



California Girls' Courts Process Evaluation Project Proposal

The Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children, and the Courts (CFCC) proposes to examine all of the girls' courts and CSEC courts in California to learn about each court's processes and team approach. CFCC is already conducting a process and outcome evaluation of the Los Angeles STAR Court, one of the state's CSEC courts. This process evaluation of the remaining girls' courts and CSEC courts will assist in gaining a better understanding of these courts, successful practices, and how they can be replicated.

About Girls' Court and CSEC Court

Girls' courts are juvenile courts that have a dedicated calendar and judge for girls in the juvenile justice system who have a history of trauma or exploitation, or may be at risk for these things. The goal of a girls' court is to have a different track from traditional delinquency court that recognizes these girls' unique and gender-specific risks and needs. The court focuses on providing services rather than on convictions or detentions. Similar to girls' courts are CSEC courts, which are specifically for survivors of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC), or sex trafficking. Survivors of CSEC may be any gender.

Girls' and CSEC courts apply collaborative justice principles to combine judicial supervision with intensive social and treatment services to at-risk girls* in lieu of detention. These collaborative justice principles include a multidisciplinary, nonadversarial team approach with involvement from justice system representatives, mental health providers, specialized trauma services, and other support systems in the community. The goal of a girls' or CSEC court is to have an alternative track for girls that recognizes their unique and gender-specific risks and needs. This track, like other collaborative courts, is meant to hold girls accountable for their actions while building on their strengths and reconnecting them with healthy relationships and behaviors.

Each girls' or CSEC court may operate slightly differently from one another, but all follow collaborative justice principles of combining judicial supervision, often on a weekly or biweekly basis, with intensive social and treatment services to at-risk girls or girls who have been victimized or exploited. Many girls' or CSEC courts offer evening and Saturday programs for girls to have group therapy or to discuss things from the self-worth and body image to the legal system and court process.

* Although CSEC Courts are available to both girls and boys in the juvenile delinquency system, most participants are currently girls.



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Like other collaborative courts, some girls' and CSEC courts use a continuum of sanctions for repeat offenses or not adhering to program rules. However, courts are also aware that exploitation is similar to domestic violence, and thus girls may "AWOL" and return to their exploiter several times before leaving for good. Some courts use detention as a sanction more than other courts, depending on the jurisdiction's philosophy, politics, and culture. Although there is a movement to expand "Safe Harbor" laws in which exploited youth are always treated as victims rather than criminals, concerns about minors' safety in an unlocked facility remain. California is one of few states that permits the court to expunge the record of exploited minors.

For additional information about girls' and CSEC courts, please visit
<http://www.courts.ca.gov/37353.htm>

Evaluation Objectives

Since girls' court and CSEC court are relatively new collaborative court models, very few evaluations have been done. The main objectives of this evaluation are to 1) describe the process of a girls' court and a CSEC court and 2) identify specific aspects of the court models that are particularly beneficial. An additional objective is to identify what stakeholders see as model practices for jurisdictions that are interested in program replication.

Research Questions

This evaluation will focus on the process of girls' courts and CSEC courts in California. With that in mind, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Who does the court serve (age, offense, trauma history, service needs, eligibility)?
2. What are the eligibility requirements and referral process?
3. How does the court serve its constituents (types of services [inpatient v. outpatient, county-provided v. contract-provided, etc.], sanctions and rewards, if and when placement or detention is used)?
4. What is the difference in case processing between the girls' court and a traditional juvenile delinquency court? How do state laws (e.g., Prop 35) impact case processing?
5. What are cost-effective practices that the girls' court uses?



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Evaluation Analysis and Data Collection Methods

To answer the research questions, researchers will use qualitative data collection via interviews, focus groups, and court observation.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Researchers will conduct interviews or focus groups with stakeholders of the court teams, including the judge, prosecutor, defense attorneys, probation officers, and treatment providers. These interviews will help to ascertain court team members' experiences and thoughts about specific aspects of the girls' court process. The questions asked in the interviews will pertain to court processes as well as interviewees' thoughts on how the court works.

Court Observation

Researchers will visit the girls' court at least once to observe the court in action. Researchers will use this visit to note details about the court such as the location of the court, the number of court team members involved, the number of participants present, the process of the court, how participants react to the attorneys and judge, etc.

Locations

There are currently a total of 11 girls' courts/CSEC courts in California. This process evaluation will examine 10 of these courts:

1. Alameda Girls' Court
2. Fresno Friday Court
3. Los Angeles DREAM Court
4. Orange Girls' Courts (2)
5. Sacramento Friday Court
6. San Bernardino Girls' Court
7. San Diego RISE Court
8. San Mateo Girls' Court
9. Santa Barbara HART Court

A combination process and outcome evaluation is currently underway at the Los Angeles STAR Court, the 11th court.



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Data Distribution

Upon completion of this evaluation, CFCC staff will compile a report of the findings. This report will be available to all of California's juvenile court stakeholders and will be posted on the Judicial Council's website.

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