity in their homes because school may be one of few contexts where such adolescents’ achievements are recognized and celebrated” (Hawkins, et al., 2009). Arrests for juvenile crime peak between 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., making issues of absenteeism, truancy, and a lack of after school programming for girls particularly important for preventing juvenile delinquency.

According to the Florida Department of Education’s Annual Measurable Objectives (2015-16), Leon County schools were graded at satisfactory or above in English Language Arts and Mathematics higher than schools statewide. This applies to students regardless of race, gender, their native language status, or disability—however, economically disadvantaged students at all grade levels in Leon County score lower than similar students statewide.

Parents with income restraints are less likely to have the discretionary time and financial resources to provide their children with afterschool enrichment, tutoring, and opportunities for extracurricular activities. During the summer months, if those students are unable to participate in meaningful programs to help maintain the educational gains they have made during the school year, they risk starting the next school year behind their peers, or spending the first

months of the year trying to catch up. These incremental setbacks accumulate over time, preventing many students from ever being fully on track with their grade level.

The outlook for female students in the Leon County public school system is very promising overall. The data demonstrate that girls are able to outperform boys in nearly every subject area. However, the landscape for girls’ academic success is complicated by the intersection of race and class. The true barriers for girls in accessing a high quality public education in Tallahassee and Leon County are more directly associated with where they live and the schools to which they are zoned. The concentration of lower performing schools in the areas of the community with lower household incomes makes for a complex social and educational challenge in our community. #YOTG

Creators Camp: Empowering Girls in STEAM *By Sandie Chavez*

I believe it is extremely important to educate and prepare our future women leaders. Exposing our girls to science, technology, engineering, art and design, and math (STEAM) at a young age gives them opportunities to explore fields that have, in the past, been predominately pursued and dominated by males. If we are not encouraging our girls to showcase their skills, or we are stigmatizing them because they show interest in a “male” profession, it is unlikely that they will pursue their passion in those fields. It is our responsibility as parents and educators to assure these young girls that STEAM fields are open to all people, regardless of gender.

In 2013, only 26% of positions in technology fields and professions were held by women, according to the National Center for Women and Information Technology. Today, technology is vital to our communication, and if we are not preparing our girls today to have a basic understanding of technology and coding, they will be unable to compete in a global economy. Through hands-on learning and being able to see female STEAM professionals, they see not only a role model, but a vision of themselves in the future. For a particular expedition, in collaboration with SciGirls Tallahassee, we focused on Raspberry

Pi, the credit card sized single board computer that can be used in electronic projects. In a one-week immersive exercise, Campers built a computer using the Raspberry Pi to learn the foundation of the languages most widely used in computer programming. Girls proposed innovative projects for learning with their Raspberry Pi units, from home security systems to gaming machines.

I believe that early exposure to the fields of STEAM and a strong creative core will help prepare girls for the future in a fun and safe environment where they can explore, create, and pursue ideas and STEAM professions without the fear of failure. I believe we have the ability to help change not only the view of STEAM fields by girls, but make the percentage of women in STEAM fields increase if we expose them to fun and interesting professions they would not likely hear about in formal school settings.

Sandie Chavez is the President and Camp Chief at Creators Camp for creators and innovators, hands-on learning experiences within the STEAM paradigm, with a dual emphasis on building key interpersonal skills such as: critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and “buildership.” #YOTG



The Importance of Pushing Yourself: Earning an Advanced Degree & Having a Career in Science

By Zemoria A. Johnson, PharmD Candidate

When I was four years old, I told my mother that I wanted to be a missionary and a doctor. I did not realize how underrepresented young women were in the sciences until I started my tenth grade year in the International Baccalaureate program. Now at twenty-three, I am achieving the first part of my career vision—entering into my fifth year in Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University’s Pharmacy program. My parents instilled in my sister and me three important things: the importance of education, the importance of giving back to our community, and most of all, to never be afraid to accomplish our dreams—no matter how big or scary they may be.

Achieving my dream of becoming a doctor has not been easy, but I know that once I graduate, it will pay off! It is my hope that I will be an example to other young ladies who also want to make a difference—especially in the sciences. According to the National Science Foundation, “Women remain underrepresented in the science and engineering workforce, although to a lesser degree than in the past, with the greatest disparities occurring in engineering, computer science, and the physical sciences” (NSF, Science and Engineering Indicators, 2014). As a millennial, I believe that my generation can earn advanced degrees and close this achievement gap. To do this, young ladies must do two essential things: first, find their niche in the science fields and, two, earn advanced degrees.

In my own words, a niche is something that makes an individual happy and excited to make a difference in and for others. A young girl’s niche could be doing research in Australia or China, finding a cure for cancer, or educating young ladies who also aspire to

become scientists or physicians. The way I see it, girls can do anything that they put their minds to—no matter how strange or impossible another person may think that goal is! A girl must take the challenging courses and opt into the sciences. To have a career in the sciences, the most important step involves pushing oneself to earn an advanced degree.

Although attending college can be intimidating—especially because of the high costs associated with secondary education—financial aid in many forms is available. If science is your passion do not let anything deter you from your goal. As long as girls are tenacious, willing to take a chance on themselves and have the desire to make the world a better place, then there is nothing that can stop them from earning an advanced degree in the sciences!

Zemoria A. Johnson is a FAMU Honors Program Track III Scholar and the founder of Prestigious Young Thinkers (P.Y.T), a mentoring program created to empower elementary and middle school girls. #YOTG

Physical Health *By Commissioner Roxanne Hughes, PhD*

Whole-body health and wellness have a significant impact on women's and girls' quality of life. There are a number of specific physical health issues of critical importance for girls in Leon County. Focusing on state and county data for girls, we found that weight, physical activity, pediatric care, and good nutrition are all considered essential components of a person's overall health and well-being.

Attitudes and Expectations about Body Weight

Body Mass Index (BMI) is calculated from a person's weight and height, and is used by medical professionals as a general health indicator weight. While BMI may be used to screen for weight categories that may lead to health problems, it is not a diagnostic indicator of the health of the individual. Both low and high BMI can indicate risk for health issues. Regardless of measured BMI, however, people's attitudes about their weight are extremely important for whole-body wellness and can reveal a lot about the emotional impact of our society's expectations.

According to the 2014 Florida Youth Tobacco Survey's (FYTS) BMI calculations, Leon County has fewer underweight (14.7%) and obese (5.5%) girls than is represented by statewide data. Leon County has a higher representation of girls in the BMI normal weight range (62%). The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the use of BMI to screen for overweight and obesity in children and teenagers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are health consequences for obesity during childhood, including juvenile diabetes and high blood pressure (Ogden, et al., 2015). Additionally, there are consequences associated with behavioral health, such as depression, issues in school, low self-esteem, and low self-reported quality of life. The most recent data for BMI show girls in Leon County fare better in three of the indicators associated with BMI than girls statewide. On the fourth indicator, overweight, a slightly higher percentage of girls are overweight as compared to

the statewide data.

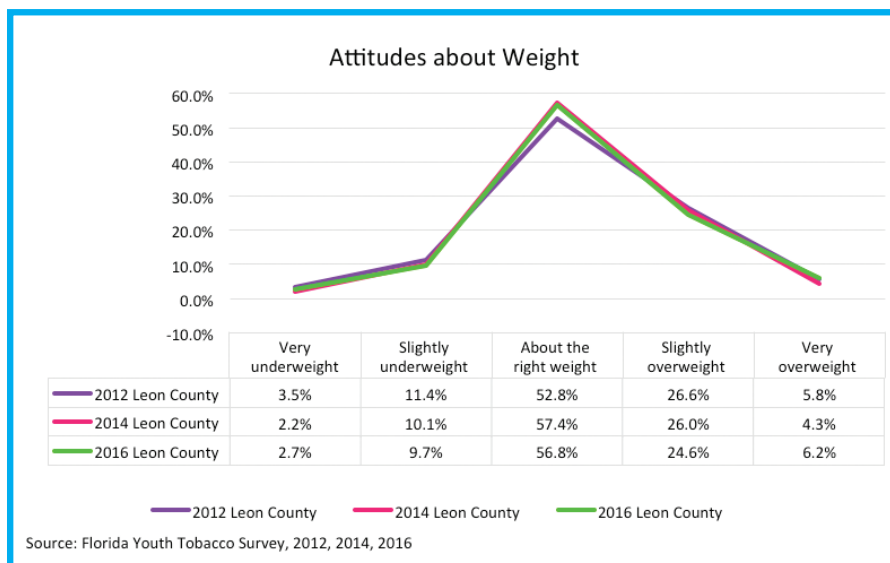
Feeling satisfied and healthy about our weight regardless of BMI is a measure of self-esteem. While adolescent girls are more likely to perceive

"One of my greatest strengths is being myself and thinking constantly, but sometimes people misunderstand it as being an introvert."



themselves as slightly to very overweight, girls in Leon County tend to have a more positive attitude about their weight compared to the state of Florida and this trend has remained fairly stable for the last five years.

Although a majority of girls describe themselves as being about the right weight, when asked about whether they are trying to do something about their weight, a similar majority stated that they are trying to lose weight.



This reveals that middle and high school girls in Leon County feel the expectation to lose weight, even if they are comfortable with their weight. Girls are exposed to messages about their appearance early on in their lives and these follow them and expand as they enter middle and high school. Our community can empower our girls to focus on their passions and strengths, offering them opportunities to believe in themselves and internalize messages of positivity to counteract the constant criticisms they face from the media and at their schools. #YOTG

Physical Activity

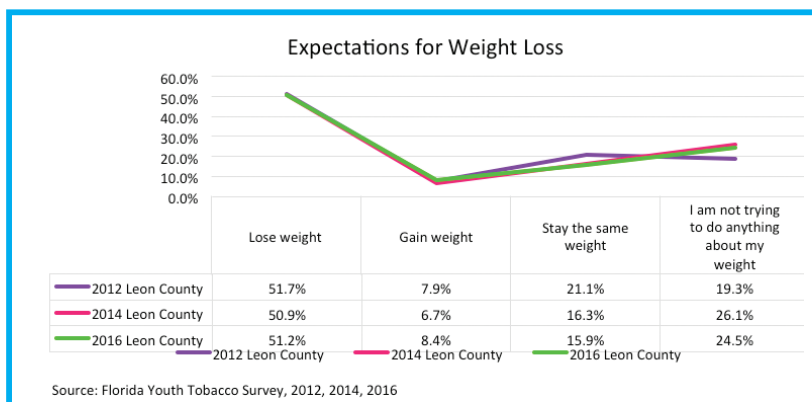
Regular physical activity is important for good health and reduces risks for chronic diseases. Girls in Leon County have similar trends in terms of daily physical activity compared to girls in the state and close to 60% of girls are active at least 2-3 days per week for at least 60 minutes each day, with 50% being active 4-5 days a week. Girls and boys have similar levels of activity 4-6 days a week, with boys being more active 6-7 days of the week. The amount of physical activity needed by adults varies depending on their health needs; however, the CDC recommends children and adolescents should be active for 60 minutes or more each day. The CDC's recommendation focuses on three types of physical activity: aerobic, muscle strengthening, and bone strengthening.

In terms of positive health behaviors, 75% of girls in Leon County participate in school and organized out-of-school sports. This is 10% higher than girls statewide. Leon County girls also have a higher representation in school band, school clubs, and community clubs than girls statewide. Florida Statutes include grade level requirements for physical education during the school year. Elementary schools are required to provide 150 minutes of physical education each week and a minimum of 30 minutes must be consecutive on any one day. Middle school students are required to have one semester of physical education each year. High school students are required to have one credit of physical education with the integration of a health component at least once during their four years of high school.

Community Health Status Assessment

One such initiative in Leon County, the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), is a long-term strategic effort to identify community health needs and provide action plans for "health, governmental, educational, and social service agencies and organizations to implement policies and programs that address health." Based on the data collected from 300 households throughout Leon County, the 2016 Community Health Status Assessment used a health equity lens; focused on health factors for vulnerable populations; and included 94 questions about the environment, children's concerns, education, safety, personal health of adults, health behaviors, and access to care.

The assessment focused on the following areas of Leon County: South City, Bond Community, Greater Frenchtown, Fairbanks Ferry, Macon Community, and Highway 20/Aenon Church Road. Of most parents in the survey, 73% had children in pre-K, 88%, in elementary school, 33% in middle school, and 32% in high school. Across the board, parents were most concerned with their children's safety over and above the categories of child development, feeding children, health care, or dental care. Parents also identified, "making friends, concentrating in school, discipline or behavior issues, and bullying" as other concerns they have for their children. All involved neighborhoods requested more afterschool activities and programs,



along with mentoring and tutoring programs, to help keep their children safe, healthy, and happy.

The Health Department and steering committee for CHIP identified obesity and resulting chronic diseases as a health priority in Leon County and are working towards establishing a plan for monitoring BMI among first and third graders; for decreasing the percentages of first and third graders considered obese or overweight; and for increasing the number of schools compliant with the 150 minutes per week required by Florida Statutes. Increased attention to promoting healthy physical activity among youth, especially girls, is a community investment. The evidence highlights the link between healthy physical activity and decreased risks for obesity, chronic diseases, and low self-esteem.

Nutrition

The final category of physical health is proper nutrition. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), poor nutrition leads to chronic diseases that are on the rise among American adults, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. In 2016, the HHS released a new set of Dietary Guidelines which include eating nutrient rich foods, and lowering consumption of added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. They define nutrient rich foods as whole fruits, leafy greens, and protein from a variety of sources. In addition, they recommend consuming less than 10% of calories per day from added sugars and saturated fats.

Both federal and state level health agencies provide information on healthy nutrition and attitudes towards healthy habits. It is important that we work together to ensure that girls, families, caregivers, health providers, and schools are empowered to utilize these guidelines.

The added pressures girls have in terms of body image can affect their nutrition decisions, especially with the constant messaging that they should be losing weight. Additionally, the period during which girls are influenced by body image often coincides with general physical development. Healthy food choices that support optimal physiological and psychological growth are important from an early age, but particularly for girls ages 10 to 19, even though food decisions are being made for them by parents and schools. #YOTG

Insights

Girls were adamant that they wanted to participate and have their desire to participate in sports more respected by their schools and community: "Boys' sports get more funding, more attention. Makes me feel annoyed. It feels like nobody cares as much for girls' sports." —Girl Scout Troop, Killbuck

Jayda the Brave *By Seth Lyon*

Failure. Every single one of us is terrified of failure in one way or another. For some of us, the fear of failure is so strong that it paralyzes us and keeps us from moving forward.

For many of us, you can probably look back on your life and recall at least a handful of times where you regret being too afraid to act-- too afraid to do that one thing that would have meant so much to you, or to speak your mind. We are so often told that our character is defined by our choices, yet, when it comes to actually making those choices, we tend to pick the ones with the least resistance. Everyone has felt afraid. This is why it is so inspiring to see someone have the ability to look their fears in the face and accomplish their goals despite their fears.

This is not a story about failure. It's a story about success. This is a story about a girl named Jayda, and how she took one of her fears and turned it into her strength. In the fall of last year, Jayda and her mother were attending a screening of the Empowerment Project Documentary. When we asked her a simple question, she had a wonderful response. "What would you do if you weren't afraid to fail?" Jayda scribbled down her answer, and, when she finally held up her paper, it read, "Run a 5K and be in Girls on the Run."


Jayda joined our DeSoto Trail team in the spring and, like all of us, she discovered how challenging running can be on the body and mind. When commenting on the experience as a whole, her mother said that Jayda, like all young runners her age, "tends to find excuses during her runs to slow down."

Yet, she found ways to keep a positive attitude and keep moving forward. "Look at those pretty flowers," and, "Can we see if [my friend] is home?" were some of her favorite go-to motivations.

Jayda stuck with it-- a fact that her mother says she couldn't be more proud of. She commented on Facebook that her daughter Jayda was "going to DESTROY the goal she set [last fall]," and finally run her first 5K.

And she was right.

On May 14th, 2016, Jayda accomplished her goal of running a 5K in a big, bright tutu and a cheek-to-cheek smile. Through training, positive thinking, and the power of determination, Jayda was able to do what few people are. She was able to look her fears in the face and accomplish her goals.

Jayda is a very brave girl, and we are proud to say she's a Girl on the Run. 

Seth Lyon served as a Florida State University marketing intern with Girls on the Run of the Big Bend in 2016. Girls on the Run of the Big Bend is a positive youth development program for third to eighth grade girls to build self-esteem and healthy lifestyles through a fun, experience-based curriculum that creatively integrates running.



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Behavioral Health *By Commissioner Kori Pruett*

To better understand the lives of girls in Leon County, it is essential for us to consider their behavioral health. Defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, behavioral health is, “A state of mental/ emotional being and/or choices and actions that affect wellness.” Behavioral health data help us to understand the unique issues girls face as well as the way the community contributes both negatively and positively to these outcomes.

The Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls 2012 report contained data that demonstrated substance abuse and mental health services are significantly lacking in and around Leon County. This report concluded that mental health was a major issue impacting women and girls, but research efforts are limited by the lack of local data. Fortunately, the Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS) and the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS) have state and county level data that can be separated for girls ages 10-18.

Substance Use

Data show that girls in Leon County are below the state average in both lifetime use of alcohol or any illicit drugs (41.5% Leon County versus 50.1% statewide) and fewer girls report use in the past 30 days (23.4% Leon County versus 27.9% statewide). In regard to drugs, separating the types of substances and percentages of use provides a clearer picture into the behavior of girls in Leon County. Overall, rates of female girls’ drug use is lower than male drug use, with the exception of depressants and prescription pain relievers. Although the percentages are small, girls used both depressants (2%) and prescription pain relievers (2.7%) in the last 30 days at double the use for males in Leon County. These percentages are also higher than the state average for girls. Further exploration as to why females report higher use of depressants and prescription pain relievers might provide insight into the emotional state of and access to prescription drugs for girls in Leon County. The rate at which girls in Leon County consume alcohol is lower or equal to the state average. Girls also report drinking fewer drinks in one day or during a single sitting over their lifetime than boys in Leon County. The most alarming alcohol consumption,

however, is that 15% of high school girls in Leon county said they have consumed 5 or more drinks in one day over the last 30 days.

Overall, Leon County has shown a steady decrease in the rate of alcohol or any illicit drug use over the 2004-14 time span. Further examination of changes in policy, enforcement, and prevention efforts during this time could provide guidance for sustainable efforts moving forward.

In regard to location or access to alcohol, females in Leon County report their personal home or others’ homes as the most frequent locations. However, a notable data point is the high percentage of girls in Leon County that access alcohol at restaurants, bars, or clubs. In Leon County, 7.6% of girls report being able to access alcohol at these businesses, while boys in Leon County report 0%. The state average for females is only 3.4%—almost two times lower than Leon County! This data point indicates the need to better understand the rate at which girls in Leon County are accessing these establishments and the methods they are using to gain access to alcohol. Girls in Leon County also report a higher rate of gaining access to alcohol at other public places and public events than the state average. According to the 2014 FYSAS, females in Leon County reported a higher percentage than the state average for purchasing alcohol themselves at restaurants, bars, and clubs, as well as someone buying them alcohol. We need to work together as a community to identify factors that make Leon County unique regarding these data to decrease the accessibility of alcohol at local establishments and disrupt girls’ ability to purchase alcohol in public venues.

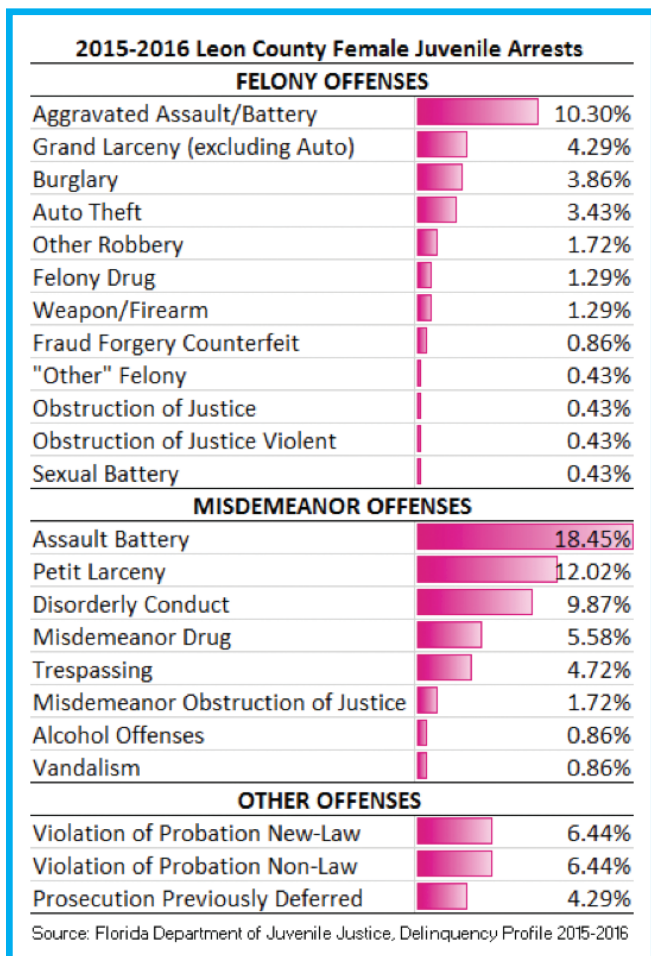
With respect to opportunities for education and prevention, there is some promising data that show the effectiveness of prevention awareness programs for reducing tobacco, alcohol, and drug use among local youth. Girls and boys in Leon County report rates similar those statewide for having personal disapproval, parental disapproval, and peer disapproval for substance use in the 2014 FYSAS. More information is needed to understand how education campaigns can be created through collaboration with community and other state partners to prevent substance abuse, particularly among girls.

Delinquent Behaviors

On average, girls in Leon County report engaging in delinquent behaviors in the past 12 months at similar rates as girls statewide. The 2014 FYSAS considers delinquent behavior to be carrying a handgun, selling drugs, attempting to steal a vehicle, being arrested, taking a handgun to school, getting suspended, and attacking someone with intent to harm. There are two reported behaviors that are notably higher than the statewide average for girls, though, which are getting suspended (9.2%) and attacking someone with the intent to harm (8.2%). Since boys in Leon County report lower percentages than the statewide average on these two indicators, these appear to be unique to girls. While these trends are alarming, it is important to note that self-reported data reflects perceptions of self rather than specific incident reporting. Further investigation is necessary to further examine the dynamics revealed in this survey. These numbers can help inform education and response to girls and aggressive behaviors. If we are able to understand the root of these behaviors, schools, families, and the community will be better able to mitigate these factors and create a healthier and safer environment for girls in Leon County.

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) reports that the state experienced a 37% decrease in female juvenile arrests between 2011 and 2016, compared to only a 24% decrease in Leon County. In 2015-16, 25% of all Leon County juvenile arrests were female. Of those, a majority, or 54.1%, of those arrests were for misdemeanor offenses, 28.8% were for felony arrests, and 17.2% were for other offenses. In recent years, DJJ has prioritized juvenile delinquency prevention and diversion programs, which has likely played a role in the decrease of statewide juvenile arrest rates.

Between 2012 and 2016, the FYSAS asked girls about their bullying of others in the previous 30 days, including physical, verbal, and cyber bullying. Among the options of “not at all,” “somewhat,” and “a whole lot,” both the state and Leon County experienced marginal decreases in girls reporting bullying “a whole lot.” In 2016, Leon County girls reported an increase in having physically and verbally bullied others “a whole lot” in the previous 30 days and at a higher rate than the state



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average on those two measures. During that same period, boys reported a decrease in having physically and verbally bullied others “a whole lot” in the previous 30 day. The fact that girls are reporting an increase in physical and verbal bullying while boys report decreases in these same behaviors is a very alarming, gender-specific trend to which our parents, schools, and community should be paying attention.

Emotional Health

Adolescent girls face cumulative stressors at home and school that contribute to diminished feelings of self-worth. The FYSAS asked girls to respond “yes” or “no” to the following statements: Life is not worth it, I am no good, I am a failure, and I am depressed most days. While girls statewide remained fairly stable between 2012 and 2016 with little increase in responding “yes” to these statements, Leon County is a different story.

In comparison to 2012, in 2016 13% more girls reported life is not worth it, 11% more girls reported they are no good, 15% more girls reported they are failures, and 15% more girls reported being depressed most days.

According to the 2012, 2014, and 2016 FYTS survey, girls in Leon County and statewide self-report a higher percentage of self-harm than boys. The survey asked respondents “During the past 12 months, did you do something to purposely hurt yourself without wanting to die, such as cutting or burning yourself on purpose?” While for all three years Leon County

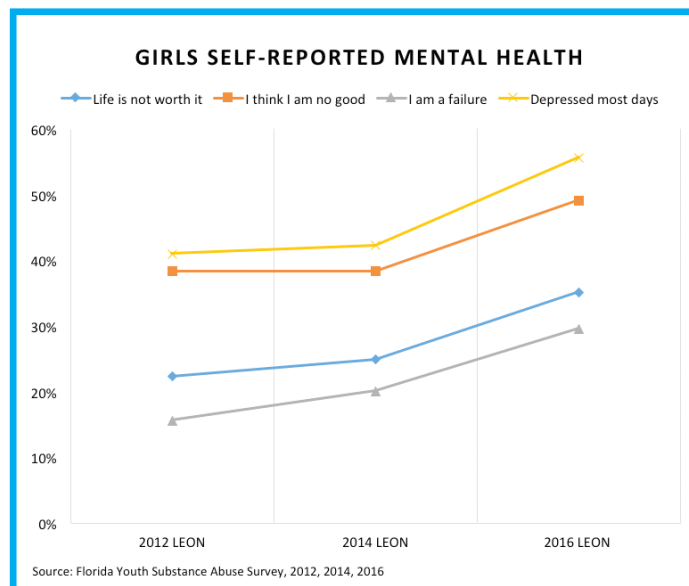
girls reported doing self-harm about 6% less than girls statewide, any type of self-harm often represents a physical manifestation of mental and emotional distress. This is an alarming trend, and needs to be researched further in order to better understand the type of harm girls are inflicting on themselves and the reasons that lead them to do so. Girls in Leon County also indicate feeling so sad they stopped usual activities in the past 12 months at about 10-15% higher than boys from 2012-16. Emotional stress can lead to academic decline, self-harm, and decrease in social efficacy, all of which hinder healthy child development. Due to the drastic difference in the self-report numbers between girls and boys, it is important to identify the unique experiences girls in Leon County are having with regard to emotional and mental health.

continued >>



<< behavioral health continued

Leadership at the Apalachee Center in Tallahassee spoke to us about the distinctive mental health challenges facing our community. Dr. Jay Reeve, the President and Chief Executive Officer, and Sue Conger, M.S.W., the Chief Operations Officer, said they serve around 600 clients under the age of 18 each year and during the last fiscal year, 269 were girls. Although the average stay at their inpatient facility is three days, most girls (200 out of 269) were referred to their outpatient services through their schools. Dr. Reeve emphasized the lack of school and child psychologists in our area, “Our presence in schools started because the schools gave us a call and said, ‘We need some behavioral health services.’ And that’s been true in all of the counties that we serve at one point or another. Usually it’s within the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs where they’re looking for more support than they were able to get from their ESE budgets.” Clinical staff at the center know that psychiatric illnesses for kids are much different than adults and begin to manifest at different ages depending on the illness. They also noted that giving antidepressants and antipsychotic medicines to kids have historically been something approached with caution. In their experience, girls receiving care at Apalachee Center are there for depression, anxiety, and ADHD/ADD and are often referred to them from their schools or the Department of Children and Families. If the child is in foster care or has experienced physical and/or sexual abuse in her/his home, sometimes children will remain at the center until they are placed in another home. They find that girls struggle most with depression, resulting in school avoidance due to experiences with cyber bullying through social media. These avoidance behaviors can lead to girls acting out at home and in school—a common reason for their referral in the first place.



Courtney Atkins, the Executive Director of Whole Child Leon, echoes these concerns, especially with regard to the impact of behavioral health issues on development. She said comprehensive screening initiatives like the Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System and services provided by the Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend are crucial to “elevate the message to screen early and often.” Also, increasing the behavioral health services for children and their parents can strengthen familial relationships, and can create important connections between families and the community. Social support is the greatest protective factor for physical and mental health, something discussed regularly in our community conversations with girls. #YOTG



Insights FROM GIRLS ON EXPECTATIONS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

“[There is an] unspoken rule that girls have to start wearing makeup at a certain age. There was a video of a girl who wore tons of makeup and, then, took it off to show people what she looked like without makeup. People called her names (like ugly) when it was off, but then call her fake for wearing makeup.” —Girl from the School of Arts and Sciences

“I do believe in a dress code, but I don’t like to just wear skirts, pants and dresses. Students should be able to wear anything they want as long as it covers body parts. Let people be comfortable in their own way. In general, there are some things girls can’t wear; you could be seen as ‘slutty.’ And the attitude toward females—they can’t say and do certain things. Labels that are applied, like ‘PACE Girls’ may be seen negatively. Sometimes a label sticks with you your whole life.” —Girl from PACE Center for Girls, Leon

Igniting the Power Within: Women and Girls Empowerment Summit 2016-17

On April 14, 2017, over 260 women and girls, vendors, Commissioners, and panelists came together to empower, inspire, and share vital information on numerous topics important to women and girls. The program offered separate tracks for women and girls, with combined opening and closing sessions. Students from 23 public, private and charter schools throughout Leon County, three local colleges and universities, along with students from as far as Jacksonville and Thomasville, GA benefitted from the wisdom shared in the 13 sessions held throughout the day. The panelists and speakers included university professors, doctors, attorneys, public relations professionals, law enforcement professionals, business owners, and news anchors. Judge Nina Ashenafi-Richardson, the keynote speaker, provided a challenge to all women and girls in the audience to “recognize and use their own gifts and power to fulfil their dreams.”

Empowerment programming for women included discussions with successful and civic-minded female leaders, mapping success, connecting passion, leadership, and action. Some participants shared their thoughts on the Summit with participants:

Girls’ programming was split into three grade levels (grades 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12) to discuss financial empowerment, envisioning the future, and achievement through assertiveness. All girls came together for an afternoon session titled “I AM Worth it/I AM Beautiful” that focused on self-worth and interpersonal relationships. The facilitators began by asking girls what beauty meant to them. Their responses included:

“You decide what beauty is to you and how you’re beautiful. Beautiful is showing your true self, not how others want to perceive you and want to push on you but just showing how you view yourself as you. Just you, you’re beautiful.”

“At the end of the day it’s up to us to decide how we’re going to react and how much power we are going to give to other people. Keep believing in yourself.”

An activity with a powerful message involved each girl imagining two \$100 bills, then they were asked to think about crumpling up one but not the other. Then they were asked if their worth changed at all. The girls took time to write down what hurts their self-worth, things that they may not be comfortable sharing with anyone else, and things that they are proud of about themselves. Then, the girls crumpled up their two papers and threw the paper including the things that hurt them into their feelings box and then the things they were proud of into their self-worth box—highlighting that those two things should be kept separate.

“If you think you are worthless, you will trade yourself for lesser things.”

“One of my greatest strengths is doing the right thing, but sometimes people misunderstand it as snitching, which makes me feel annoyed.”



“Don’t ignore those people in your life who see your worth and who say ‘You know what? You’re shortchanging yourself.’ “

After the exercise, girls talked with each other at their tables and shared their reactions to the activity:

“Loving myself is something I need to put work into. The activity with the money made a good point. That was actually super impactful that your self-worth is already determined and what people think or you think actually doesn’t matter.”

“I love getting to see my friends and love them and love me. Girl power is real.”

“I struggle with wanting to be prettier, skinnier, cool, I don’t know all of the things I feel like I’m supposed to be but it’s nice to see that everyone around me feels the same and we are all holding ourselves to an impossible standard.”

“Without this, I am really alone. At school I am really alone and my ‘friends’ treat me as less than. But here (points to girls at table), I have good friends who lift me up and I can do the same for them because we are all awesome.”

“The Summit is a first-rate venue for girls to learn about their value and strengths and for women to share their own experiences with and learn from each other. The panelists are knowledgeable community leaders from whom we can all benefit.”—Elizabeth Ricci, Esq. #YOTG

Quotes provided by students from Lincoln High School, Florida High School, Rickards High School, Montford Middle School, Maclay School, and Highlands Middle School in Jacksonville, FL.



Girls tend to exhibit fewer risky behaviors than boys; however, they are more often the victims of others' unsafe acts of negligence and violence. The result of risky behavior can have a significant impact on the lives of girls. The Florida Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) considers risk behaviors those that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence, sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV infection, alcohol and other drug use, tobacco use, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and inadequate physical activity. Leon County girls face bullying, physical fighting, gang violence, homicide, homelessness, human trafficking, and sexual violence. A community-wide focus on girls' safety can reduce injury, death, and increase their chances for a balanced, successful life. Girls face a battlefield wherever they go, making their safety and ability to thrive a necessary priority for our community.

Girls in Leon County feel safer in their neighborhoods than on the way to or at school. Statewide, little variation was shown among girls feeling unsafe at school between 2012 and 2016, but the Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS) reveals over a 10% increase in Leon County girls not going to school because of safety concerns.

Being forced to choose between receiving an education or feeling safe is not something girls should have to do in their daily lives.

Gang Activity

The Florida Office of the Attorney General published a gang reduction report in 2013, which reported an overall 27% decrease in gangs throughout Florida since 2010. They also reported that Leon County had a lower than state average representation of gangs and gang members, with 11 of the state's total 1,223 documented gangs and 229 of the state's total 46,635 gang members located in Leon County. However, the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS) finds that Leon County exceeds the statewide average of girls who have ever belonged to

a gang by 1-3% between 2012 and 2016. Girls participate in youth gangs far less than boys, but are often caught up in gang activities in their neighborhoods and homes if gang activity occurs. Several factors contribute to gang involvement, including a lack of jobs for youth, social isolation exacerbated by poverty, domestic violence, negative peer associations, lack of parental supervision, and early academic failure or lack of attachment to school.

Gangs are involved in vandalism, assault, human and drug trafficking, drug sales, and rape. Gang members can be as young as eight years of age and initiations into gangs begin in middle school. According to the Florida Office of the Attorney General, of the various reasons youth join gangs—fun and excitement, friends or relatives in gangs, forced to join, respect, money, to fit in—girls cite receiving protection as the most prevalent reason.

The FYSAS shows a statewide increase in middle and high school youth who report that they carry a gun statewide. Girls' responses to related survey questions about taking handguns to school and attacking others with intent to harm have increased over the last several years. Leon County girls report carrying a handgun and getting suspended at higher rates than girls statewide.

Bullying

Bullying is an aggressive act that reoccurs and demonstrates an imbalance of power favoring the perpetrator. This aggression can be presented in person through physical or verbal attacks, or through technology like social media, email, chat rooms, or text messaging. Though the likelihood of suicide caused by bullying alone is low, bullying can contribute to and exacerbate existing depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Therefore, bullying is associated with some suicide attempts.

The 2014 FYSAS shows that when compared to girls statewide, Leon County girls have a comparable but slightly higher percentage of physically bullying others in the past 30 days (5.9%) and verbally bullying others in the past 30 days (13.4%). In Leon County, 6.5% of girls have skipped school because of bullying, which is lower than for girls at the state level. Nearly 1 in 3 girls in Leon County (31.3%) report that

they were taunted or teased in the past 30 days. Students that frequently bully are more likely to be involved in anti-social and risky behavior including fights, vandalism, and substance abuse.

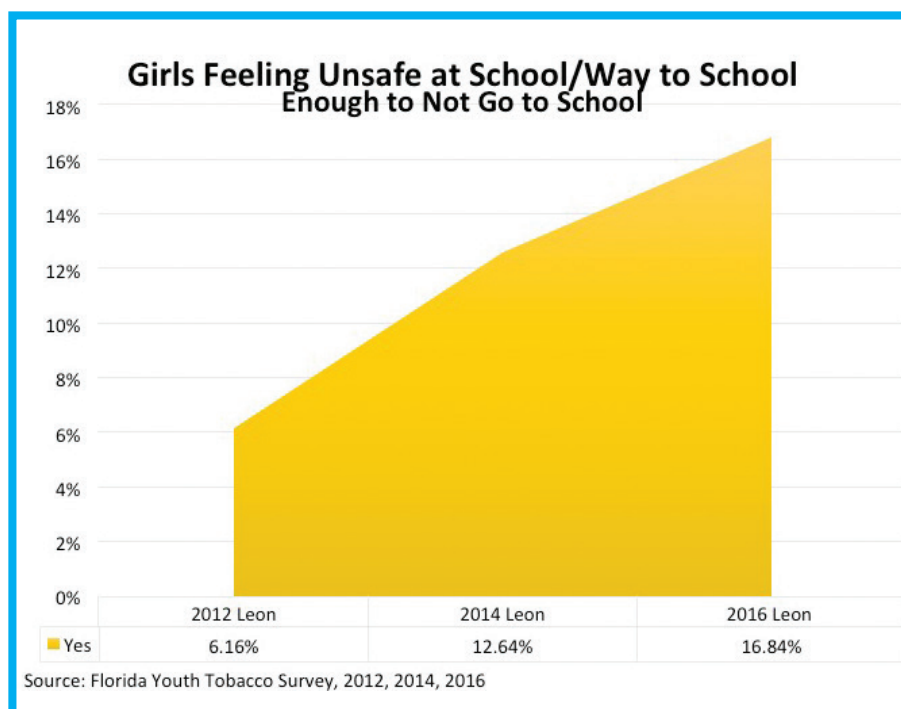
Overall, Florida middle school students report a higher percentage of involvement in bullying behavior than high school students. Among middle and high school girls in Leon County combined, 39.6% report that bullying caused them to worry, compared to only 22% for boys. Generally, bullying rates demonstrate the need to do more research and create space for open dialogue with girls about bullying to better understand the impact on their lives. Bullying affects academic outcomes and self-esteem; therefore, it is crucial to identify protective and prevention strategies.

Human Trafficking

When students are away from the structure and supervision that schools provide, risky behavior, exposure to unsafe acts, and juvenile delinquency increase. These behaviors range from experimenting with sex and drugs to running away and falling prey to human trafficking. The Florida Department of Education lists absenteeism as an indicator of a child being involved in human trafficking.

Federal law defines the trafficking of persons as “sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age” or “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” Cases involving trafficking of children can include: commercial sex, stripping, pornography, forced begging, magazine crews, au pairs or nannies, restaurant work, hair and nail salon work, and agricultural work. The sexual exploitation of children occurs with both males and females; however, females are the victims of sex trafficking at significantly higher rates than males.

The Florida Department of Children and Families’ Office of Child Welfare tracks human trafficking in three areas of maltreatment: Human trafficking- General (16.8% of all cases), Commercial Sexual



Exploitation of Children (CSEC) (73.6% of all cases), and Labor (9.6% of all cases).

Between 2013 and 2015 there were 4,548 reported cases of human trafficking in the State of Florida. Of those, 3,072 intakes were children. Commissioner Jane Johnson provided data and insight from the Florida Department of Children and Families on child trafficking in Florida, noting that “on any given day there are around 250 children in foster care that have a verified case of being involved in human trafficking. Out of these cases, only seven will be male.” She says that “most identified victims will be located in urban areas south of Interstate-4” with “66.5% of the state’s current trafficking population within foster care coming from a few counties: Miami-Dade (22%), Broward (13%), Hillsborough (11%), Pasco and Pinellas (10.5%), Orange and Osceola (5%), and Seminole and Brevard (5%).” Between 2013 and 2016, DCF completed human trafficking intakes for 56 children within Leon County—all of whom were girls.

Leon County has 2.5 human trafficking cases per 100,000 in the population compared to 1.7 per 100,000 in the population state wide. All forms of human trafficking that are higher in the regions south of I-4 have more experience in reporting and combating human trafficking. Leon County’s proximity to I-10, which connects all the lower states from California to Florida, may be

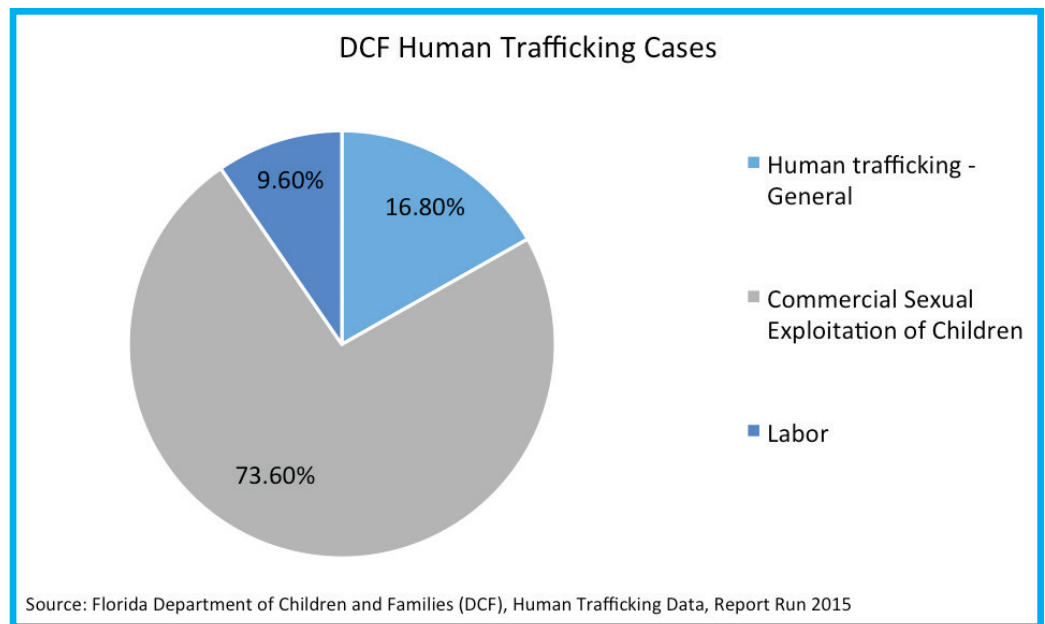
a contributing factor to the amount of human trafficking.

The Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center (STAC) in Tallahassee is a local initiative that offers a comprehensive hub of resources to victims of human trafficking and their families. Robin Hassler Thompson, J.D., M.A., the Executive Director, points out the importance of integrated services for both sex trafficking and labor trafficking victims. Often, women who are victims of labor trafficking are also raped or sexually assaulted when not performing physical labor. “For STAC, it’s both crisis response and long term response,” said Hassler Thompson. “From a service provision perspective, it’s imperative that everybody connect and work together because these survivors have a vast array of needs: legal services; dental; mental health; job training; long-term and short-term trauma-informed care; and family counseling—the list is long.” Until 2010, trafficking victims who received criminal records for crimes committed while they were trafficked had no legal recourse to appeal those charges. New York was the first state to pass a law allowing survivors of human trafficking to pursue court orders to vacate or expunge their criminal records. Florida followed, with the added provision for automatically expunging records for any offense committed while a victim of human trafficking.

continued >>

<< safety continued

Girls who are trafficked are forced to engage in behaviors that are criminalized such as prostitution and drug-related offenses. If a victim of human trafficking is charged for these crimes, that criminal record will have tremendous negative consequence over their lifetime, and is a significant miscarriage of justice. Not only does this result in another form of victimization that will further limit their chances at a happy and secure life, it results in additional psychological distress where they are made to feel responsible for what has happened to them. #YOTG



Insights

Girls shared their thoughts about big issues facing girls that grown-ups don't know about or talk about, and many of them involved issues of safety:

"Boys are touching girls where they shouldn't and girls don't want to tell their moms 'cause they're scared to." - Girl from Oak Ridge Elementary School, Oasis Girls Circle Group



Social Media *By Commissioner Dr. Elizabeth Jakubowski and Commissioner Jane Johnson*

In A Call to Action: Improving the Status of Women and Girls in Tallahassee/Leon County, the 2013-14 report from the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, the issues identified as the most pressing ones facing girls in our community had social media as a common thread. Social media are computer-mediated tools that allow people and organizations to create, to share, or to exchange information, pictures/videos, and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Such tools have introduced significant changes to the manner and speed with which people communicate around the world.

Navigating a New Frontier

In the emerging world of social media, no one can boast having decades of experience and wisdom. We cannot turn to a previous generation for guidance. In a sense, we are all students learning to use these new tools at the same time. Social media, as we know it today, is not even 10 years old and the applications being developed to support it are constantly evolving and changing. While there may be experts on the mechanics of certain social media applications, it simply has not been around long enough to allow for a thorough analysis of its impact on our personal development, our relationships, and our society in general.

Of the research done by business, communications, and psychology professionals, the explosion of social media in our lives represents an unprecedented opportunity to draw adults and youth closer together—or keep them at a distance. The sharing of photos, videos, and ideas through a variety of platforms has enabled multiple generations to communicate and stay virtually connected, regardless of geography. That is probably one of the reasons social media has been so enthusiastically embraced across so many age cohorts. However, because we are all new to this territory, none of us can fully understand where the landmines are yet. Adults and youth have entered into a new and still-developing social landscape together, with no rulebook to guide the way forward. Very little to no local data currently exist to help understand and construct a picture of social media's impact on girls in our area.

[continued >>](#)

<< social media continued

At the national level, data show that access to social media is impacted by increased access to mobile devices, including laptops, smartphones, and tablets. Many of the widely used applications in social media are available on these mobile devices. To help contextualize the influence of social media on today's youth, the Pew Research Center gathered data on issues related to teen relationships and technology, including social media. Their 2015 reports surveyed 1,060 teens ages 13-17 and provided the following statistics that describe this generation's use of social media:

- 92% of teens reported going online daily
- 56% of teens ages 13 to 17 went online several times a day; 24% said they would go online "almost constantly"
- 88% of teens had or had access to cell phones or smartphones and 90% of those teens with phones exchanged texts
- A typical teen sent and received 30 texts per day
- Facebook was the most used social media site among American teens ages 13 to 17; with 71% using the site
- 52% of the teens surveyed used Instagram and 41% used Snapchat
- Boys were more likely than girls to report that they visited Facebook most often (45% of boys versus 36% of girls)
- Girls were more likely than boys to say they used Instagram (23% of girls versus 17% of boys) and Tumblr (6% of girls compared with less than 1% of boys)
- Older teens ages 15 to 17 were more likely to cite Facebook (44% versus 35% of younger teens), Snapchat (13% versus 8%) and Twitter (8% versus 3%) as the most often used platform, while younger teens ages 13 to 14 were more

likely to list Instagram (25% versus 17% of older teens) as a platform they visited most often

There is no disputing the fact that social media has assumed a dominant role in the lives of American teens and is becoming their primary method of communicating with others. The Pew Research Center report (2015) also found that for today's teens, 57% had met a new friend online. Social media, along with online gaming, were the two common digital venues for meeting friends. Girls are more likely to make new friends online through social media (78% vs. 52% of boys). In addition to building new friendships, teens have indicated that social media helps them feel more connected to their friends' feelings and daily lives while being a place to receive support from others during difficult times. #YOTG

Tips for Talking with Girls about Social Media

Discussions about social media should start as early as possible—even before a girl has her own smart phone.

Don't focus on what a girl should not be doing; instead, emphasize the positive potential of social media, while also carefully pointing out the pit falls as well.

Convey the big picture. Social media can be incredibly time-consuming and distracting, capable of taking over a person's life.

Try to help young girls unplug and step away from it to view its role in their lives as one of many tools they can use to communicate and socialize.

Help them to realize that everything that is posted becomes a forever image and brand of who she is and is available as long as there is an Internet.

To balance or offset the heavy emphasis social media places on body and appearance—and the pressure to post a perfect selfie—give equal attention and affirmation to photos of girls being active, natural-looking, and authentically themselves. #YOTG

How Do Girls Use Social Media?

As part of the research for her 2016 book, *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Life of Teenagers*, Nancy Jo Sales interviewed more than 200 girls in 10 states over a 10-month period, most of whom were under 16 years old. The teen girls she spoke with talked about the stress they experienced from social media, but also said they could not stop using it. Sales noted that social media is such a part of teenage life, one almost has to ask a girl about social media to find out who she is and what is going on in her life.

A disturbing finding of Sales' research was the extent to which social media has hyper-sexualized online text interactions among teens resulting in expectations for girls to portray a certain physical ideal. The teens she interviewed said they felt compelled to go to great lengths to modify their looks so they could take the perfect selfie to share on Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, or a variety of other social media applications. Some girls reported spending hours each week taking and editing selfies to post on social media. Sales also found that it was considered acceptable for both boys and girls to make sexualized comments about one another's selfies. She suggests that the ready availability of online pornography has influenced the way teens view themselves and has encouraged girls in particular to dress and pose themselves in ways that mimic porn models, including having a hand on one hip or puckering their lips in the "duck face."

According to Claire Mysko (2013), an internationally recognized expert on body image and media literacy, "While social media is not the cause of low self-esteem, it has all the right elements to contribute to it. Social media creates an environment where disordered thoughts and behaviors really thrive." Mysko further comments that the pressure to be accepted (as measured in "likes") for a perfect photo of oneself can magnify a young girl's insecurities about her body. A study conducted by Florida State University on Facebook and eating disorders (2014) found that a group of women who were asked to browse Facebook for 20 minutes experienced greater body dissatisfaction than those who spent 20 minutes online researching rainforest cats. The pressure to project an attractive and popular image through their social media postings is evident in the percent of teens using social media who feel pressured to be liked.

Some of the girls Sales spoke with also reported they felt pressure to text nude or sexual photos of themselves to boys. Other girls reported that exchanging texts of a sexual nature with boys was fairly common. The girls complained that this puts them in a lose-lose situation, because if they refused to send photos of themselves or suggestive texts, they risked being rejected or becoming unpopular. However, if they did send them, they risked being “slut-shamed” if the boy shared them with his friends and others.

The Pew Research Center study also collected data on social media and flirting. Teens were asked about how they showed romantic interest in someone. The data show that virtual interactions are just as likely as face-to-face conversations.

How Teens Show Romantic Interest in Someone:

- 55% by talking with them in person
- 50% by friending them on Facebook or some other app
- 47% by liking, commenting or otherwise interacting on social media
- 46% by sharing something funny or interesting with them online
- 31% by sharing flirtatious messages
- 11% by making a music playlist for them
- 10% by sending flirty or sexy photos or videos of themselves
- 7% by making a video for them

Social media has become a platform for teen girls to seek affirmation of their sexuality by posting photos that will generate a maximum number of “likes” or comments. Teens are also using social media to share their romantic interests and initiate romantic relationships.

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In another of Pew Research Center’s studies (2009), they surveyed 800 teens about their “sexting” behaviors and found:

- 4% of cellphone-owning teens ages 12-17 have sent sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images of themselves to someone else via text messaging
- 15% of cell phone-owning teens ages 12-17 have received sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images of someone they know via text messaging on their cell phone
- 8% of 17-year-olds with cell phones have sent a sexually provocative image by text and 30% have received a nude or nearly nude image on their phone
- 17% of teens who pay for all of the costs associated with their cell

phones send sexually suggestive images via text; just 3% of teens who do not pay for, or only pay for a portion of the cost of the cell phone, send these images

Although many of these teens reported exchanging “sexts”

with their romantic partners or people they hoped would be their romantic partners, these exchange behaviors are known and used enough to be taken advantage of by predators. The challenge for adults is to help teens fully appreciate the ramifications and dangers of their information-sharing activities, while providing a safe space for teens to talk openly about the realities they face.

How Can We Help Girls Navigate Social Media?

Parents, teachers, and adults involved in the lives of teens must understand and embrace the major role social media plays in their lives. Because it is still a relatively new and emerging social trend, there is not a lot of reliable data available on the short or long term impacts of social media on youth. Given that information gap, the best thing to do as a community is to engage in meaningful and candid conversations about social media, its role in our lives, and the risks and benefits of online information sharing.

Conversations with girls about social media should be dialogues, not lectures. Asking questions can help adults better understand what drives girls to post and scan social media so frequently. During our community conversations, several girls referred to their social media activities, from how they spend their time to concerns they have about using social media:

“[I need more] sleep; I like to take a nap. Sometimes I am up all night texting, and don’t get enough rest.”

- Girl from PACE Center for Girls, Leon

“[I spend a lot of time] getting on social media. My favorite is Instagram.”

- Girl from Fairview Middle School, Oasis Girls Circle Group

“Parents should talk to you about what they think you should post on the Internet; something wrong gets posted and then it’s a big mistake.”

- Girl from Oasis’ Girls Can Do Anything Summer Camp

“[Unhealthy relationships have a] lack of communication and you’re unable to trust a person. For example, checking up on someone by checking on their Instagram.”

- Girl from Palmer-Munroe Teen Center

We need to continue these discussions with girls throughout the community and engage with organizations and initiatives that work with girls to better understand the impact of social media on their lives. **#YOTG**

“One of my greatest strengths is my voice, but sometimes people misunderstand it as attitude, which makes me feel I am rude.”

Sexual Violence in the Lives of Girls

By Dr. Jesse Klein and Commissioner Jessica Lowe-Minor

The 2014-15 Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CSWG) Report on Sexual Violence Response in Tallahassee/Leon County offered research and best practices for our community's preventative initiatives and response to sexual violence. The report focused on our community's existing response policies regarding sexual violence against women in homes, workplaces, and college campuses. Further, the report highlighted medical and legal responses to adult female survivors. The success of the report relied in part on the availability of data on survivors ages 18 and older. However, a nationwide 2011 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey found that 23% of females who experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime, first experienced some form of partner violence between the age of 11 and 17 years of age. Accessing data on sexual offenses against children for independent analysis is very difficult, where protection of the victims is taken very seriously. In this article, we share our findings on the data tracking of sexual violence against girls, our community's response process for victims, and the new threats our girls face on social media and the Internet.

Data Tracking

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) requires law enforcement throughout the country to submit data on eight types of reported crimes, including rape. This reporting system has been in place since 1930, making changes in crime definitions necessary over time. While the FBI's definition of rape became more inclusive of gender and type of sexual violence in 2013—including male victims, sodomy, and sexual assault with objects—adding the element of the victim's age requires different reporting protocols.

The FBI defines statutory rape as “Nonforcible sexual intercourse with a person who is under the statutory age of consent,” but adds that “If the victim was incapable of giving consent because of his/her youth or mental impairment, either temporary or permanent, law enforcement should classify the offense as Rape, not Statutory Rape.” The UCR does not collect data on statutory rape or other specific

details for other offenses against children through its reporting system. Varying definitions and reporting systems have the potential to fracture the reporting and analysis of data at the national level on sexual violence against children; however, the FBI began working on a more nuanced reporting system in the 1980s.

In 1988, the FBI began experimenting with a new, more detailed reporting system called the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), which would collect data on 46 specific crimes, including both rape and statutory rape. This is a significant improvement to crime reporting conducted through the UCR system and it ensures that incident-level, specific data on victims, perpetrators, and co-occurring crimes are recorded thoroughly. However, implementation of NIBRS has been slow and voluntary with the goal of fully transitioning from the UCR to the NIBRS by the end of 2021. In 2013, only 38.3% of law enforcement agencies reporting to the UCR submitted crime data in the incident-based system. These mandatory reporting guidelines at the federal level result in many local and state law enforcement agencies tracking data on crimes reported, arrests made, and convictions for sexual violence.

There are 44 states implementing and/or testing the NIBRS—Florida is not one of them.

While these reporting systems have normalized tracking data on sexual violence throughout the country, it is important to note that these data only tell us about reported crime. Comparing national victimization surveys with official data, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that between 2006 and 2010, 52% of all violent victimizations were not reported to the police, and 2 out of 3 or 65% of rapes and sexual assaults went unreported. They also found that violent crime victimizations against youth ages 12 to 17 went unreported at higher rates than any of the other age categories. With such a low reporting rate, there is also the risk of believing these victimizations are not happening at all or not often. With this in mind, NIBRS released a report on sex offenses via their system in 2013 and found that the “most likely victims of rape were teenagers with 33.8% of victims between 13 and 18 years

of age” and offenders were reported “to be slightly older with 39.1% between 16 and 25 years of age” nationwide. Teenage victims were also most likely to be girls.

This means that girls are simultaneously more likely to be victims of rape and sexual assault and that these crimes are most likely to go unreported to law enforcement.

We can find national data sometimes disaggregated by age, gender, and race of the victims, but for state- and local-level data, it is an entirely different story. Communities come together to provide data tracking and crisis response through law enforcement, medical and mental health professionals, social workers, and community service providers. However, community dialogue is more open with regard to talking about the response for victims over 18 years of age because the status of sexual violence against children is still not something people are comfortable talking about. Despite national prioritization of the investigation and prosecution of sexual crimes against children, when we cannot grasp the scope of the problem, statistically or otherwise, the interagency collaborations we rely on for crisis response are hindered.

Community Response to Child Victims of Sexual Violence

Tallahassee and Leon County have a comprehensive network of agencies committed to sexual violence response that receive community-wide and state-wide support to do so. After consulting with many providers in Tallahassee, a common theme emerged—there are many crisis- and trauma-related services for adults but few for children. Barriers to providing more services for child victims of sexual violence include a lack of resources and a collective denial about the realities of child sexual abuse nationwide.

In 1978, the State of Florida initiated a “pilot project using a medically led, multidisciplinary team approach” in Jacksonville and called it the Child Protection Team (CPT). Today, 48 CPTs operate throughout Florida in main offices and satellite offices, including a main office in Tallahassee. In explaining the range of services CPTs provide by working together with law enforcement and the Department

of Children and Families (DCF), the DOH says teams provide:

- Medical diagnosis and evaluation
- Nursing assessments
- Child and family assessments
- Multidisciplinary staffing
- Psychological and psychiatric evaluations
- Specialized and forensic interviews
- Expert court testimony

Kevin Winship, a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (L.M.H.C.) and Director of Program Operations at Children's Home Society of Florida, North Central Division (CHS)—the main CPT office in Tallahassee—spoke with us about the CPT operating in the Big Bend and gave us a tour of their facility. They are prepared to process many types of abuse victims; however, for this report we asked specifically about their sexual abuse cases involving girls. Their team members include support from county law enforcement and certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) for providing sexual assault exams, contracting with physicians specialized in pediatric trauma, clinical social workers, and licensed counselors and psychologists. Winship provided data for 2014-15 and 2015-16:

- In 2014-15, there were 375 alleged female victims processed through Tallahassee's CPT and of these 23.2% were ages 0-5, 38.7% were ages 6-12, and 38.1% were 13 years or older.
 - o Of these victims, 82.7% knew their perpetrators which included parents (13.3%), step-parents (5.9%), other relatives (30%), parent or guardian's paramour (11.5%), and other known non-relatives (29.6%).

- In 2015-16, there was a significant drop from 375 to 170 female victims, of whom 31.2% were ages 0-5, 34.7% were ages 6-12, and 34.1% were 13 years or older.
 - o Similarly to 2014-2015, most of these girls knew their perpetrators (82.4%) and included parents (15.9%), step-parents (6.4%), other relatives (21.9%), parent or guardian's paramour (2.4%), and other known non-relatives (28.2%).

At the time of our interview, CHS had just started processing 2016-17 data and noted that they were observing an uptick from the previous year's number of victims served. A majority of child victims of sexual abuse in Leon County are brought to Tallahassee's CPT and are often referred by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and local law enforcement. Winship noted that DCF also provided specialized response teams for High Risk Victims, which included children who went into the DCF or Department of Juvenile Delinquency systems multiple times, who moved between foster homes frequently, and who had been trafficked for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. As reported in the safety section of this report, Leon County had 56 child victims of human trafficking in 2015 and all of them were girls. From child sexual abuse within their homes to being trafficked and exploited for commercial sex, sexual violence against girls is a substantial and complex problem in our community.

Barriers to children's access to treatment abound once they leave CHS, depending on their access to insurance, access to transportation, their school's capacity to provide counseling for possible consequent emotional or behavioral issues resulting

from their victimization, household income, possible ongoing interaction with the legal system, and those victimized by parents or relatives might be removed from their homes.

Meg Baldwin, J.D. is the Executive Director of Refuge House, a domestic and sexual violence center serving eight counties in the Big Bend area, including Leon County. As one of the several community service providers where children and their families are referred after CHS, she sees girls needing complex direct services after experiencing trauma as well: "The thing that is probably the biggest barrier is being able to afford therapeutic services for a lot of these families. Most of the girls that we are working with have really complicated home lives. Many of them have grown up witnessing domestic violence, they've been molested early, and they come from a long history of family violence. So, their needs are broad. They need basic case management, their families need affordable, safe housing to reduce their risk—they need positive adults in their life." She adds, "Each girl really needs and deserves to have a safe, protective, nurturing relationship in her life. And if she doesn't have that, she's going to be vulnerable to seeking something that pretends to be that kind of emotional and material support from anyone who seems to be offering it. And that contributes to an environment of predation that may be exploited by an age peer, a member of the family, a brother, an uncle, a boyfriend of her mom or an older sister, another student in school, and older boys and young men who circle these girls who are vulnerable in these ways and will use them sexually and sometimes also prostitute them."

continued >>



<< sexual violence in the lives of girls continued

The Threat of Online Predators

Unfortunately, girls face more threats now than ever before with advances in technology and the spread of social media. As noted in the Social Media article of this report, the lines of communication and information exchange are there for positive relational interaction, building friendships, and maintaining contact across the world. However much we would like for our girls to have only positive experiences online, that just isn't the case.

We spoke with Special Agent Jason A. Knowles at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's (FDLE) Florida Computer Crime Center (FC3) about the landscape girls in our community are facing on the Internet. He began by explaining the predator mentality.

"Predators are looking for prey, first and foremost. They are going to go to the places that kids are frequenting, whether they are applications or online social media sites. They are going to look for the baited field. And when they find the prey, they are going to take it upon themselves and go through a process where they isolate an individual or several individuals. That's easy to do on the Internet because you have applications that are specifically written for isolating communication. So, if they make contact with a child, they can isolate that communication by taking them to a different app. So, we see a lot of times predators will come across somebody who they think is a child and then they'll say, 'Hey do you have a Skype account,' or 'Do you have a Kik account?' and they'll take them from one application to another so that they can isolate that communication."

These online predators seek user handles that indicate a child may have created it and immediately begin to assess whether the user is in fact a child by asking certain questions and analyzing the responses.

Children coming from difficult home lives are particularly vulnerable because they are easier to isolate and groom. Social media grooming is when a predator builds trust from a potential child victim which can result in isolating that child from their social supports and increasing their risk for exploitation. At FC3, Agent Knowles says, "A large percentage of our investigations are focused on child pornography possession and sharing on the Internet." The possession, production, and distribution of child pornography has become increasingly prevalent as predators are better able to collect, to create, and to share this material with one another.

Agent Knowles pointed to a seminal research report, The Butner Study (2009), which revealed that offenders in possession of child pornography also had a high likelihood of being contact offenders. In this study, 155 inmates that had been incarcerated for possession of child pornography were interviewed and researchers discovered that 85% had been contact offenders—meaning they had gone beyond "mere" possession and children. Of the 85%, inmates also conveyed their number of victims—the average number of victims per offender was a staggering 13.

The team at FC3, and other computer crime task forces, know they are going after perpetrators who are likely to be child



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rapists and traffickers, which is why the enforcement of child pornography laws is comprehensive and consistent. Child pornography is a crime scene photo because it is a capture of the rape of that child. Agent Knowles has provided expert testimony at many of these trials and notes that it has taken many years for law enforcement “to get judges and juries to know that this isn’t just some dirty old man looking at a photo—it’s a crime.”

The funding and departmental structures for combating these crimes are different at the county, state, and federal levels, making tracking sex offenses against children complex. Fortunately, however, these agencies communicate and track offenders and predators collaboratively within states and across state lines to protect children against computer-related sex crimes. Victim data within the State of Florida’s Sex Offender Registry is confidential and not publicly available, making disaggregating sex offenses against minors by gender impossible. By requesting detailed registry data between 1970 and 2016, we were able to determine rates of sex offender charges against children per 100,000 people in each county, rates of sex offenders who perpetrated crimes against children per 100,000 people in each county, and rates of computer-related sex crimes against children per 100,000 people in each county.

Sex offenders are grouped into three categories: offenders, predators (repetitive offenders), and juvenile sex offenders (offenders under the age of 18). Sex offenders are typically arrested and convicted for more than one crime; making the charges exceed the amount of offenders. The Florida counties with the highest rate per 100,000 in the population of sex crimes against children are Liberty (1052), Gadsden (931.3), Desoto (803.2), and Citrus (802.2) County. Gadsden and Liberty counties also have the highest rate of sex offenders, with 653.2 and 597.7 per 100,000 respectively.

The data was grouped by computer-related sex crimes against children, including: Possession of photo/picture showing sexual performance by a child; Produce, direct, promote sexual performance by child; Providing obscene material to a minor; Send child porn; Sexual performance by a child (possess photo or picture); Traveling to meet minor to commit unlawful sexual offense; Use computer to have sex with minor; Use Internet to solicit/attempt to solicit a child for sex/lewdness; Use of a computer to solicit or lure a child to engage in sexual conduct; and



Use of a computer to solicit or lure a parent or custodian of a child to consent to the child’s participation in sexual conduct. For these crimes, Citrus (155.1), Polk (106.5), and Sumter (100.6) County had the highest rates per 100,000 in the population. Leon County had the 6th highest rate of computer-related sex crimes against children, with 86 per 100,000 in the population. Of Leon County’s 237 computer-related sex crimes against children documented between 2006 and 2016, the highest frequency of charges included:

- 69 Possession of photo/picture showing sexual performance by a child
- 50 Traveling to meet minor to commit unlawful sexual offense
- 50 Use Internet to solicit/attempt to solicit a child for sex/lewdness

Agent Knowles explained that the agency prioritizes investigating pornographic images of infants and toddler-aged children, because those images are indicative of a predator who is a repeat, preferential molester.

Online predators are really good at presenting themselves as a child’s hero or salvation. Predators often encourage child victims to run away from home and assist in orchestrating that exit strategy. The child thinks she/he is running away into a situation that will be loving, but by the time the child gets there it is already too late. In most cases, within 24 hours runaways have already been sexually abused by the person they were running to and are likely being trafficked for sex by the predators immediately. According to Agent Knowles, between 2011 and 2015, there were 58,000 endangered

runaways nationwide. Of these, 83% were returned home and from their interviews, agents found that 1 in 5 were sex trafficked before

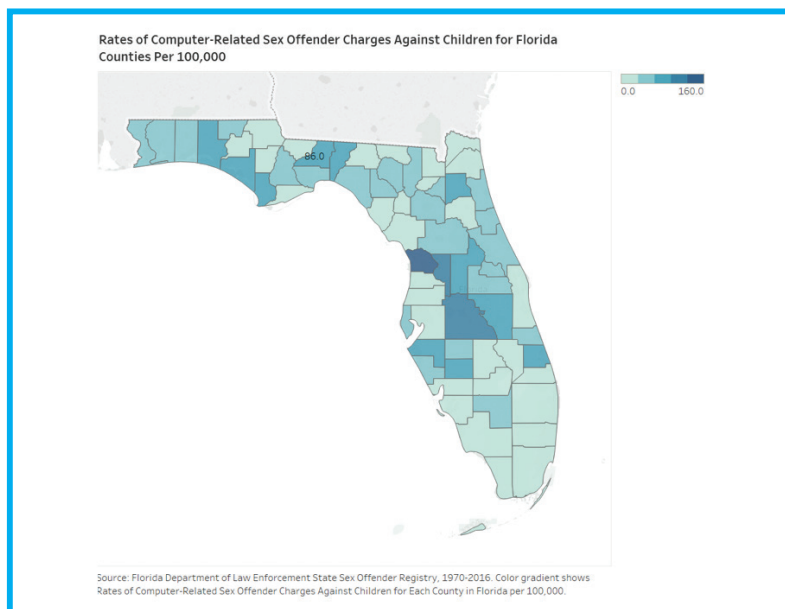
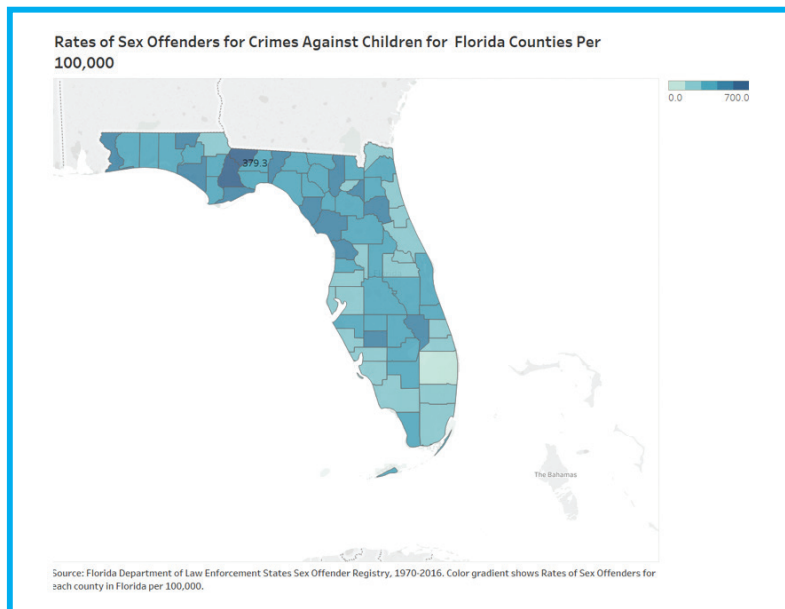
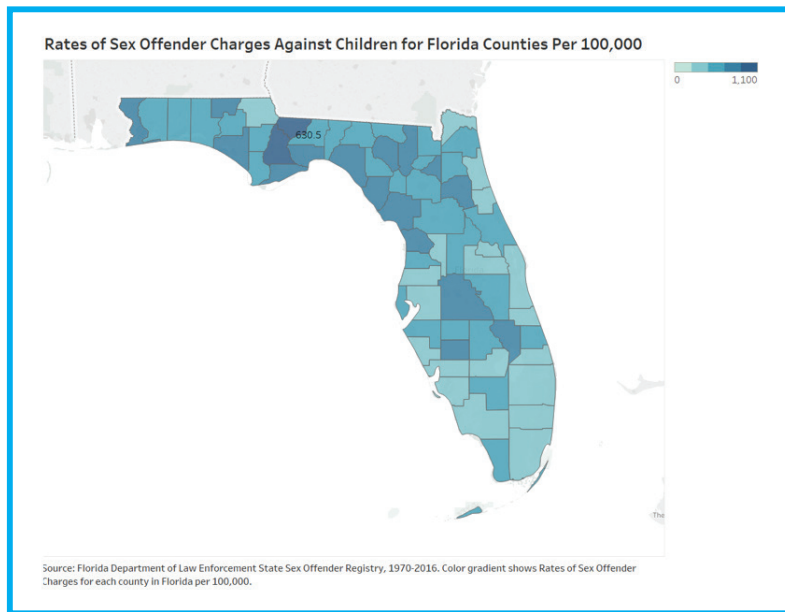
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Insights

Girls described various aspects of unhealthy relationships during our community conversations, including emotional and physical abuse from romantic partners:

“Define unhealthy relationship: Someone who bothers a girl over and over again, treating you wrong but others don’t believe you at all. People who stay in relationships where the person is not treating you well. When a person stays with a guy who pushes them around or beats on them, and abuses them. I am really close to a person like this, and it made me upset. My cousin was dating one of my friends, and I didn’t believe her when she said she was being beat on.” —Girl from PACE Center for Girls, Leon, Oasis Girls Circle Group

<< sexual violence in the lives of girls continued



they returned home. Sixty-four percent said they were running away from foster care and 35% from their biological family or parents.

Agent Knowles explained the dangers of social media for girls. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse, often adult men, pose as younger same-sex (girl) online friends who lure teenage girls into situations where they inflict sexual violence and trafficking by tricking them.

Once a girl is already in the web of the perpetrator's sexual exploitation, social media may continue to be used to perpetrate further crimes against her.

Agent Knowles offered many practical suggestions for the ways in which we as parents, teachers, and community members can empower children to make safe decisions and stop this process early.

- We need to commit to creating age-appropriate material to teach girls and boys about the risks associated with sharing pictures and talking to strangers online.
- Parents need to stay informed on new technologies and social media platforms their children might be using. There are certain platforms most likely to be used by online predators: Skype, Kik, Tumblr, Tinder, Instagram, Snapchat, Omegle, and dating sites like OkCupid, Bumble, Plenty of Fish, Grindr.
- Communities need to find ways to collect additional, localized data about social media use. Communities need to track the age when children first gain access to this technology, the age when they are first sexually solicited online, and how many teens are providing nude images based on requests or coercion from online predators, to name a few.

Conclusion

Far too many girls in our community are exposed to sexual violence. The available data show only a small piece of a vast, complex reality the girls face everywhere they go. Sexual violence in youth causes lifelong trauma that affects girls' ability to thrive. Trauma-informed care needs to be more heavily integrated into our community's response to sexual violence against girls. As a community, we need to continue advocating for more robust data tracking of sexual violence against girls, offer support and encourage wraparound services for victims of child sexual abuse, and bring awareness and education to the increasing presence of online predators in girls' lives. #YOTG

The PACE Center for Girls, Leon County: A Gender-Responsive Prevention and Early Intervention Program for Girls *By Kelly Otte*

Of the 202 girls we served from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015, 38% were ages 11 to 14 and 62% were ages 15 to 18. Girls were racially/ethnically identified as being Black (67%), White (28%), Hispanic (3%) or Other (2%). An overwhelming majority, 81%, of the girls had three or more risk factors:

- 27% had a learning disability;
- 57% of the girls had a parent or sibling incarcerated or on probation;
- 18% had a seriously ill parent;
- 30% had a parent with substance abuse addictions;
- 32% experienced domestic violence in the home;
- 25% were living away from their parents in outside placement and 6% were in foster care;
- 50% were living in a single parent household;
- 23% had been physically abused;
- 25% sexually abused;
- 22% had been raped;
- 75% had serious physical health problems;
- 20% had substance abuse issues;
- 22% had considered suicide and 20% had attempted suicide;
- 53% had eating disorders or unhealthy eating behaviors;
- 34% had a prior arrest and 20% were on probation.

Since opening, PACE Leon has served over 2,100 girls and helped them gain the skills and knowledge they need to lead healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives. The PACE Model is effective and impactful. Of the girls served in the past 2 years:

- 95% of the girls did not have adjudication (or adjudication withheld) in the juvenile justice system while enrolled in the program;

- 95% had no involvement within six months after transitioning out of the program;
- 100% of the girls did not have additional involvement within one year of transition;
- 98% of the girls earned a high school diploma (or GED), or mainstreamed back to their public school, an appropriate educational setting, or were employed or were placed in an appropriate placement based on their individual treatment plan;
- 91% of the girls stayed enrolled in the program for longer than 30 days;
- 97% of the girls transitioned to an appropriate educational placement consistent with their individualized treatment/case plan;
- 88% of the girls who stayed at least 90 days in the program increased their academic functioning;
- 93% of girls served reduced conflict at home;
- 100% of the girls served by the Reach Program reported increased self-efficacy and self-esteem.

“One of my greatest strengths is learning, but sometimes people misunderstand it as asking stupid questions, which makes me feel sad.”

Kelly Otte is Executive Director of The PACE Center for Girls in Leon County and is a trailblazing, celebrated advocate for women and girls. She served as a Commissioner on the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls from 2011 to 2014. In 2007, she founded The Oasis Center for Women & Girls in Tallahassee. #VOTG



Essay on School Dress Codes *By Casey*

Controversies surrounding school dress codes are an increasingly prominent and pervasive issue in today's society. Some might dismiss it as unimportant, and I suppose sending a young girl home to change isn't in itself a large issue in the scheme of things. However, it goes far beyond disagreement over the visibility of bra straps and actually gives us a crystal clear insight into how dominant patriarchy and its consequence are in today's society, and how dominant they are from a young age.

Back in November, I was dress-coded and sent home for wearing leggings to school. I was told that my mother would have to leave work to drive me home to change, or I would have to stay in In-School-Suspension for the entire day. I wasn't allowed to go to my classes, take tests, turn in homework, or see my classmates. That is, not until I was wearing something less "distracting."

The reason behind all of this is apparently because our outfits are considered "distractions" to the boys in our school and are, therefore, an obstacle to their education. There is something very wrong

with the implementation of a school policy which unequally affects girls and boys. For example, when girls' clothes are perceived to be too much of a distraction for boys to handle, girls get sent home from school (or to In-School Suspension), thus precluding them from access to their own education. Such a policy and practice prioritizes a boy's education over a girl's education. It sends a very strong message to our youth that schools care more about what girls wear than whether they learn. It blames a girl for boys' distraction and the actions that may follow—staring, pointing, ogling, teasing, and making suggestive comments. It shames a girl into thinking that the unwanted attention is her own fault. It teaches boys that if a girl wears leggings, shorts, or has her shoulders showing that they are absolved from staring and making comments and acting inappropriately, and that it is the girl's fault for drawing their attention in the first place. This mindset is prevalent in the objectification, harassment, and sexual assault of girls, teaching boys that they are blameless and free to act as they wish. This normalizes asking, "But what

was she wearing?" and perpetuates victim blaming.

We need to find a way to change our system of dress code enforcement so it doesn't plant the seed for a perpetual cycle of sexism and potential violence. We can't keep telling our girls that they are of less importance than boys, that it's their fault for being objectified. We can't keep contributing to a culture that perpetuates violence against women and girls.

Instead, we should be teaching boys that it is inappropriate under any circumstance to objectify a girl, regardless of what she is wearing. We need to teach kids to be more tolerant and accepting, and to discourage objectifying and bullying behavior. The answer is not to remove the distraction—the short shorts, the leggings—but rather to identify and eliminate the intolerant and objectifying attitudes and behaviors that our culture perpetuates.

Casey is in 10th grade. She lives and goes to school in Tallahassee. #YOTG

The Anti-Defamation League (2014) has developed educational materials including tools, strategies and conversations starters about current events. In their educational series about dress codes, they explore the history of dress codes nationally.

Conversation starters and other tools and strategies to explore this topic are available for parents, families, and educators at www.adl.org.





COMMUNITY HELPING GIRLS AND GIRLS CHANGING THE WORLD

Girls who participated in our Community Conversations throughout the commission year were passionate about their communities and about helping others. We are all fortunate to live in a community where girls respond in such fun, loving, and meaningful ways to community-wide and personal challenges. Responses to two particular survey questions highlight the range of expression received from girls in our community.

WHAT IS ONE THING THE COMMUNITY COULD DO TO HELP YOU REACH YOUR GOALS?

Girls from Palmer Munroe Teen Center

"They could give me money so I could have a full scholarship."

"My community could support me [in]getting to culinary school."

"... Well, there is nothing they can do they haven't [already]done. They have given me advice and they have directed me to the right place, like coming here, and I have now earned two scholarships for college ... I am actually helping other kids and helping the ESE kids during sixth period."

"Not really anything."

Girls from Rickards High School, Oasis Girls Circle Group

"They can start having programs, like tutoring, food drives and mentoring...but Tallahassee is just broke."

"The city isn't broke; they just don't know what they want to do with their money. One thing the community can do to help me out, so I can do things to help [the community]

out, is changing people's mind sets. I know that it's hard, but I need them to be just a little more open-minded."

"Like instead of putting young people in jail, they can make them do different things instead of putting them in jail, because I know 16 year olds in jail."

Girls from PACE Center for Girls, Leon

"Stop stereotyping us. People out in the community automatically think negatively of us. ... One lady asked me what school I go to, and when I said PACE, she said you need to get yourself together. The community should offer more mentoring programs to help teens, to support them, and help them out in school and for the future. I had to tell someone, 'It is not a school for bad kids,' since he didn't know what PACE is. PACE should make a commercial to talk about PACE. The community should see us in a different light—increase our visibility. We have to prove them wrong. This community should change the way girls are treated."

Girls from Fairview Middle School, Oasis Girls Circle Group

"I don't want kids to say they had a bad neighborhood or bad childhood or dirty neighborhood. I just don't want them to have to say that."

"The community can't really help me because what I want to do has nothing to do with the community."

Girls from Oak Ridge Elementary, Oasis Girls Circle Group

"Have fundraisers and protests. Give to heart disease."

"Throw me a party and bring LeBron James and other famous people here to help me become motivated."

"Get rid of breast cancer. Get people money they need. Some people don't have homes, so people could have homes."

"I don't have any set goals right now, except academics. [The] community can't help me with that."



IF YOU HAD A MAGIC STICK, AND COULD CHANGE SOMETHING TO MAKE YOUR LIFE OR OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES BETTER, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

Girls from Fairview Middle School, Oasis Girls Circle Group

"I would change my economy because I would like to give back to people who give me stuff. I would also give back to my church. God says give 10%. I would help homeless people who don't have food or a place to stay."

"I would help my brother's life, because my mom has to travel from place to place just to get my brother's legs fixed. He's bowlegged and he's always in pain but we don't know how to handle it. I'd change little people's lives because they struggle with a lot of stuff because they can't do what average sized people do."

"I would change my mother because she really needs some help. She needs to get her own house, and her own car. There's a man that's down the street from my grandma house that has to live in a shed."

"I would help people who are sick and don't have no legs, I would use my magic stick to give them legs. My cousin doesn't have legs."

Girls from Palmer Munroe Teen Center

"That I would get anything I want. I want a better life for my family. Like, us—in our own house. My mom having my sister back. My brother being good and not getting into trouble. My mom getting a new car..."

"I want [to help] the homeless people because after they make their mistakes, they [can] have a second chance at life."

"Food. My wish would be [to attend] culinary school. I would go to Africa and give everybody cheeseburgers. Food and clean water."

"...We could go to high school and college providing enough money so families can send their kids to college. Support kids going to school."

Girls from Oak Ridge Elementary, Oasis Girls Circle Group

"Something I regret doing. Can't say what it is."

"My dream is to go out and be myself and be what I want to be, not put myself down, or have trouble. Really wanna grow up and be a gospel singer, or like Beyoncé."

"My cousin—how she acts. And how my other cousin never should've gone to jail, but she shouldn't have said something bad to police; and the people dying in my family."

"Prevent my granddaddy from dying of cancer."

Girls from Rickards High School, Oasis Girls Circle Group

"I need ...more money. I want to be rich, ... then I can donate to hospitals."

"If I had one, everybody would be rich and everything would be free. I'm including everybody."

"I would build more houses for the homeless, after that I would think [a]bout myself and get more money."

"I would cure everything, so everyone can live a normal life. And depression, too." #YOTG



#YEAROFTHEGIRL Summit 2015-16

At the beginning of the 2015-16 commission year, once girls were decidedly the focus, the Commission announced the #YOTG program and the Summit to be held in September 2016 to celebrate girls in our community. The Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CSWG) recognized several #YOTG honorees—local girls who are making a difference in our community and are doing incredibly inspiring work in their neighborhoods and schools. The 2015-16 commission year culminated in a girls empowerment summit designed to:

- Engage a diverse group of girls
- Encourage girls to recognize and achieve their personal and professional potential
- Engage around the issues they face and strategies for overcoming challenges
- Empower them to make a difference in our community through education, leadership, and self-actualization

Hosted by CSWG, the #YOTG Summit was held from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on September 23, 2016 at City Hall in Tallahassee, Florida. Former CSWG Commissioner and the First Lady of Tallahassee, R. Jai Gillum, spoke to the over 100 girls in attendance during the opening session to get them excited for the day ahead of them:

“We’re counting on you to make sure that every year is the year of the girl.”

“Before we can empower each other, we have to first empower ourselves.”

“We believe that every girl can embrace who she is, can define who she wants to be, can rise to any challenge, and can change the world.”

Leon County and City of Tallahassee Commissioners were well represented, including County Commissioner Kristin Dozier; County Commissioner Nick Maddox; County Commissioner Mary Ann Lindley; City Commissioner Nancy Miller; and City Commissioner Curtis Richardson.

In addition to the girls, about 50 adult women attended as speakers, volunteers, and chaperones. Numerous vendors tabled with information about community and campus. The summit was an amazing opportunity for the Commission to collaborate with community members and organizations.

Breakout sessions were organized by grades 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12 and included discussions about unleashing their potential, finding their authentic selves, healthy relationships, and preparing for college.

Closing presenter Denise Wilson rallied the girls to keep the energy going during her speech to the summit: “You have choices now. Now, what you could do is you could say ‘Yeah, we had a lot of fun, and now it’s time to go home. I’m going to go home, and I’m going to do things the way I’ve always done them.’ That is a choice. Or... you can choose to take what you did here today back with you and you can share it with other people. You can take it back and you can make a difference in your life and that will make a difference in other people’s lives...it’s your choice. You choose.” #YOTG



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"One of my greatest strengths is performing in front of people, but sometimes people misunderstand it as wanting all the attention or showing off, which makes me feel angry."



**Club 25 believes
in creating a world where
all women and girls can achieve
their fullest potential.**



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