



girls' task force:  
youth needs assessment findings

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## Introduction

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The Santa Cruz Girls' Task Force (SCGTF) was organized in order to assess and address the needs of girls at highest risk of entering detention.

The SCGTF began a formal needs assessment of girls in April 2005. The needs assessment was designed to measure where girls in the county perceive gaps in services related to physical and mental health, as well as social services. This report summarizes the findings from the SCGTF Youth Survey.

## Research Design and Methods

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The SCGTF Youth Survey was developed collaboratively by task force members and girls residing in detention. Angela Irvine, Ph.D., the Principal of Ceres Policy Research and a member of the task force, drafted a survey and then revised the instrument based on feedback that she collected from other task force members. Toni Spencer, the Assistant Superintendent of the Youth Detention Hall and also a task force member, piloted the survey with girls residing in the hall. The instrument was then further revised to incorporate the girls' feedback.

The survey was administered at a movie screening for youth with experience in detention as well as all alternative education sites throughout Santa Cruz County. 218 surveys were collected. Respondents varied across gender, ethnic and racial identity, language, zip code, suspension and expulsion history, detention history, and home removal history. Exact numbers are reported below.

### *Gender*

121 surveys were collected from boys and 97 surveys were collected from girls.

### *Ethnicity/Race and Language*

62 surveys were collected from youth with a white racial identity, 6 surveys were collected from youth with an Asian racial identity, 112 surveys were collected from youth with a Chicano or Latino ethnic identity, 5 surveys were collected from youth with an African American racial identity. 29 surveys were collected from youth with more than one ethnic or racial identity.

109 surveys were collected from youth who speak only English. 90 surveys were collected from youth who speak both English and Spanish.

### *Zip Code*

24 surveys were collected from youth with a zip code in north county, 58 surveys were collected from youth with a zip code in the city of Santa Cruz, 10 surveys were collected from youth with a mid-county zip code, and 109 surveys were collected from youth with a south-county zip code.

### *Suspensions, Expulsions, Detention, and Home Removal*

169 of the respondents have been suspended from school, 84 of the respondents have been expelled, 91 of the respondents have been in juvenile detention, and 43 of the respondents have been removed from their home.

## Findings

### **Girls' Perceived Gaps in Services**

Ceres Policy Research first analyzed the data to determine where girls perceive gaps in services.

The survey contained six questions asking youth about their use of basic health services and sixteen questions asking youth whether they have knowledge about various types of mental health, physical health, and social services. Each of the questions asked youth to respond on a four point scale, with a “1” meaning “strongly disagree,” a “2” meaning “disagree,” a “3” meaning “agree,” and a “4” meaning “strongly agree.”

For this section, we only analyze girls' responses. Girls' average responses varied between 2.78 and 3.42. There were five average responses below “3.”<sup>1</sup> These are listed below.

**Table 1: Girls' Low Average Responses**

<b>survey question</b>	<b>average response</b>
<b>I see a counselor regularly.</b>	2.78
<b>I exercise regularly.</b>	2.93
<b>I have healthy eating habits.</b>	2.80
<b>I know where to get health insurance.</b>	2.83
<b>I know where to find a job.</b>	2.83

<sup>1</sup> Any average response below a “3” means that girls, on average, don't know where to go for a particular type of service.

To understand whether there were particular subgroups that were more likely to perceive gaps in services, Ceres Policy Research ran regression analyses of the findings. There were no notable differences across ethnic or racial identity, language, area of residence, suspension history, expulsion history, or home removal history.

### **Safe Place to Stay**

A previous informal survey of girls in Santa Cruz County in south-county alternative education sites shows that between 95-100% of girls have experienced some form of relationship abuse (Watkins and Couchman 2005). In addition, a previous study of Santa Cruz County girls in detention found that girls are more likely to run away from placement or detention, when compared to boys (Irvine 2005). For this reason, we ran an analysis to understand which girls are most likely to need a safe place to stay. We found that there were no notable differences across subgroups.

### **Access to Drug and Alcohol Services**

A previous study of girls in detention in Santa Cruz County found that girls are most likely to be held in detention for drug and alcohol related offenses, when compared with boys (Irvine 2005). For this reason, we ran a regression analysis to understand which girls are most likely to need information about drug and alcohol services. Again, we found no notable differences across subgroups.

## **Summary**

Ceres Policy Research found that there were five questions with low average responses for girls: use of counselors, exercise, healthy eating habits, access to health insurance, and access to information about jobs.

Ceres Policy Research found that all subgroups of girls appear to have an equal need for services and information, including a safe place to stay and access to drug and alcohol services.

## **References**

Irvine, Angela. "Data Analysis of Santa Cruz Probation Department Booking Data from 2004," report presented to the Santa Cruz Probation Department and Annie E. Casey Foundation, May, 2005.

Watkins, Martine and Cyndie Couchman. "Informal Survey of Girls' Circle Participants and DeWitt Anderson School Students," presentation to the Girls' Task Force, May, 2005.