

JLFL SPAC  
2009 Legislative Priorities

*These three priorities were voted and approved on Sunday, October 12<sup>th</sup> by a delegate from each of the participating Leagues of the JLFL SPAC in attendance at the Fall Conference in Jacksonville, FL. In an effort to streamline our advocacy message, we will focus on these three issues while supporting other proposed focus issues with grassroots efforts designed to engage the members of the participating JLs.*

- Booster Seats The JLFL SPAC Legislative Analyst, Charlotte Mather, agreed to work the bill this legislative session, again. In her professional opinion, she felt that with our major opposition termed out the bill had a real chance of passing this year. Also since it's a tighter budget year, and this bill won't cost the state anything, it may be the 'feel good' issue legislators are looking to support. Senator Gelber has agreed to sponsor the bill. Charlotte was working to obtain a sponsor in the House.

*Correlating position statement- Position Statement on Child Safety Restraint Systems (Adopted spring 2001; reviewed fall 2006)*

- Foster Care We will work to preserve funding this year. After discussions recently with foster care providers on statewide boards, the priority now is to simply maintain funding and avoid further cuts. Last year \$20 million was cut. Many providers are working under budget and having to privately raise one-third of their budget.

With the successful new strategy of wrapping families at-risk in services and keeping children in the home combined with a shorter average length of time in foster care, the number of children in the system has been greatly reduced. Providers are hoping this success won't be misinterpreted by legislators as a reason to cut funding, but rather to appropriate funding to prevention programs. Rep. Glorioso has committed to using one bill slot of his each year he holds office to proposing a foster care bill. He will be sponsoring a bill that has yet to be drafted. The group felt that since many Leagues have community projects supporting foster care projects and this has been a priority of SPAC's for several years, it was appropriate for SPAC to take up this issue without a specific bill just yet.

*Correlating position statement- Position Statement on Young Adults Emerging from Foster Care (Adopted winter 2004; reviewed fall 2006)*

- Girls' Advocacy Project (GAP) Vicki Lukis submitted a thorough summary of GAP. (See attached.) Right now 3 JLs in the state have GAP as a project; Miami, Orlando and Palm Beach. It was relayed to us that one of the reasons the funding for last year passed at all was because of the huge support of the Junior Leagues that these 3 sites receive. The immediate past SPAC Chair, Melissa Fritsch, has joined the GAP board giving them another strong advocate. Only \$150,000 of their \$500,000 budget is currently included in the DJJ budget. They are looking for \$350,000 in funding and need help advocating for that this session

*Correlating position statement- Position Statement on Service for Female Juvenile Offenders (Adopted winter 2005; Revised fall 2006)*

Here's a link to last year/session's legislative representative marketing material: <http://www.jlflspac.org/id3.html> ; see Girls Advocacy Project (GAP) on page 2, Foster Care on page 1 and Booster Seats on page 1.

*It is the hope of the JLFL SPAC board that with the information that will be provided in time to member Leagues by the JLFL SPAC board, each League will whole heartedly support these three priorities with supporting PR, GMM presentations and volunteer activities, in an effort to train members in the advocacy process.*

### **What is GAP and how long has it operated and briefly what is its success?**

The Girls Advocacy Project (GAP) was initiated in 1999 to serve girls detained in the Miami-Dade Regional Juvenile Detention Center. **It is the only comprehensive prevention/intervention/education project in the State of Florida specifically serving girls while they are detained in a juvenile detention center.** GAP staff consists of a qualified professional staff experienced in working with girls and their unique gender-specific issues. The GAP Facilitators meet with the girls frequently to conduct group and individual sessions. They are knowledgeable in the area of delinquency and trained on issues pertinent to girls in the detention center. Girls are voluntarily admitted to the program. GAP uses a group facilitation model that combines the Motivational Interviewing approach with Solution Focused practices. This model uses a technique that gets girls to change themselves by increasing their own desire to change. It helps them see the benefits of moving in a new direction by leading her through a comparison between her goals and her current behavior. The goal is to create tension in her, and to place her in charge of the process of resolving the tension in pro-social ways. The focus is on getting her to rely on inner motivation rather than external control.

The girls have shown an improvement in awareness and understanding of the topics presented, which have given them the foundation to make better choices and stay crime-free after their release from detention. In May 2006, ABC News *Nightline* profiled GAP for its unique intervention work.

### **Incorporation and 501(c)(3) Status**

GAP was incorporated in Florida on June 12, 2006 and received its 501(c)(3) exemption on August 16, 2007 with an effective exemption date of June 12, 2006.

### **Where did it expand and what money was used?**

Since 1999, the legislature has funded GAP Miami, which received \$150,000 in non-recurring funds in the amount of \$150,000 until 2006-2007 when it received recurring funds in the same amount. That same year, GAP expanded to Southwest Florida, Orange and Palm Beach Regional Juvenile Detention Centers in Fort Myers, Orlando and West Palm Beach, respectively. The expansion received \$775,000 in non-recurring funds from the legislature. The program did not receive start-up funds from DJJ until December 2006, when it hired three GAP Facilitators. They trained the month of January and began serving girls on February 1, 2007. In 2007-2008, GAP received \$500,000 in non-recurring funds from the legislature to continue the program in the expansion sites. GAP Miami continued to receive its \$150,000 from recurring funds.

Recurring funds are used for programs the state is expected or required to continue from year to year while non-recurring funds are used for programs that are only expected to be funded in the current year. GAP faces a difficult challenge because one-third of its funds are recurring while the remaining is non-recurring. The organization cannot sustain its administrative expenses without the total \$500,000 and therefore, would have to terminate its services even if awarded the recurring funds of \$150,000 because there

would not be sufficient funds to pay for administrative and operational expenses required.

### **How much is currently in budget?**

GAP is part of the Department of Juvenile Justice's base budget and receives \$150,000 in recurring funds. The Department has allocated an additional \$300,000 in non-recurring funds. This represents a total current GAP funding of \$450,000 for the three sites. Due to a budget reduction of \$200,000 in 2008-2009, GAP was forced to close its operations in Fort Myers in May 2008. As a result, GAP reduced its total operations by 25%.

### **What will happen to GAP if funds are not earmarked in 2009-2010?**

**GAP requires \$500,000 in recurring funds to continue its operations in Miami, Palm Beach and Orlando. If GAP is not successful in securing this level of funding, GAP will be forced to close its doors as of June 30, 2009.**

### **What type of child will go without services and why is this so critical?**

Girls come into the juvenile justice system with unique differences. National statistics state that close to 80% have histories of physical abuse. Approximately, 70% are victims of sexual abuse or assault (compared to approximately 20% for teenage families in the general population). As a result of the abuse, girls may run away to escape, endangering their lives and derailing them from healthy growth into adulthood. Living in the streets occasionally leads to prostitution and quite frequently to criminal activity, thus involving them in the juvenile justice system. In addition, running away is considered a crime and therefore, further exasperates her situation. Depending on the criminal charge, they are at risk of entering the adult system at young ages.

According to the Department of Juvenile Justice, girls represent a growing proportion of Florida's juvenile justice population. In 1992, girls represented 24% of all youths referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice, and 10% of all youths incarcerated. But since 2003, girls have represented 30% of all youth referred. And by 2004, girls represented more than 18% of all youths incarcerated, though the rate dropped to 15% in 2007. The number of girls referred for delinquency in FY 2006-07 was 27,303.

While these overall trends are mirrored across the United States, the rates of arrest and incarceration for girls in Florida – that is the number of arrests and incarcerations as a percentage of the total population of girls – are considerably higher than elsewhere. The arrest rate for females in Florida is almost twice that for the nation as a whole. Nationwide, 716 girls per 100,000 population are arrested while in Florida 1,259 girls per 100,000 population are arrested.

### **What groups across the state have supported GAP?**

GAP receives support from American Airlines, American Association of University Women, Dade Community Foundation, The Women's Fund of Miami-Dade County, Miami-Dade County Juvenile Services, Florida Association for Women Lawyers-Dade Chapter, National Council of Jewish Women Greater Miami Section, Museum of Contemporary Art, ArtSpring, Inc, Junior Leagues of Florida State Public Affairs Committee, Junior League of Fort Myers, Junior League of Greater Orlando, Junior League of the Palm Beaches, Miami-Dade County Commission for Women, Miami-Dade Juvenile Assessment Center, Voices for Children Foundation, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, Administrative Offices of the Court-Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court, Planned Parenthood of Orange County, The Comprehensive AIDS Program and Healthy Mothers of Palm Beach and Healthy Babies Coalition of Palm Beach.

