

DC Girls Coalition

The DC Girls Coalition is comprised of a multi-disciplinary network of youth-serving advocacy and victim service organizations who work together to amplify the voices of young women and girls in the District of Columbia. Together, we strive to reduce the reliance on justice system responses to trauma, uplift young women and girls as leaders and advocates, and build a cadre of organizations dedicated to creating and implementing gender-responsive and trauma-informed policies and programs. We believe that in order to generate solutions that are affirming for all girls, including non-conforming and transgender young women and girls, we must see them as they are: multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and dynamic.

Background

The road to adulthood for girls includes different challenges and developmental experiences than that of boys. As the largest growing juvenile justice population, girls who come into contact with the system also have some of the highest rates of mental health needs, trauma, and unsafe home environments among youth in the system.

Recent research has helped us better understand how girls experience, cope, and respond to trauma. Many of these behaviors have led to direct, gendered pathways into the criminal justice system, especially for girls of color. How the District chooses to respond is within our control. If we want better results for girls, we must address the root causes of their behavior and provide a holistic approach to supporting young women and girls. Developing gender responsive, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, strength based, and developmentally appropriate services is key to changing the narrative for young women and girls. Now is the time to focus on women and girls of color.

“ Do I act a certain way because it’s me or because it’s the pain inside me? ”
- QUOTE FROM GIRLS VOICES

Girls Voices on Juvenile Justice

In Spring 2017, the DC Girls Coalition brought together 15 young women and girls of color for a youth advocacy and storytelling workshop. “Girls Voices”



was developed over three full-day workshops exploring issues pertinent to juvenile justice, school pushout, dating violence and sexual assault. Youth shared stories of community, joy and pride alongside experiences of structural racism, discrimination, abuse and more. We engaged in listening sessions, journaling, poetry, spoken word and

training in advocacy and leadership skills. The girls’ own words appear throughout this book. We invite you to listen to their stories, letters and poems.

About Us

The DC Girls Coalition was created through an innovation grant to the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence from the National Girls Initiative (NGI) of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention). The NGI focuses on catalyzing change for girls in, and at risk of entering, the juvenile justice system.