



Best Practices for Girl- and Young Women Friendly Cities: TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE

Prepared by POWER Camp National/Filles d'Action

For the World Urban Forum III
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
June 2006

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This publication is also available as a PDF on our website:
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An in-depth report, *Best Practices: Experience, Knowledge and Approaches for Working with and for Girls and Young Women* is available on our website: www.powercampnational.ca. The report includes case studies of over 20 local-level Canadian initiatives that engage girls in social justice education and community action, as well as an in-depth resource guide for policy-makers, community organizations and programmers.



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INTRODUCTION

POWER Camp National/Filles d'Action (PCN) has been hard at work developing a document on “best practices” in working with and for girls and young women in the Canadian context. Drawing on innovative programs that have been implemented by members of PCN’s national network of grassroots girl-serving organizations, the report amassed a range of experiences and expertise regarding potential strategies for working with girls and young women.¹ Its objective was to create a document in which young women and their allies could name their issues, concerns and challenges, share and learn about programming strategies and future plans, and articulate a variety of practices that have worked well. The preparation of that document helped us come to better understand the multiplicity and complexity of issues facing girls and girl-specific programs in Canada at the present time.

The timely occasion of the World Urban Forum III has provided PCN with a wonderful opportunity:

- to make the links between girls and young women, gender specific spaces and the WUF priority issues: civic engagement, governance and cities;
- to highlight some of the particular findings of our “best practices” research and analysis with a more specific focus on urban environments;
- to synthesize that research with the latest international research and practice on engaging girls and young women in civil society;
- to pinpoint and discuss some of the issues of immediate concern to girls and young women in city settings; and
- to share successful strategies in programming for girls (including the POWER Camp National approach—a model for delivering girl-specific programs that support violence prevention, poverty reduction and civic engagement) both nationally and internationally.

¹ POWER Camp National/Filles D'Action's “Best Practices: Experience, Knowledge and Approaches for Working with and for Girls and Young Women” will be available at: www.powercampnational.ca.

Rapid urbanization and its impact on communities, cities, economies and policies is indeed one of the pressing issues facing our world. It is absolutely imperative that girls and young women play an active role in the discussion and debate on creating healthy, safe, equitable, and sustainable cities. PCN looks forward to facilitating that conversation. It is our hope that this document, *Best Practices for Girl- and Young Women-Friendly Cities: Towards an International Dialogue* will help stimulate discussion about how to engage girls in their communities, build their strengths, and incorporate their concerns into policy and urban development. Our experience and that of PCN network members has shown that girl-specific programs fostering social justice education are an effective and promising approach to violence prevention and civic engagement among young women.

POWER Camp National/Filles d'action: An Overview

POWER Camp National/Filles D'Action is a Canadian charitable organization focused on the research and involvement of girls and young women in communities. PCN creates and supports social justice education for girls and young women across Canada. We work directly with girls in the city of Montréal, facilitate a national network of over 75 girl-serving organizations, and provide resources for organizations and individuals doing similar work. PCN also collaborates with academics, policy makers, youth organizations, and others whose work supports girls. The vision of PCN is for "every girl to have access to the resources and support necessary to bring her gifts to the world and to participate fully in society. By building a movement of active, engaged young women and organizations across Canada, PCN envisions a new generation committed to creating a just and peaceful world."

Girl-specific spaces: Programming with and for Girls and Young Women in Canada

I think it is *really* important to have girl-specific spaces, because in all fairness there are *none*.

– Jen Fawcette, METRAC

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation's report *Girls In Canada 2005*, a "gender-specific girls' program" is defined as

[a] single-sex program intentionally designed to respond to the specific needs and strengths of the girls it serves...[T]here is no one experience of being a girl. Gender combines with race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and dis/ability status to shape girls individually and collectively, and programs for girls need to reflect such diversity.²

"Girl-specific programs" then, are those that focus on girls' voices, concerns and realities. Just as there is "no one experience of being a girl," girl-specific programs themselves are not homogenous. They vary according to context (be it geography, background, target issue(s), or situation) yet they are all generally designed to affirm girls' experiences and initiatives and to provide room to explore their thoughts and understandings, to spark their imaginations, and to express their creativity.

As such, gender-specific girls' programs in Canada must simultaneously balance a diversity of girls' realities from region to region across the country while also fostering the strengths and abilities of participating girls. Programmers must consider the multiple ways "girl" is performed and experienced as well as how it fluctuates with intersections of race, class, age and experience. As Marni Kellison (of PCN's Girls Club) notes, "these programs help girls locate themselves within larger complex societal systems and to be aware of and sensitive to the situations of those other than themselves."

² Canadian Women's Foundation, *Girls In Canada 2005* (by Calhoun Research and Development/ Recherche et développement Shediac, NB, with C. Lang Consulting, Toronto, ON & Irène Savoie, Chiasson Office, NB, September 2005) 55.

Girls In Canada reports that while girl-specific programming—“a wide-ranging and diverse offering from neighbourhood based activity groups, to innovative social action projects, to national networks that support and network with local girls’ empowerment programs”—is being conducted throughout the nation,

[i]t is difficult to say...whether these are sufficient to address the needs of girls in urban, rural and northern communities across Canada. We can venture a guess that with 2.9 million girls in Canada under the age of 14, the coverage is likely woefully inadequate.³

Very little research has been done on the instances of programming for girls in the Canadian context. Making it even more difficult to determine the effects and importance of girl-specific programming, the group “girls” is commonly collapsed into the categories “women” or “youth” in both research and programming. Additionally, there is resistance to the very notion of “all-girls” programming; some argue that it promotes false gender dichotomies, while others go as far as to suggest that it discriminates against boys. Jiwani, Steenbergen and Mitchell (2006) note that

[w]hile the amount of attention that the category “girl” (however loosely defined) has increased in recent years, there remains a propensity among researchers to favour an ostensibly more encapsulating focus on “youth” rather than concentrating on the multifaceted nature of girls’ lived realities; to collapse gender differences to examine a theoretical “whole.” This tendency has also translated into a blurring of age distinctions by focusing on the category of “women” in general. Either way, any and all elements—as well as the nuances—of “being a girl” vanish. Simultaneously, these categorizations have been accompanied by a strategic move that dismantles differences between and among girls and young women—differences based on their location at diverse intersecting and interlocking sites of societal and structural forces.⁴

The Canadian Women’s Foundation concurs, noting that “much of this youth programming today has become ‘gender-blind,’ and does not take

³ Ibid, 56.

⁴ Yasmin Jiwani, Candis Steenbergen & Claudia Mitchell, “Girlhood: The Canadian Terrain,” Introduction to *Girlhood: Redefining the Limits* (Montreal, Black Rose Books, 2006) x.

into account the specific needs and interests of girls and the significant disparities girls and women face in access to resources and opportunities.”⁵ Sadly, that has forced many feminist grassroots organizations to “prove” the need for this type of programming. As PCN’s Salma Ahmad comments, “when it comes to discussing potential girls programs, sometimes organizations don’t really see it as a priority, and you can either convince them, or try elsewhere. Also, organizations don’t want to offer a girls program if there is no boys program. We think a boys program is important too, but we don’t offer that.” “Youth” as an overarching umbrella term often gets understood as signifying boys or young men, and tends to overlook the different issues and needs of girls and young women.

The few notable studies that have been conducted in the fairly recent past consistently note that there continues to be a significant need for gender-specific girls’ programming in Canada, especially within ethno-specific communities and impoverished neighbourhoods, as well as rural and Northern regions.⁶ Those studies also highlight a need for increased partnerships between associations serving girls and young women as well as stronger, more visible spaces for girls’ voices in the country.

Gender-specific initiatives are strategies that explicitly appropriate the word “girl” in order to fill the gaps in youth programming. “Girl-specific programs” have had overwhelmingly positive results, and giving girls the opportunity to address, critique and develop their ideas, experiences and imaginings has led to some remarkable outcomes. As POWER Camp National puts it, “our unique approach invites young women into a process where their voices are heard and validated, and where the exchange of their stories breaks down barriers. By affirming young women’s experiences in a dialogue-oriented youth forum, they are empowered to develop their own critical understandings of and approaches to the challenges they face.”⁷

⁵ Canadian Women’s Foundation, 56.

⁶ Girls In Canada 2005 notes that the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence’s Phase I report (published in 1999) included a database on girls’ programs in Canada (one undoubtedly out of date by now), and the Toronto YWCA conducted a study on girls’ programs in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), in 2003 (one limited by its location). See also Jiwani, Steenbergen & Mitchell (2006).

⁷ <http://www.powercampnational.ca/html/what01.html>

Girl-Specific Spaces and the World Urban Forum

UN-Habitat has identified areas that need to be developed and strengthened in order to achieve sustainable and equitable cities. Two of these areas have particular importance for girls: civic engagement/governance and safety. Girl-specific programs are an important element in increasing girls' engagement and representation in cities and safety and freedom from violence. We will examine each of these two objectives to identify issues that girls and young women face and to explore how all-girls programs can help advance girls' status in each area.



ISSUES I: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, POPULAR EDUCATION, & EMPOWERING GIRLS

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT relates to a notion of community belonging, “the experience of investment, and the position of ownership a citizen feels throughout the local, national and international communities to which they belong” (Wikipedia).

The primary goal of grassroots girl-specific organizations is to engage girls and young women in their communities through a combination of local activism, popular education, leadership initiatives and creative arts. Many recognize that an investment in the future of girls and young women is an investment in the future of Canadian society, because “youth who participate in community activities are more likely to be involved in their community as adults.”⁸ Therefore, girls and young women need to be represented as crucial stakeholders in urban sustainability.

Through civic engagement girls and young women have a greater sense of belonging and confidence which increases their participation in the advancement of social justice in urban settings. As a participant from a gender-specific workshop with Anti-dote (Victoria, BC) said,

I feel more confident now to speak in public about these issues and to be an advocate for other girls like me, to really make change happen. I feel like my voice matters and that I have the knowledge and the skills to make the change happen.⁹

⁸ R.D. Putnam, “The Prosperous Community,” *The American Prospect Online*. 4:13 (June 1993). <http://www.prospect.org/print/V4/13/putnam-r.html>

⁹ Dr. Jo-Anne Lee. “Anti-dote: Multi-Racial Girls and Young Women’s Network: a Case Study” *Best Practices: Experience, Knowledge & Approaches for Working with and for Girls and Young Women*. POWER Camp National (May 2006).

How does community activism enhance girls' level of civic engagement?

Many grassroots organizations in the POWER Camp National network encourage girls and young women to act directly in their communities to implement concrete change because it is an effective way to make girls aware of their own political potential. For example, Joanne Cave, the 14 year-old youth coordinator and creator of Ophelia's Voice (Sherwood Park, AB), taught leadership and global awareness workshops where girls had to "implement a service, action or project in their community that coincided with their passion and utilized their facilitation and leadership skills."¹⁰ Community activism helps girls build capacity to take action in both their communities as well as at the policy level on important issues such as violence and poverty.

Girls who live in low-income urban settings face many challenges that are countered by community action and engagement. Girls' involvement in their communities helps bridge the gaps between ethnic groups and alleviates the negative representation and assumptions that stigmatize girls who come from economically marginalized areas. For example, Ghettofabulous (Ottawa, ON), a discussion group for girls, works for the positive reclamation of the term "ghetto" and encourages girls and young women from economically marginalized and violent urban settings to become politically engaged at the local level, as well as think critically about systems of power that limit their lives and influence their potential. The discussion forums facilitate girls' sharing of experiences and comments about what it means to live "on the block."

"I call it Ghettofabulous because I really want to highlight the real advantages of living in this neighbourhood to offset the sense of shame and stigma the girls have to contend with."¹¹

The girls involved come from different racial, religious and cultural backgrounds, including ethnicities that have historically been in conflict with each other. Ghettofabulous tries to ethically negotiate these

¹⁰ Joanne Cave, "Ophelia's Voice: a Case Study" in *Best Practices: Experience, Knowledge & Approaches to Working with and for Girls and Young Women*. POWER Camp National, May 2006.

¹¹ Chelby Marie Daigle, "Ghettofabulous," *Best Practices: Experience, Knowledge & Approaches to Working with and for Girls and Young Women*. POWER Camp National, May 2006.

differences and help the girls work collaboratively in their communities. Instead of negating and denying its potential, difference is seen as a tool for understanding the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, gender and religion in their neighbourhood.

“Our discussions often focus on seeing the neighbourhood as a wonderfully diverse community, a diversity that one would probably not be able to find in a neighbourhood with a higher income bracket. Our community is full of rich human resources that the girls are able to tap into if they wish [...] Discussions about religion allow the girls to dispel some of the fear they have of each other as well as some of the misinformation they have built up regarding each other’s way of life [...] Through these various discussions, I hope to give the girls the chance to better understand their lived experience.”¹²

“I also hope to build a sense of community amongst the girls that crosses ethnic and religious lines, in which they can begin to see each other as resources of support and allies who are dealing with similar issues and struggles.”¹³

“I really hope for the girls to see that their neighbourhood is a fascinating place to live and that they need not be ashamed.”¹⁴

Internationally, young women’s activism and engagement often targets poverty and the improvement of the day-to-day quality of life for women and girls in impoverished cities. Since many girls are significantly under-educated, grassroots communications initiatives in developing countries have been using technology and media training to facilitate girls’ civic engagement.

For example, *Women’s Voices* is part of the “International Women’s Information and Communications Technology (WICT) project which works with poor urban women from Kenya, Peru and Zimbabwe by supporting their existing communications skills, as well as giving them the chance to reach, inform, and influence those that have the power to affect their lives.”¹⁵ Women’s voices need to reach community and political leaders in order for policy debates about poverty in these countries to include the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ WICT “Women’s Voices” http://www.itdg.org/print.php?id=womens_voices2

realities of women and take into account the multiple ways poverty hinders social and gender equity. By giving video cameras and adequate media training to women with limited literacy, Women's Voices (Nairobi) finally found a method to legitimately communicate with policy makers about the dire state of their community and their demands for change. The videos were shown on national television and "their families and neighbours have admired their new skills and now respect their views."¹⁶ Not only did media-skills strengthen these women's civic engagement and belonging, but they also influenced policy. At the video launch, "a cabinet minister promised to recall an official report to include details learnt from the women's videos."¹⁷

Girls and young women represent a wealth of untapped potential for social, political and economic transformation. They need to be engaged in their communities in order to develop and sustain girl-friendly cities. With the use of technological capacity-building and media training, girls and young women can access the public sphere and participate in social and political debates that will influence their quality of life in urban environments.

Popular Education: a tool for getting girls involved

Popular education has been used historically to help oppressed people legitimize their voices and concerns by using resources, tools, and knowledge for their empowerment. With a legitimate public voice, marginalized populations are able to increase their civic engagement, influence policy, and inspire social change. This radical type of education is based on sharing knowledge and experiences in an ethical and safe manner that values different learning abilities and skills. Popular education tries to dismantle hierarchical educational structures where only the so-called "experts" possess knowledge. Unlike traditional curriculum models that undervalue girls' and young women's lived experiences, this method views everyone involved as an expert in their own right.¹⁸ Since the educational system has generally been used to reinforce oppressive ideologies that keep certain people in subordinate positions, many

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ POWER Camp National "Fundamental Principles" www.powercampnational.ca

women's groups have used popular education to raise awareness about sexism and gender inequality in society. The curriculum structure is fluid and tends to focus on the relationship between personal experience and political structures, institutions, ideologies, and practice. "The personal is political" slogan sums up this approach very succinctly.

Unfortunately, popular education and feminist practitioners have mostly focused on adult experiences, failing to ask how these methods are important and useful for girls.

In "Popular Education with Girls: When Freire, Feminism and Fun Collide," Rachel Gouin asks how popular education theory can be applied to girls while addressing the lack of research and literature produced on this subject. POWER Camp National uses a popular, informal, and fun pedagogical approach in order to recognize young women's strengths instead of focusing solely on their victimization.

*"Popular education and feminism are not just about adults. Girls and young women also want to change things, but it has to be fun."*¹⁹

Skill-building is another aspect of how popular education programs can fuel civic engagement and poverty reduction among young women. Allowing girls and young women to develop their critical thinking skills as well as communications and technical skills enables them to build self-esteem and become actively involved in their cities and communities.

UNESCO offers several international education programs that focus on vocational, technical, and science training for girls and young women. A project was launched in Asia and the Pacific where out-of-school girls from rural and urban communities acquired technical skills to increase their job opportunities and standard of living. UNESCO's goal is to increase educational access for girls from impoverished areas and to "provide policy makers with a set of Good Practices and Guidelines" to better promote the participation of underprivileged girls in scientific, technical and vocational education."²⁰

¹⁹ Rachel Gouin, "Popular Education with Girls: When Freire, Feminism and Fun Collide," *GR: Journal for the Arts, Sciences and Technology*. 2:2 (2004) 97-101.

²⁰ <http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php>

UNESCO also reported that in some African countries girls and young women have trouble accessing scientific and technical education because of gender stereotypes. In order to break socio-cultural barriers for girls, they created a popular educational comic strip to sensitize “policy makers, parents, employers and the general public about the ways in which women and girls’ full participation in science and technology can make a positive difference for current and future generations.”²¹ With the use of this visual popular education tool, Yanna Billé presented a positive image of girls interested in science and technology. Comics proved to be an effective method for sensitizing girls, boys, parents, teachers, and policy makers about the importance of girls’ technical education and the reduction of gender disparity in scientific fields.

Since many African families live in poverty, they tend to invest in their sons’ educations because boys grow up to be heads-of-households, whereas girls are expected to be perpetually dependent. Many girls have extra chores and household duties as part of their training to be adequate wives, which hinders their concentration on schoolwork. Popular education is an effective method for addressing the gender gap in education and deconstructing stereotypes that justify oppressive gender roles.

In her article “‘The Girls do not learn hard enough so they cannot do certain types of work,’ Experiences from NGO-sponsored gender sensitization workshop in a Southern Ghanaian community,” Henrietta Abane explains how an educational gender gap in Ghana is maintained by sexist cultural values and how popular educational strategies are needed to deconstruct gender disparity in schools. Girl-specific spaces are an important part of creating a popular education initiative that will encourage girls to stay in school and pursue previously male-dominated occupations.

“A community participatory approach was used to help participants interact and identify their own problems within the community regarding education generally and girls in particular.”²²

²¹ Billé, Yanna. “Scientific, Technical and Vocational Education of Girls in Africa—Motivation through Comic Strips: an Example.” UNESCO 1996, (i).

²² Abane, Henrietta. “‘The girls do not learn hard enough so they cannot do certain types of work.’ Experiences from an NGO-sponsored gender sensitization workshop in a Southern Ghanaian community” in *Community Development Journal*. 39:1 (January 2004) p. 49-61.

“The methods merits include an emphasis on learning rather than teaching, the development of a democratic way of thinking, and the development of a spirit of tolerance.”²³

As a result of these popular education workshops, participants were eager to begin searching for ways to promote the education of girls in their community. They constructed a daily activity profile to find a solution to the girls’ heavy domestic work load. “They agreed to encourage the boys to share the housework,”²⁴ which challenged traditional work-related sex roles. Therefore, popular education can be used in many different contexts to stimulate discussion and dismantle sexist, racist or classist ideologies that hinder the advancement of girls and young women.

How can civic engagement lead to girls’ empowerment?

Empowerment has been defined as a “social action process in which individuals and groups act to gain mastery over their lives in the context of changing their social and political environments.”²⁵

Civic engagement is a strategy to help girls and young women realize their potential and feel empowered. Since girls are often socialized to be more compliant and soft-spoken, they feel less confident to publicly voice their views. In response to this social phenomenon, Ruta Valaitis’ research has linked community participation with empowerment and specifically revealed its significance for young women, as “83% of girls in inner-city schools in Canada said that they were not heard and felt disempowered in the larger community.”²⁶ According to Valaitis, community participation has helped inner-city girls and young women find a solid personal identity and increased their self-determination.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Valaitis, R. “‘They don’t trust us: We’re just kids.’ Views about community from predominantly female inner-city youth” in *Health Care for Women International*, 23:2 (June 2002) p. 248-266 referencing the work of Wallerstein & Bernstein 1994 p.142.

²⁶ Valaitis, R. “‘They don’t trust us: We’re just kids.’ Views about community from predominantly female inner-city youth” in *Health Care for Women International*, 23:2 (June 2002) p. 248-266.

“Girls need access to caring adults, involvement in organized community activities, and other protective environments to help them mature into healthy and productive women.”²⁷

Grassroots gender-specific programs are therefore crucial for the empowerment and civic engagement of young women. For example, the Vancouver-based leadership program Go! Girls has encouraged girls from economically marginalized communities to attend university—a feat that they never dreamed possible before attending Go! Girls’ workshops. The girls gained confidence through working with mentors, self-reflection exercises, media-awareness training and critical thinking discussions. Additionally, the program is held on a university campus, giving girls exposure to an environment they may not have experienced before. As Andrea Canales, program coordinator, notes, “most of the girls have been inspired to attend university, given that they have spent so much time already in the classrooms with Go! Girls.”²⁸

“Adolescents high in social support are high in perceived opportunity; they believe they will have access to opportunity for both educational and occupational advancement; they anticipate future success. In contrast, adolescents low in social support may perceive their access to, or ability to pursue, future opportunities for career and educational development to be more limited.”²⁹

Breaking gender barriers with the use of technology has been proven to empower young women in developing countries and solidify their political agency. For example, *Women’s Voices (WICT)* in Nairobi reported that “the empowerment of the individual young women within the groups has built the community’s capacity to develop. It is the women’s access to important information, their social contacts, family authority and their wealth of relevant knowledge, which is the foundation stone for family and community empowerment.”³⁰

²⁷ Weiler, Jeanne. “An Overview of Research on Girls and Violence.” *Choices Briefs*. 1:5 (January 2004) <http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/choices/briefs/choices01.html>

²⁸ Canales, Andrea. “Go Girls: a Case Study.” *Experience, Knowledge & Approaches to Working with and for Girls in Canada*. POWER Camp National, May 2006.

²⁹ Covell, Katherine, Peter D MacIntyre and Julie Wall. 1999. Implications of social supports for adolescents’ education and career aspirations. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*. 31(2): 63-71.

³⁰ WICT “Women’s Voices” http://www.itdg.org/print.php?id=womens_voices2

How is governance related to girls' civic engagement?

“Governance is the use of institutions, structures of authority and even collaboration to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy” (Wikipedia).

In Canada, only 21% of elected representatives are women. In the most recent B.C. Provincial election the number of women elected dropped to 20%. It is recognized globally that the participation of women in all facets of the community is key to the health development of that community. There is a growing realization that the same philosophy for women is also applied to youth—youth are important assets to the community, and if marginalized and not included, the community is harmed.³¹

In terms of gender-specific endeavours, governance encourages girls and young women to participate in decision-making and leadership. Since girls' voices are seldom heard at the policy level, gender-specific programs tend to promote girls' participation in local politics, campaigns and social life in order to encourage their advancement towards decision-making positions and involvement in policy-making.

According to the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), engaging girls and young women in governance will “generate awareness of the disadvantaged situations of girls among policy makers, planners and implementers at all levels as well as within households and communities.”³²

Despite common notions about young women's civic apathy, girls and young women in Canada are (and have been) active in their communities, and have even proposed several initiatives to their local governing bodies concerning important issues such as poverty and violence-prevention. Some examples include the following:

For the National Day of Action, February 14th 2006, Young Women & Real Power raised awareness about poverty with a 'zine on “Poverty, Power and Equality” and a giant quilted wall-hanging: “A Tree of Action: Visions for reducing poverty and promoting equality in Kenora.” These creations

³¹ Fraser, Tatiana and Joah Lui. “World Urban Forum III: Project Funding Request” POWER Camp National, October 31st 2005.

³² Article 278a. United Nations Fourth World conference on Women, 1995.

were on public display and presented to the Kenora City Council and Mayor in hopes of bringing awareness to inequality and poverty within their community.

Girls' Club, a grassroots girls-program that focuses on violence-prevention and social justice in Montreal, held a series of workshops and actions for the National Day of Action, which included themes of privilege and power. The girls then decided to write letters to the Prime Minister of Canada addressing the issue of poverty, as well as women's health issues and animal rights. Afterwards, the girls were given cameras and sent out into their neighborhoods to photograph what poverty meant to them. A public photography exhibit at their elementary school allowed the girls to talk with members of their community about poverty and raise awareness about the realities of living in a poor urban sector.

Metrac, a community-based organization seeking to reduce and finally eliminate all forms of violence against women and children, used research as a strategy for reaching policy-makers. Jennifer Fawcette is researching immigrant girls' experiences of violence in Toronto. Her research indicated a lack of information on girl-gangs and immigrant girls' experiences with girl-on-girl violence. The report she is writing on immigrant girls and violence in Toronto will let girls speak for themselves and assert their needs in order to end violence in their lives. The report will even be presented to the Mayor in order for the research to be implemented into concrete social action. Jennifer sees her research as a form of violence-prevention because "I think just giving people a voice to speak out for their concerns to be heard will be make a difference [...] We are hopefully going to be publishing this report and doing a presentation with it, making it very accessible to groups within the city of Toronto. Even the TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) or MPs, if we make this report mandatory reading within the city of Toronto it will have a great impact."

Internationally speaking, governance is a not a very accessible tool for young women and girls. The political sphere is generally an adult-male-dominated sector, and girls' voices are largely ignored:

"Ghanaian women have remained invisible in the development process because low levels of education place them either in the informal sector of the economy where their contributions in the informal sector are undervalued or in lowly placed positions within

the formal sector.³³ In addition to the above, only 20% of women [in Ghana] find themselves in decision-making positions in the country, with less than 10% involved in policy-making.³⁴

The engagement of young women in governance touches on multiple and intersecting issues ranging from systemic (racism, colonialism, poverty, violence) to personal (healthy development and self-advocacy) as well as social and environmental justice. Young women need to identify these issues and create strategies for advocacy, education, and action, and programmers need to foster and facilitate their abilities in order to do so effectively.

³³ Abane, Henrietta. "'The girls do not learn hard enough so they cannot do certain types of work,' Experiences from an NGO-sponsored gender sensitization workshop in a Southern Ghanaian community" in *Community Development Journal*. 39:1 (January 2004) p. 50.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 50.



ISSUES II: SAFETY, VIOLENCE PREVENTION & RACISM

Violence is a reality for girls. From war zones and armed-conflicts where girls' needs and experiences are often overlooked because there is "no practical movement toward involving them in a peace-building process,"³⁵ to impoverished communities without the necessary means to ensure equitable education and security for young women, the continuum of violence against girls increases with the advent of urbanization.

According to the UN Platform for Action, violence against girls and young women has been a consistently prevalent issue that cannot be overlooked. Their research indicates that women experience various forms of violence from the earliest stages of life right into adulthood:

Sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, have a devastating effect on children's health, and girls are more vulnerable than boys to the consequences of unprotected and premature sexual relations. Girls often face pressures to engage in sexual activity. Due to such factors as their youth, social pressures, lack of protective laws, or failure to enforce laws, girls are more vulnerable to all kinds of violence, particularly sexual violence, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking, possibly the sale of their organs and tissues, and forced labour (article 269).³⁶

UNAIDS/WHO concurs, noting that young women are 1.6 times more likely to be living with HIV than young men, and that young women make up over sixty percent of 15-24-year-olds living with HIV.³⁷

From a Canadian perspective, Yasmin Jiwani indicates how violence is expressed daily in the lives of girls as a continuum of experiences:

³⁵ Kirk, Jackie. (GPWC) Gender and Peace-building Working Group "Fact Sheet: Adolescent girls affected by violent conflict, why should we care?"

³⁶ *The United Nations 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing China, Action for Equality, Development & Peace, September 1995.*
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/girl.htm>

³⁷ UNAIDS/WHO "AIDS Epidemic Update," December 2003, and UNAIDS/WHO estimates, 2004.

Girls experience a continuum of violence, ranging from sexual harassment to rape. Societal acceptance of violence was identified as a major issue. Violence has become normalized. Self-esteem, self-image, and peer pressure are significant issues of concern to girls. Self-harm (suicide, eating disorders, etc.), and the internalization of stereotypes and negative images of girls, have create a 'girlpoisoning environment.' Depression in girls is a symptom of this environment, as is girl-on-girl violence. Girls talked about having to 'watch their backs,' and living in a 'war zone'.³⁸

Recognizing that violence in girls' lives is complex and multidimensional, from a Canadian perspective we stress the importance of looking at this issue holistically. This includes taking into consideration violence done to the self (self-harm, substance abuse, anorexia, etc.), relational violence (racism, bullying, physical, verbal or sexual aggression, etc.) and systemic violence (racism, poverty, and other social injustices). It also includes understanding that girls are not simply vulnerable, victims of diverse forms of violence, but also that they are active agents of change in anti-violence movements. They understand the violence they experience in their day to day realities, and have much to teach programmers about how best to combat it.

Violence against girls and young women needs to be recognized and identified by local authorities, individuals and policy-makers. In order to break the silence around gender-based violence and to validate girls' concerns and voices, grassroots organizations have prioritized violence prevention in cities around the world.

Recognizing the extent of violence in Canadian girls' lives

In Canada, 50% of girls below the age of 16 have been victims of some form of violence, and the percentage increases for immigrant, refugee,

³⁸ Jiwani, Yasmin, Kelly Gorkoff, Helene Berman, Gail Taylor, Glenda Vardy-Dell and Sylvie Normandeau. 1999. Violence Prevention and the Girl Child: Final Report. The Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence, funded by Status of Women Canada.

Aboriginal, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered girls.³⁹ Researchers have documented the extent and types of violence in Canadian girls' lives:

- "In Canada, 75% of Aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have been sexually abused. Furthermore, Aboriginal girls are hospitalized for attempting suicide at twice the rate of boys."⁴⁰
- Research repeatedly shows that a vast majority of Aboriginal women have been assaulted, and that the chances of an Aboriginal child growing up without a single first-hand experience of abuse or alcoholism is tiny. Violence may have begun while at residential school or by parents whose souls were damaged by the residential school experience of rape, physical abuse, and cultural genocide. Violence continues into adulthood, ranging from 48% to up to 90% of Aboriginal women being assaulted at the hands of their partners, depending on the community in which they live. Aboriginal women also experience racially-motivated attacks and are harassed on the streets by the public and police more so than non-Aboriginal women.⁴¹
- According to the Roeher Institute (1998) cited in Fiduccia and Wolfe, "39 to 68 percent of girls with developmental disabilities will be assaulted before the age of 18".⁴²
- In Canada, "the chance that a young women or girl will be a victim of some form of violence before she reaches 16 is 50%. Furthermore, girls from marginalized groups tend to experience violence at heightened levels; these are girls and young women of the First Nations, refugees and immigrants, lesbians, bisexual and trans-gendered youth" (*National Council of Women of Canada* 1999, 7).

³⁹ National Council of Women of Canada

⁴⁰ Jiwani, Yasmin. 1998. The Girl Child: Having to 'Fit.' The FREDA Centre for Research for Violence Against Women and Children. Retrieved 12 January 2004, <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/articles/fit.htm>

⁴¹ Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence Achieving Equality* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1993). See chapters prepared by the Aboriginal Circle, pp. 101-190.

⁴² Fiduccia, Barbara Faye Waxman and Leslie R Wolfe. 1999. *Violence Against Disabled Women*. Washington: Centre for Women Policy Studies. Retrieved 8 January 2004, <http://www.centerwomenpolicy.org/pubfiles/199903violencedisabledwomen.pdf>

- "Poverty is one of the major contributing factors to the violence experienced by girls. In the hierarchy of industrialized countries, Canada's child poverty ranks second. In the cities, 1 out of every 3 children is raised in a home with an income below the poverty line. In rural areas, the rate is 1 in 5" (Jiwani 1998).
- "In 2002, girls represented 79% of victims of family-related sexual assaults [...] Rates of sexual offences were highest among girls between the ages of 11 and 14, with the highest rate at age 13." (Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada*, 2004).⁴³
- "For girls who are differently situated by virtue of their race, sexual orientation, disability and class, the situation is compounded by their marginalization and 'lack of fit' within the dominant, white, heterosexual world...Stigmatized and subjected to verbal and physical abuse, these girls lead a socially isolated existence".⁴⁴
- A significant relationship exists "between being abused and developing aggressive tendencies in later childhood and adolescence for girls" (13). Moreover, in a society that encourages girls to conform to norms of femininity, this aggression is stigmatized.⁴⁵
- Parmi les jeunes filles ayant eu une relation amoureuse, c'est environ le tiers des filles de 13 ans et un peu plus de 40% des filles de 16 ans qui ont subi au moins un type de violence (physique, sexuelle, ou psychologique).⁴⁶

⁴³ National Council of Women of Canada. 1999. Girls/Young Women and Violence Project. Retrieved 5 January 2004, http://www.ncwc.ca/pdf/girls_violence_forum.pdf

⁴⁴ Jiwani, Yasmin. 1998. *The Girl Child: Having to 'Fit.'* The FREDa Centre for Research for Violence Against Women and Children. Retrieved 12 January 2004, <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/articles/fit.htm>

⁴⁵ Leschied, Alan W, Anne L Cummings, Michelle Van Brunschot, Alison Cunningham and Angela Saunders. 2000. *Female Adolescent Aggression: A Review of the Literature and Correlates of Aggression.* Ottawa: Department of the Solicitor General Canada. Retrieved 12 January 2004, http://www.sgc.gc.ca/publications/corrections/200004_Leschied_report_e.pdf

⁴⁶ Lavoie, F. and Vézina, L. (2002). Violence dans les relations amoureuses à l'adolescence. Dans Enquête sociale et de santé auprès des enfants et adolescents québécois 1999. Institut de la statistique du Québec.

- “Young women are a subgroup most vulnerable to health risks.” They smoke more than young men and “are some of the largest consumers and abusers of alcohol.” Their mental health is also a concern as depression and suicide rates increase between the ages of 18-25. Furthermore, rates of HIV infections in young women between 15 and 29 has increased by 30% since 1995. (Public Health, 2003).

Responding to violence against girls in cities

In response to a significant gender gap in urban safety is the emergence of gender-based violence prevention programs world wide. For example, UN-Habitat’s “Safer Cities for Women and Girls” created the Bogotá Declaration that implemented the following initiatives:

- National Governments to ensure appropriate policies, mechanisms and resources to address the causes of violence; as well as guarantee full safety for women participating in politics either as candidates or elected leaders.
- Local Authorities to implement municipal safety policies with a gender perspective to build the capacity of those who are responsible for the formulation and implementation of public policy.
- Private Sector to exercise its social responsibility including violence prevention programmes, good practices awards, and establish internal mechanisms for ending sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Mass Media to work with communities and with local authorities in the dissemination of the norms and principles of mutual respect and solidarity, which involves respecting gender, age, and diversity.
- Civil Society organizations to continue to be the monitors for urban safety, especially regarding the safety of women and girls and to award prizes to local authorities and communities that put in practice in a consistent and sustainable manner joint actions that promote safer cities for women and girls.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ UN-Habitat Newsletter “Urban Safety” (March 2005).

These girl-positive propositions for safer cities will build an important foundation for gender-specific violence-prevention programs in urban settings on an international scale. Targeted efforts for the creation of girl-friendly cities are crucial investments in urban sustainability, safety, and equity.

A promising violence prevention strategy: Girl-specific spaces

POWER Camp National and many other community organizations in Canada have chosen to address the continuum of violence against girls by creating gender-specific violence prevention programs. Research supports the need and efficacy of such initiatives. The Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence, for example, has documented the lack of violence prevention programs for girls in Canada, “despite the need and demonstrated success of such programs”⁴⁸:

“Safe spaces for girls to address the social, economic, cultural, political and personal issues in their lives that place them in positions of vulnerability to violence are required. Community-based adolescent violence prevention initiatives are most successful when they are gender appropriate and sensitive to the needs of teens in gaining their own authentic voices in achieving change.”⁴⁹

Many other studies show that girl-specific spaces and programs are needed to assist girls to deal with violence and other challenges associated with growing up female in a Canadian or North American context:

- “There is a need for services designed specifically for girls, and for girl-only spaces where young women can come together to talk about violence and develop strategies to improve their circumstances. Service providers indicated that boys tend to

⁴⁸ The Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence. (2002). *In the Best Interest of the Girl Child: Phase II Report*. H. Berman & Y. Jiwani (Eds). p.6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.161.

dominate programs designed for youth, making these programs key sites of vulnerability for marginalized girls.”⁵⁰

- “Girls overwhelmingly identified the need for “safe” and girl-specific spaces in schools, shelters, and services. Such spaces were viewed as being critical for reasons of safety, positive development of self, and identity formation.”⁵¹
- “In a series of focus groups consisting of girls in Vancouver, Victoria and Whitehorse, the majority of girls identified respect as a key issue. They talked about the need to have girl-only spaces where they can come together, and where they can find some refuge from abusive parents, boyfriends and peers.”⁵³
- “Programs serving young violent women effectively must take into account girls’ status in a gendered society. While delinquent and violent girls share with their male counterparts many of the same problems, girls’ problems are often a result of their status as females (such as sexual abuse, male violence, oppression by family members, occupational inequality, and early motherhood). As such, they require different program approaches from boys.”⁵³
- “The creation of community and critical education toward social change appears essential to develop hardiness zones that support the strengths of girls.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Janovicek, Nancy. 2001. *Reducing Crime and Victimization: A Service Providers’ Report*. The FREDa Centre for Research for Violence Against Women and Children. Retrieved 12 January 2004, <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/articles/spreport.htm#6>

⁵¹ Janovicek, Nancy. 2001. *Reducing Crime and Victimization: A Service Providers’ Report*. The FREDa Centre for Research for Violence Against Women and Children. Retrieved 12 January 2004, <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/articles/spreport.htm#6>

⁵² Janovicek, Nancy. 2001. *Reducing Crime and Victimization: A Service Providers’ Report*. The FREDa Centre for Research for Violence Against Women and Children. Retrieved 12 January 2004, <http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/articles/spreport.htm#6>

⁵³ Jeanne Weiler. 1999. An Overview of Research on Girls and Violence. *Choices Briefs*. 1. Retrieved 5 January 2004, <http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/choices/briefs/choices01.html>

⁵⁴ Jeanne Weiler. 1999. An Overview of Research on Girls and Violence. *Choices Briefs*. 1. Retrieved 5 January 2004, <http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/choices/briefs/choices01.html>

- In their study of community-based projects for young women, Bertram, Hall, Fine & Weis wrote: “We have learned quite a bit about the need for gender segregated spaces in which young girls and women can rewrite the histories of their bodies and their souls; can transgress the scars of violence experienced or anticipated; can coalesce as girls/women qua girls/women with neither interruption nor competition from males. There is a well-developed empirical literature on the power of single-sex organizations for girls and women.”⁵⁵
- “Toute stratégie de prévention de la violence doit être appliquée différemment selon qu’elle s’adresse à des garçons ou à des filles... Nous recommandons que tous les programmes de prévention de la violence et tous les programmes de résolution de conflits destinés aux jeunes incorporent de l’information sur les stéréotypes sexuels et sur les attentes différentes selon le sexe.”⁵⁶

Creating “Safe Spaces”: Learning from the POWER Camp National network

Members of the POWER Camp National network have created innovative approaches to establishing safe spaces for girls that reduce violence and victimization in their lives.

Social justice education programs for girls aim to provide a safe space for young women and girls to come together, share, discuss, express and grow into engaged citizens who are able to critique the world around them and work towards changing it. But what is a “safe space” exactly? How is it established? Who is the space safe for? How does one create boundaries that ensure a space is accessible to girls from diverse backgrounds? How are spaces created to secure enough intimacy to ensure confidentiality, comfort, and privacy?

⁵⁵ Bertram, C., Hall, J., Fine, M. & Weis, L. (2000). Where the girls (and women) are. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28: (5), p.731-755.

⁵⁶ Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse (RESOLVE). *Programmes scolaires de prévention de la violence : Manual de documentation*. Prévenir la violence envers les fillettes et les jeunes filles. (2002) Calgary, AB: RESOLVE.

Generally defined, a safe space is a supportive environment in which participants are able to have their voices validated and heard, free from discrimination. A “safe space” can be established to ensure that girls and young women feel comfortable to be themselves, where they not have to be concerned about racism, sexism, homophobia, or any form of intolerance or harassment because of who they are. Often, safe spaces are formed as confidential spaces, ensuring that the conversations that occur remain there once the meeting ends.

Since girls’ voices are often silenced or outright ignored, many community organizations develop safe spaces to give girls the opportunity to explore and express their thoughts on key issues that affect their lives. The ideal “safe space” is inclusive and conscious of the intersections of different forms of oppression. Both GirlSpoken (Ontario) and Girls’ Club (Montreal) put the girl participants at the forefront of decision-making. Girls have the option to opt out of discussions and to participate at their own speed and comfort level. This leaves room for the girls to reflect, share, and ultimately to have a say in how the programs operate, as well as how they choose to participate. In this sense, safety emerges alongside the development of authority.

Many girls’ program facilitators have learned that creating safe spaces to address difficult issues, such as racism and discrimination based on social class, is most successful in smaller numbers. Another successful strategy is to seek out and draw on the experience and expertise of people in our communities who are skilled in applying innovative approaches to creating transformative experiences and spaces.

Language use can be a useful marker of how “safe” spaces are. Reflecting critically on the language that we use in various situations can incite us to understand the historical context of oppressions and how those systems of discrimination are alive in our daily words and interactions. Asking questions like “How do we perpetuate the very oppressions we seek to eradicate through the language that we use?” can help facilitate the negotiation of a safe space.

However, language use can also hinder the feasibility of successful safe spaces. For instance, if only a few individuals can understand the “lingo” being used by facilitators in a workshop, then other participants will be marginalized.

Using language strategically can also help participants feel comfortable and relaxed. The girls in Ghettofabulous (Ottawa) debunk taboos and discuss touchy subjects in an open environment where everyone is

encouraged to share their experiences. For example, using the word “Ghettofabulous” to highlight the advantages of living in a racialized neighbourhood offsets the sense of shame and stigma that girls sometimes feel when they think about their neighbourhood. The facilitator, Chelby Marie Daigle, fosters safety by sharing her personal experiences with the girls: “The girls often talk about how these experiences make them feel, and I often share my own past experiences in similar situations. Together, we all suggest strategies to resolve particular problems where possible.”

Attempts at establishing and then maintaining safe spaces can lead to the emergence of tensions. Contrary to common assumptions however, tensions can be the starting point for the negotiation of a safe space. Tension can bring insidious forms of discrimination—such as racism—to the surface of discussions between girls, young women and program leaders. When discrimination is named and discussed, it creates the potential for breaking down subtle patterns of oppression.

Programmers cannot guarantee that their attempts to create a safe space will prevent or deflect tensions (and breaches of that ‘safety’). A safe space is only an illusion if some people cannot express their concerns or comments, if some feel pressured to participate in an activity that makes them uncomfortable, or if the vocabulary used in discussions is inaccessible to some participants. Therefore, creating a safe space should be seen as a process, a work-in-progress. Programmers are constantly working with challenges that affect participants and the communication and power dynamics within the group caused by racism, violence, classism, poverty and other issues of inclusion.

Addressing the intersection of violence and racism

“Racism is a form of violence against girls. Racism shows itself in all forms, one of the hardest to deal with is the verbal because it is so hard to forget. Who ever said “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” was probably a white male living with middle class parents. Not to say that they don’t have problems, they do but being a young woman of color is a hard place to be.”⁵⁷

Despite the constitution of multiculturalism in 1971, ideological, systemic and discursive forms of racism still exist in Canadian urban settings. Young immigrant women have expressed difficulties in accessing resources for employment, schooling, advocacy and health care in cities across Canada. Aboriginal young women experience racism on a daily basis from individuals and institutions. Although racism affects people of all genders, it is important to recognize that being female changes the way girls and young women experience and deal with racism on a day-to-day basis.

Grassroots girl-specific programs have addressed racism as violence at the personal and political level. An important element of overcoming racism among girls is anti-racist educational programs with an emphasis on all-girls discussion and community action groups that allow stories and strategies to be shared.

Institutional and systemic racism are forms of oppression that are often overlooked. They are probably the most infuriating forms of racism because they are invisible to many people and are even legitimized by certain social structures (i.e. schools, places of worship, the local police force). The young women from *Stitch n’ Bitch* in Kenora, Ontario have addressed and identified systemic forms of racism in their school:

We know that teachers aren’t allowed to be racist but they are. A principal at one of the elementary schools here told a white girl who was friends with a lot of Natives that “those aren’t the kind of people you want to hang around with.”

In order to vent frustration about systemic racism and to break silences, the girls in *Ghettofabulous* speak out against these subtle forms of

⁵⁷ Ocran-Caesar, Ya-Asantwa. “Racism: Another Form of Violence Against Girls” *Justice For Girls*. http://www.justiceforgirls.org/publications/speeches_racism.html

racism that affect them on a daily basis. The girls in the group come from different racial backgrounds, including those that have historically been in conflict, but they are from the same low-income neighbourhood and share many of the same experiences. Instead of pretending to be unaffected, Ghettofabulous provides a space for girls to express their anger and to be critical about the larger social context that sustains racism and violence. "Our discussions have given the girls a chance to vent their anger towards each other but also to come to terms with the fact that people are often forced to become enemies through no fault of their own."

Addressing racism in girl-specific programs is a necessary but often difficult balancing act. It requires courage to confront contradictions and uncomfortable topics in a non-violent fashion. Contextualizing racism is a good way to ensure that discussions are non-violent. Kim Melnyk from the North Star Girls' Club (Winnipeg) found that open talks about the history of racism between Canadian and First Nations people have opened up a plethora of discussions, especially since most of the participants have family members who were residential school survivors. Melnyk is careful to negotiate and create a dialogue about the historical roots of racism in Canada and allows a lot of space for girls to express their questions, concerns and experiences.

Discussion groups that confront these issues head-on give girls the room and the confidence to understand and articulate how racism can exist in a presumably harmonious, multicultural society. It helps place everyday forms of racism in a social context and gives girls and young women the opportunity to share and learn techniques to help combat racial discrimination.



CONCLUSION

Sharing practices:

Effective approaches for working with girls

The following practices and strategies are from a Canadian context and have been identified by drawing on the experiences of POWER Camp National and members of PCN's network of grassroots girl-serving organizations.

Apply an intersectional feminist analysis: An intersectional feminist analysis takes into account the multiple and interlocking impacts of policies and practices on different groups of women because of their race, class, ability, sexuality, gender identity, religion, culture, refugee or immigrant status, or other status. This framework recognizes that girls' and women's experiences of life occur in multiple and compounding spheres. Though each girls' program varies in philosophy and approach, integrated practices are grounded in an understanding of social justice that is filtered through all steps of programming development and implementation.

Create opportunities for action: An important part of engaging girls in their communities is to create opportunities for action where they are encouraged to express their concerns and ideas to decision-makers, community leaders and the public. Girls and young women can be supported to initiate and implement their own strategies for change.

Recognize power: At every stage of program development and implementation, power is a subtle but impacting force underlying group dynamics and program effectiveness. It is important to acknowledge your power as a facilitator, as well as the power differentials between participants. The ability to recognize the way power functions in your program is crucial in the creation and sustainability of safer spaces.

Acknowledge and address difference.

Girls and young women are not homogenous groups. They come from different backgrounds, have markedly different experiences, and have distinctly different perspectives and needs. Discussing disparities openly and honestly can be a valuable learning tool, and can lead to a broader understanding of how multiple and interlocking oppressions directly impact policies and practices that affect girls and young women.

Evaluate!

Once a program, workshop or activity is complete, set some time aside to reflect and assess its overall strengths and weaknesses. If possible, request feedback from those involved. Evaluations will illustrate what worked, what didn't, and why, and pinpoint areas for improvement; ultimately assisting you in planning future programming. Though it may be a difficult decision, taking time out for reflection can be an important way to sustain your program. Draw on community resources to build your capacity to do evaluation.

Be conscious of language

Language is probably the most simple, direct way of transmitting knowledge. It is also the most contentious. Misunderstandings happen easily, and mis-communication can hinder a program's success. It is important to know your audience to ensure that everyone present can be involved and that language used is accessible. Establishing respectful boundaries can ensure that everyone will fuel the spirit of open communication.

Be flexible.

Though your vision for your program may include a specific intention or agenda, "thinking outside the box" about strategic planning, organizing and traditional hierarchies is necessary in terms of programming with and for girls and young women. Being open to change at any moment or responding to emerging issues and needs can often lead to innovative and exciting approaches. Allow your practice to inform and transform your theory. Learning-by-doing is a very useful method for facilitating social change – don't forget, you're there to learn, too.

Popular education

Popular education is a model that begins with an individual's personal experience and moves towards collective action by fostering and nurturing girls' capacity for critical thought. Contrary to traditional hierarchal education where experts hold the knowledge, popular education validates different ways of knowing and actively engages and empowers the individual in moving towards collective change. In terms of gender-specific programming, popular education is grounded in girls' realities and is geared towards building skills, sharing knowledge, initiating action and thinking critically about the world.

Have fun!

Balance discussions, workshops and learning activities with creative expression, arts based activities and games. Better yet, combine them all

and develop educational activities in which girls learn through play and art. Everyone has a unique learning style, so mixing media (talk, visual, hands-on, physically active, problem solving) is a good way to make sure all girls are engaged.

Community involvement

Girls learn a lot just by being exposed to new people and places in their communities. Involve female mentors, volunteers and guest presenters from the community. Organize trips to local places that will inspire thought, action and creativity.

Organizing Strategies

The following strategies are the suggestions of POWER Camp National and are informed by the testimonial of contributors.

Collaborate.

It is possible to create something new while still drawing on the work of others; there are individuals and organizations who have been working with and for girls who have knowledge and expertise that can facilitate your own work. Build bridges with organizations with similar mandates. Draw on resources from within your community; space, volunteers, in-kind contributions. Join a network! This will help reduce the sense of isolation and increase your access to resources.

Self-Care

Though passion and commitment are essential to girls' programming, it is crucial to not overlook your own health and well-being. It can be easy to internalize difficult issues that arise within your program. Self-care is a priority. This will prevent activist burn-out and remind you that your everyday programs are valuable, important, and are making a difference.

Be Persistent.

Establishing a grassroots initiative from the ground up—and helping it grow—is a difficult and often daunting process. It takes patience, perseverance, and a lot of time and energy. While the challenges might be overwhelming, the positive outcomes far outweigh the negatives. Connect with others experiencing similar struggles: it'll feed your motivation and provide you with novel ideas and strategies to proceed.

Girls and Young Women are Colleagues

Share decision-making and planning with those who will actually participate in and be directly affected by a project, study or initiative. As we know, girls are agents of social change and have invaluable knowledge to share. Learn from them!

Make Yourself Known.

Visibility—an organization or program’s identity within its community, a network, in print or on the web—leads directly to the establishment of credibility and legitimacy. Promote your activities, write about your practices, promote your successes and disseminate your research findings and outcomes. Making yourself visible not only grounds your organization within its local environment, but also familiarizes outsiders with the work that you do.

Reach Out!

Outreach is a fundamental aspect of an organization’s growth and maintenance (and ability to fulfill a mandate). Volunteers can simultaneously ease a programmers’ workload, add valuable knowledge and skills to programs, and expand an initiative’s community network base. Also, programs need participants: utilizing a variety of outreach strategies can ensure a steady flow of new members and help to expand an organization’s range and scope.

Looking Forward:

Strengthening practices and capacity for change

POWER Camp National looks forward to initiating a dialogue with international grassroots girl-specific organizations in order to share and sustain practices on a wider scale. Based on the case studies with network members, the best practices research study identified priorities for moving forward, strengthening capacity for work, and for advancing knowledge and learning about working with girls and young women in the Canadian context. Although this document also has a Canadian focus, PCN hopes to build relationships with international organizations that share similar mandates and visions surrounding the empowerment of girls and young women.

Girl-specific programming fills an important gap in youth engagement initiatives. Girls' programs give under-represented groups the opportunity to participate in challenging and inspiring activities that encourage civic participation and social justice. From photographs of poverty through the lens of a 12 year-old girl, to letters written to the Prime Minister about girl-gangs and violence-prevention, girls and young women are important agents of social change.

Many grassroots organizations promoting girl-specific programming want to increase accessibility in order to reach more girls and young women from marginalized and isolated communities. New and more programs need to be funded, supported and sustained in order for a greater diversity of girls and young women to have access to the resources, education, and tools necessary to increase their social engagement and self-esteem. The grassroots organizations profiled in this document look forward to discovering and implementing new strategies to enhance their programs' outreach, sustainability, accessibility, credibility, and funding.

Outreach and strategic recruitment is crucial for ensuring that girls' programs are filled with as many participants (and volunteers!) as possible and that marginalized groups have access. In Canada, language barriers need to be broken down in order for outreach efforts to be successful within immigrant, francophone and Aboriginal communities. While hiring translators is not always a financially feasible option for many struggling grassroots organizations, programmers remain determined to find ways to increase their financial support, linguistic scope and communications strategies with the ultimate goal of increasing their outreach potential and the possibility of engaging girls and young women in Canada who do not speak fluent English or French.

Outreach is the lifeblood of a girls' and young women's program. Without effective outreach, a program could fade into an empty room, inaccessible to the majority of people who could benefit.

Some organizations in Canada have utilized technology—such as the Internet and other new media technologies—to increase the scope of their outreach efforts and to branch out towards international issues and groups. The use of list serves, interactive websites, and blogs have helped connect girls and young women from around the world in international—and often multi-linguistic—dialogues. The ability to share practices and knowledge across countries, ethnicities, languages, religions and politics have allowed girls and young women to communicate their similarities as well as their

differences and to learn about issues outside of their communities. Many organizations want to broaden their outreach efforts with technology and plan to bring international issues and initiatives to the forefront of their mandates and collaborations.

Sustainability is a reoccurring issue for grassroots initiatives. With cutbacks to core funding sources on the rise and the corresponding increase of the more competitive environment of nonprofit fundraising, many girl-serving organizations are looking for alternative sustainability strategies that will ensure the longevity of their vision and work.

Some organizations have taken a step back to rethink the logistics of their financing and to seek out alternate ways of securing funding and human resources without having to compromise their goals and fundamental principles. A sustainability initiative is a common objective for most grassroots organizations in order for them to secure services and resources for the future girls and young women in their communities.

In order to gain credibility and financial security, many smaller grassroots initiatives have sought active partnerships with larger networks. Although collaboration can be a difficult relationship to balance, it is very often the only way that girl-specific programs can survive in the current financial and political climate. Collaborative financing is a relatively new strategy that many grassroots organizations are considering in order to continue their programming in dire economic situations.

With much reflection and evaluation of girl-specific “safe spaces,” many organizations are re-evaluating how they negotiate boundaries and facilitate sensitive issues concerning girls and young women. While most programmers understand the inability to perfectly delineate strategies guaranteeing that everyone in their space will feel “safe,” they are dedicated to understanding how issues such as racism, homophobia, classism, and poverty can be best addressed. Brushing aside issues of difference and discrimination merely perpetuates the power struggles that plague girls and young women’s lives. Therefore, program providers have found it important to refine their skills in group facilitation and find ways to talk about difficult issues openly and in a way that respects girls’ age and developmental stage as well as their innate intelligence.

Many organizations are striving towards implementing evaluation mechanisms in order to record and analyze facilitators’ and participants’ responses to workshop material, program effectiveness and group

dynamics. Every organization contacted during this research wants to improve their work with girls and young women. Many aspire to learn and implement a variety of evaluation methods in order to continually develop their practice and program and to help establish credibility and visibility of their important work.

Social solidarity, anti-oppression and civic engagement are important principles that define and motivate most girl-specific initiatives to persevere. With this in mind, many small initiatives can barely pay their rent and their programs exist only on a week-to-week basis, which makes planning ahead and looking forward very difficult. Despite these serious challenges, many of the program providers who contributed to this report emphasize the importance of having dreams and actively seeking out the ways to achieve them. Therefore, the mere act of “looking forward” is an important step in creating sustainable, credible local-level programs that engage girls and young women as agents of social change.