

# Helping Girls Get Back on Track

AN IMPLEMENTATION STUDY OF THE PACE CENTER FOR GIRLS

*Executive Summary*

Louisa Treskon  
Megan Millenky  
Lily Freedman

April 2017

mdrc

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE  
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY



pace  
believing in



## Executive Summary

# Helping Girls Get Back on Track

## An Implementation Study of the PACE Center for Girls

Louisa Treskon  
Megan Millenky  
Lily Freedman

April 2017



This project has been funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Healy Foundation, and the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of these organizations, nor does mention of trade names, commercial projects, or organizations imply endorsement of same by these organizations.

This material is based upon work supported by the Social Innovation Fund, a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Social Innovation Fund includes support from CNCS and 15 private co-investors: The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Duke Endowment, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The JPB Foundation, George Kaiser Family Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Open Society Foundations, The Penzance Foundation, The Samberg Family Foundation, The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Starr Foundation, Tipping Point Community, The Wallace Foundation, and the Weingart Foundation.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following funders that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Laura and John Arnold Foundation, Sandler Foundation, and The Starr Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: [www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org).

Copyright © 2017 by MDRC®. All rights reserved.

## Overview

PACE Center for Girls is a unique program that provides academic and social services to girls ages 11 to 18. Girls eligible for PACE exhibit multiple health, safety, and delinquency risk factors, such as poor academic performance, exposure to abuse or violence, truancy, risky sexual behavior, and substance abuse. PACE seeks to help them onto a better path and reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes, such as involvement with the juvenile justice system.

PACE operates 19 nonresidential, year-round program centers across the state of Florida. Girls attend PACE daily during normal school hours and receive academic and extensive social services in a gender-responsive environment — that is, one tailored to the needs of girls. Most girls plan to attend PACE for approximately one year; during this time, they receive academic instruction and advising, a life skills curriculum, assessment and care planning, individual and group counseling, and service learning and work readiness opportunities. Parental engagement and transition and follow-up services are also key components of the PACE program. When girls leave PACE, they often return to other schools in their communities to complete their secondary education.

This report presents implementation research findings from MDRC’s ongoing evaluation of 14 PACE centers. A final report presenting the impacts of the program is planned for release in 2018.

## Key Findings

- The PACE program model, defined through both general program principles and a detailed manual, was implemented consistently across multiple locations. Girls at PACE received most services at the intended levels. Services varied somewhat across locations because of differences in staff and local resources and in program areas where the model gave less specific guidance.
- PACE incorporated gender-responsive programming into all services through a focus on safety and relationships, an emphasis on recognizing and building on girls’ individual strengths, and an awareness of the effects of trauma.
- Girls who attend PACE tend to be low-income, and they often struggle with school and have a range of other health, safety, and delinquency risk factors.
- PACE differed from the traditional school environment by offering smaller classes, access to frequent individual academic advising and counseling, life skills programming, and connections to other services in the community, such as transportation or health care.



## Preface

When young people drop out of school or become involved in the juvenile justice system, the consequences can extend far into adulthood. Thus, there is a compelling policy need to understand how to support young people who exhibit warning signs of academic failure and delinquent behavior. Such behavior is often a symptom of other challenges in the lives of girls and boys — and girls face their own distinct challenges. Girls in the juvenile justice system are more likely than boys to have experienced sexual abuse and maltreatment as children, and their responses to trauma differ from those of boys. Yet a juvenile justice system designed for boys is too often ill equipped to address those issues and may only worsen girls' problems. Gender-responsive programs, such as the one described in this report, were developed in recognition of this need.

MDRC's evaluation of the PACE Center for Girls offers a valuable opportunity to understand how the gender-responsive approach translates into actual program operations. PACE takes a preventive approach, aiming to help troubled girls ages 11 to 18 stay in school and avoid involvement, or deeper involvement, with the juvenile justice system. At locations across the state of Florida, PACE provides academic and social services during regular school hours in a safe, supportive environment tailored to girls' needs, with an emphasis on relationships, relevant life skills, and the cultivation of girls' strengths. A low staff-to-participant ratio allows for individual attention and an awareness of each girl's history of trauma. And, recognizing that the girls' problems are often intertwined with family and peer relationships, either as cause or result, PACE staff members also strive to engage this larger community in the girls' care.

This report describes the implementation of PACE at the 14 centers that are participating in the evaluation. The research found that PACE successfully implemented its unique model as planned in multiple locations. Besides detailing the program's dissemination of its gender-responsive culture and services, these findings provide useful information to social service providers who seek to replicate their own programs. In addition, the study has found that, after 12 months, girls in PACE were more likely than girls in a control group to have received academic advising and mental health counseling and to have been enrolled in school. The final report, due in 2018, will provide experimental evidence of the impact of this gender-responsive program on girls' well-being, along with a cost-effectiveness analysis.

Gender-responsive programming has sparked federal interest and funding for research and development. This study will provide foundational knowledge about the effectiveness of this approach in helping girls stay in school and out of the court system.

Gordon L. Berlin  
President, MDRC





## Acknowledgments

The PACE evaluation is made possible through the support of many individuals and organizations. It is funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Social Innovation Fund, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, and the Healy Foundation. At the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, we are grateful to the leadership of Teresa Power and Gabriel Rhoads.

We are grateful to the staff members of the PACE centers that are participating in the evaluation. They work tirelessly to provide services to girls in their communities and played a critical role in helping to recruit and enroll participants into the evaluation. Staff members generously assisted with arranging implementation research visits and making time in their busy schedules to participate in interviews.

We also relied on the assistance of staff members at the PACE headquarters, who spoke with us about the history and structure of PACE and provided us with essential data about programs. In particular, we are grateful to Mary Marx, Shana Brodnax, Lymari Benitez, Thresa Giles, Yessica Cancel, Janie Smalley, James Kindelsperger, and Debbie Moroney. We also thank Vicki Burke, the founder of PACE, for meeting with us to share information about PACE's early years. This report also benefited from the contributions of staff members at other organizations that either partnered with PACE centers or provided alternative services to young people in the communities where PACE operates.

This research would not have been possible without the work of many individuals at MDRC. Rob Ivry, Dan Bloom, Carolyn Hill, Farhana Hossain, Jean Grossman, and Christopher Boland provided valuable feedback on report drafts. Galina Farberova and her team managed the random assignment system. Hannah Wagner coordinated the production of the report. Danielle Craig assisted with fact-checking. Jennie Kaufman edited the report, and Carolyn Thomas and Ann Kottner prepared it for publication. We also thank the other staff members at MDRC not already mentioned who contributed greatly to the research effort, including Caroline Mage, Ada Tso, Emily Terwelp, Melanie Skemer, Sara Muller-Ravett, Julianna Alson, Hannah Siegelberg, Brit Henderson, Nicole Alexander, and Janae Bonsu.

We are also grateful to Charlotte Bright from the University of Maryland School of Social Work, who provided her expertise on gender-responsive services throughout the project. Joan Flocks, Marina Prado-Steiman, and Emily Calvin from the University of Florida assisted with site visits. In addition, Jessica Walker-Beaumont worked closely with MDRC and PACE to provide technical assistance and strategic planning on recruitment and other program efforts.

Finally, we are deeply appreciative of the girls and their parents and guardians who agreed to participate in the research. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

The Authors



## Executive Summary

In Florida, girls who are falling behind in school or exhibiting troubling behavior have access to a unique program that offers them a chance to get back on track. PACE Center for Girls employs what is known as a gender-responsive approach to provide both academic and extensive social services, including classes with a low student-to-teacher ratio, regular counseling sessions, and a life skills curriculum designed for girls. PACE, which has centers in 19 counties across the state, began more than 30 years ago as a program to meet the needs of girls involved with the juvenile justice system. The program serves middle school and high school-age girls who have multiple risk factors.

These risk factors, which include individual, peer, family, school, and community characteristics, increase the likelihood that a girl will struggle in school and engage in delinquent behavior. Delinquency and involvement in the juvenile justice system, in turn, result in considerable personal and societal costs. Juvenile charges or detention may damage a young person's relationships with friends and family, negatively affect mental health, and interrupt the academic progress and work experience that should accumulate during adolescence.<sup>1</sup> And from a societal perspective, court and detainment costs are high. Therefore, effective prevention or early intervention programs that can help young people avoid involvement in the juvenile system and succeed in school offer a significant return on investment.<sup>2</sup>

Research has shown that adverse childhood experiences affect boys and girls differently. Girls have a greater incidence of depression than boys and respond differently to trauma; for example, girls are more likely to engage in self-medicating behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Their pathways into the justice system are also different. Girls are more often detained for nonserious offenses, such as truancy or violating probation, and more often enter the juvenile justice system with a history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, extreme family conflict, and neglect.<sup>4</sup> Gender-responsive

---

<sup>1</sup>Anna Aizer and Joseph J. Doyle Jr., "Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly-Assigned Judges," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130, no. 2 (2015): 759-803.

<sup>2</sup>Steve Aos, Roxanne Lieb, Jim Mayfield, Marna Miller, and Annie Pennucci, *Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth* (Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2004).

<sup>3</sup>Margaret A. Zahn, Robert Agnew, Diana Fishbein, Shari Miller, Donna-Marie Winn, Gayle Dakoff, Candace Kruttschnitt, Peggy Giordano, Denise C. Gottfredson, Allison A. Payne, Barry C. Feld, and Meda Chesney-Lind, *Causes and Correlates of Girls' Delinquency* (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, 2010); Emily J. Salisbury and Patricia Van Voorhis, "Gendered Pathways: A Quantitative Investigation of Women Probationers' Paths to Incarceration," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 36, no. 6 (2009): 541-566.

<sup>4</sup>Charlotte Lyn Bright and Melissa Jonson-Reid, "Young Adult Outcomes of Juvenile Court-Involved Girls," *Journal of Social Service Research* 36, no. 2 (2010): 94-106; Charlotte Lyn Bright and Melissa Jonson-

(continued)

approaches were developed as a response to the recognition that the current juvenile justice system is not well positioned to meet the particular needs of girls, as most services are based on the needs of boys.<sup>5</sup> The term “gender-responsive” thus describes treatment approaches for serving women and girls. Principles of gender-responsive programs include an understanding of the effects of trauma, a focus on relationships, and life skills and health education that is tailored to the lives of girls and women.

Rigorous research on gender-responsive programming is limited, however. There has been national interest in understanding gender-responsive programs in the context of improving the juvenile system more broadly,<sup>6</sup> but the current literature is more robust in its description of concepts and principles than in its evaluation of program performance.<sup>7</sup> Until recently, it was largely unknown how gender-responsive services are implemented, how similar they are to one another, or how effective they are.<sup>8</sup> The evaluation of PACE Center for Girls — perhaps the largest and most well-established program of its kind — provides an opportunity to answer foundational questions about the implementation and effectiveness of a gender-responsive program. The research aims to help practitioners and policymakers better understand, and possibly replicate, services for at-risk girls. The evaluation is being conducted by MDRC and is funded mainly through the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation’s Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS), with additional funding provided by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund and the Healy Foundation.

## About PACE Center for Girls

PACE Center for Girls currently operates 19 nonresidential, year-round program sites across the state of Florida. Girls eligible for PACE are between the ages of 11 and 17 and exhibit such risk

---

Reid, “Onset of Juvenile Court Involvement: Exploring Gender-Specific Associations with Maltreatment and Poverty,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 30, no. 8 (2008): 914-927; Zahn et al., *Causes and Correlates of Girls’ Delinquency*.

<sup>5</sup>Margaret A. Zahn, Stephanie R. Hawkins, Janet Chiancone, and Ariel Whitworth, *The Girls Study Group — Charting the Way to Delinquency Prevention for Girls* (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, 2008).

<sup>6</sup>Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, 42 U.S.C. 5633 § 242 (1992).

<sup>7</sup>Dana Jones Hubbard and Betsy Matthews, “Reconciling the Differences Between the ‘Gender-Responsive’ and ‘What Works’ Literatures to Improve Services for Girls,” *Crime & Delinquency* 54, no. 2 (2008): 225-258.

<sup>8</sup>Meda Chesney-Lind, Merry Morash, and Tia Stevens, “Girls’ Troubles, Girls’ Delinquency, and Gender Responsive Programming: A Review,” *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 4, no. 1 (2008): 162-189; Patricia K. Kerig and Sheryl R. Schindler, “Engendering the Evidence Base: A Critical Review of the Conceptual and Empirical Foundations of Gender-Responsive Interventions for Girls’ Delinquency,” *Laws* 2, 3 (2013): 244-282.

factors as exposure to abuse or violence, poor academic performance, truancy, risky sexual behavior, substance abuse, and other stressors that may contribute to trauma and negative outcomes. PACE aims to get them back on track by providing services in a gender-responsive environment that addresses these risk factors and develops their strengths.

Girls in this voluntary program, who live primarily at home, attend PACE daily during normal school hours and receive academic and extensive social services. These services include academic instruction and advising, a life skills curriculum, assessment and care planning, individual and group counseling, parental engagement, volunteer service and work readiness opportunities, and transition and follow-up services. Girls typically plan to attend PACE for approximately one year and often return to other schools in their communities to complete their education.<sup>9</sup> A low staff-to-girl ratio allows for individual attention and opportunities to build relationships, contributing to the girls' sense of safety and belonging while they are in attendance. PACE centers strive to create inclusive environments in which a variety of support services “wrap around” each girl, and they rely on a strengths-based approach — emphasizing a girl's assets rather than deficits — and an understanding of trauma and its effects when dealing with girls' risky or challenging behaviors.

## **The PACE Evaluation**

In response to the growing need to better understand and evaluate the services available to girls at risk of school failure, delinquency, substance abuse, or other poor physical and mental health outcomes, this study aims to provide evidence on the execution and effectiveness of the PACE program. The evaluation has three main components: an impact study, an implementation study, and a cost-effectiveness analysis. Fourteen PACE centers participated in the evaluation during the two-year study enrollment period, from August 2013 through October 2015.

The impact evaluation employs a random assignment design. With this design, girls who were deemed eligible for PACE enrolled in the study and were assigned at random either to a program group, whose members are offered PACE services, or to a control group, whose members are referred to other services in the community. Between August 2013 and October 2015, 1,134 girls were enrolled in the study (679 in the program group and 455 in the control group). The results of the impact study, which will be published in a future report, will provide information on the degree to which PACE prevented negative outcomes and created positive opportunities for girls.

---

<sup>9</sup>In some cases, girls seek options other than returning to the public school they attended previously or another school in the district; for example, earning a high school equivalency diploma and gaining employment. In rare cases, PACE centers provide a high school diploma through the local school district.

This report focuses on how PACE implements its gender-responsive services at each of the centers in the study. As noted above, few gender-responsive programs have been evaluated, and information on how this type of program actually operates is limited. This research also will inform policymakers and practitioners interested in understanding how the PACE program model is replicated across locations.

The implementation study focused on answering three main questions:

- How is PACE implemented at each center? This included a close examination of how gender-responsive programming is provided.
- Whom does PACE serve? This involved understanding how girls were selected to participate in the program and how girls in the study compared with the general population of girls in Florida.
- How does PACE differ from other services available in the community for at-risk girls?

The research team reviewed the intended implementation of services according to the PACE program model and compared these with the actual implementation of services. Additional analysis examined whether implementation of the model or services varied across centers. These analyses draw from a rich set of qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data presented in this report include the baseline characteristics of the research sample, program participation data, a survey of PACE staff members, a validated classroom observation scoring system, and a follow-up survey to the study sample of girls (both the program and control groups) 12 months after study enrollment.<sup>10</sup> Qualitative data include staff interviews, observations of program activities, in-person individual interviews and focus groups with current PACE participants, and follow-up phone interviews with program group participants.

## Key Findings

This section summarizes findings from the implementation study. The full report provides additional findings, including details on how services were delivered, for each component of PACE's service model.

- **The PACE program model was implemented consistently across multiple locations. Some variation in services across locations occurred be-**

---

<sup>10</sup>Fielding of this survey was ongoing at the time the current report was written. Therefore, the survey responses presented here are from girls enrolled in the study between August 2013 and March 2015, about two-thirds of the full study sample.

**cause of differences in staffing and access to resources and in program areas where the model provides less guidance.**

PACE takes a hybrid approach to defining its model. In addition to a written set of values and guiding principles that describe how staff members should approach their work, PACE provides detailed guidance on program activities in a lengthy manual. PACE headquarters supports implementation through staff training, data systems, and a quality assurance process. The central office plays a key role, monitoring fidelity and providing guidance or support as needed. The research team found that individual PACE centers were implementing the model as intended. Staff members described in interviews how PACE's values and guiding principles provided the foundation for how they did their work, and both management and direct service staff members reported using the manual regularly to guide program implementation. Data from PACE's management information system show that girls at PACE are receiving most services at the prescribed frequency and intensity.

Activities that were not specified in the manual had more variation in implementation. In these areas — for example, the approach counselors should use with girls — variation seemed to be driven largely by the experience and approach of individual staff members. Availability of resources was another factor. Though every center receives a basic level of funding through PACE's contracts with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and local school districts,<sup>11</sup> each center drew on community resources to support or augment core services. Centers with more resources were able to offer additional services, such as health care and therapy on site. Centers with fewer resources had fewer staff members to dedicate to certain activities (for example, transition services, volunteer services, and work readiness).

- **PACE incorporated gender-responsive programming into all services through a distinct program culture and through specific program components such as assessments, life skills classes, and parental engagement.**

PACE's model incorporates many of the key tenets of gender-responsive programming that are cited by practitioners and researchers in the field. The implementation research found that PACE infused gender-responsive programming into many aspects of service delivery through a distinct program culture, focusing on safety and relationships, an understanding of trauma, and an emphasis on building girls' individual strengths. Key aspects of gender-responsive programming were also incorporated into assessments, life skills, and parental engagement. Table ES.1 provides an overview of common elements of gender-responsive programs and how they are put in practice at PACE.

---

<sup>11</sup>PACE, *Seek Excellence: 2014 Annual Report* (Jacksonville, FL: PACE Center for Girls, 2014).

**Table ES.1**  
**Gender-Responsive Programming Principles and**  
**PACE Program Components**

Category	Principle of Gender-Responsive Programming	PACE Program Component
Program environment	Safety	PACE provides secure facilities, behavior management, and a program culture that is intended to be safe from bullying and trauma triggers.
	Focus on high-quality relationships	Staff members focus on building positive and supportive relationships with the girls. Care is informed by the other key relationships in a girl's life, including family relationships.
	Strengths-based approach	Staff members are trained to recognize a girl's assets and orient care toward building strengths rather than focusing on deficits.
	Trauma-informed approach	Staff members are trained to recognize the symptoms of trauma and to understand how trauma can affect a girl's behavior. Staff members use knowledge of a girl's trauma history to inform care.
Assessment	Holistic approach to treatment	PACE implements a comprehensive assessment process to understand a girl's risk factors and protective factors across five domains: family, school, behavior, victimization, and health.
Life skills	Education about women's health	The Spirited Girls! life skills curriculum educates girls about healthy relationships and general and reproductive health. Staff members work with girls to address specific women's health needs.
	Educational and vocational opportunities	Academic services provide girls with an opportunity to catch up to grade level by providing individual support in small classes. Career exploration is provided in Spirited Girls! classes or through separate career classes. Staff members provide individual support on career planning.
	Connections to the community	Volunteer service provides girls with the opportunity to connect with the community in a positive way.
Parental engagement	Emphasis on family	Staff members engage a girl's family in her care through regular updates on her progress and by seeking to address needs within the family when possible. Staff members use an awareness of each girl's family dynamics to inform her care.

SOURCES: Developed from Patricia K. Kerig and Sheryl R. Schindler, "Engendering the Evidence Base: A Critical Review of the Conceptual and Empirical Foundations of Gender-Responsive Interventions for Girls' Delinquency," *Laws* 2, 3 (2013): 244-282; and interviews with PACE staff members.



- **PACE serves girls who tend to be low-income, to be struggling with school, and to have other risk factors, such as prior abuse or involvement with the juvenile justice system.**

PACE implements a thorough assessment and screening process to assess whether a girl meets eligibility requirements, to understand her history and risk factors, and to determine whether she would be a “good fit” for the program. PACE serves girls who are struggling academically and who exhibit a range of health, safety, and delinquency risk factors. As shown in Table ES.2, at the time of study enrollment, about half the study sample had been held back at least once, and a large portion had low school attendance. Many girls had experienced abuse or neglect or reported having thoughts about harming or killing themselves. A significant portion of the sample were sexually active. Nearly 30 percent of participants had been previously arrested, and a majority of the sample had a family member with a criminal history. Participants also came predominantly from low-income families and often from single-parent households.

- **PACE differed from what girls experienced in other school settings in several distinct areas. Girls assigned to the program group and invited to attend PACE were more likely than girls in the control group to have been enrolled in school and to have received academic advising, counseling, and other services in the 12-month period since study enrollment.**

In a review of other programs available in the communities served by PACE, none offered a similar combination of academic and social services in a gender-responsive setting. Some programs offered both academic and social services but without the gender-responsive approach. PACE’s academic services differed from those offered at public schools, which many control group members attended, in terms of class size and access to regular academic advising. Classes were capped at 14 students, and the low student-teacher ratio allowed teachers to provide girls with more individual support. PACE also provided more academic advising than was typically provided by public schools. In the 12 months since random assignment, as shown in Table ES.3, girls in the program group were more likely to have been enrolled in school and to have received academic advising than girls in the control group. On the quality of classroom instruction, as measured by one common assessment tool, PACE scored similarly to public schools.

Social services at PACE also distinguished it from the traditional school environment. Responses from the follow-up survey indicate that girls in the program group received more social service support than girls in the control group during the 12 months following study enrollment. For example, girls in the program group were 19 percentage points more likely than

**Table ES.2**  
**Selected Characteristics of Sample Members at Baseline**

Characteristic (%)	Full Sample
<b><u>Demographic</u></b>	
Age	
11-12	8.5
13-14	32.5
15-16	49.5
17 or older	9.5
Race/ethnicity	
Black, non-Hispanic	45.1
Hispanic <sup>a</sup>	16.0
White, non-Hispanic	38.1
Other	0.8
People participant lives with	
Two parents	34.8
Single parent	51.8
Relative	10.6
Other <sup>b</sup>	2.8
Family income <sup>c</sup>	
\$28,050 or lower	41.2
\$28,051-\$44,900	35.5
Above \$44,900	23.3
<b><u>Academic</u></b>	
School level at time of referral to PACE	
6th grade <sup>d</sup>	8.8
7th-8th grade	37.2
9th-10th grade	45.3
11th-12th grade	8.7
Recently expelled or suspended <sup>e</sup>	39.6
Has more than 15 absences in past 3 months	41.7
Held back at least once	51.8
Has a learning disability	29.6

(continued)

**Table ES.2 (continued)**

Characteristic (%)	Full Sample
<b><u>Delinquency</u></b>	
Ever arrested <sup>f</sup>	27.7
Ever been on probation	12.6
Has family member with criminal history <sup>g</sup>	64.1
<b><u>Health and safety</u></b>	
Ever sexually active	44.1
Abused/neglected <sup>h</sup>	38.1
Ever had thoughts about harming/killing herself	39.3
Sample size	1,134

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from the PACE management information system.

NOTES: Certain characteristics listed here were captured in two different ways during the random assignment period, as noted below.

<sup>a</sup>Sample members are coded as Hispanic if they answered "yes" to Hispanic ethnicity.

<sup>b</sup>"Other" includes nonrelative or foster care.

<sup>c</sup>The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's guidelines were used in the data collection process to determine which income range the participant's family fell into. Since these figures could vary by county and household size, the ranges presented here correspond to statewide income limits for low income and very low income for a four-person household in Florida in fiscal year 2014.

<sup>d</sup>This category includes sample members who were in fifth grade at the time of referral.

<sup>e</sup>For approximately half of the sample, this was defined as being currently expelled or suspended. For the other half of the sample, this referred to one or more expulsions or suspensions in the most recent school term.

<sup>f</sup>In the juvenile justice system, people are not technically "arrested"; the terminology used is either "incurred a charge" or "referred."

<sup>g</sup>For approximately half of the sample, this measure referred to a criminal record (including imprisonment, probation, parole, and house arrest) for a parent, guardian, or sibling of the sample member. For the other half of the sample, "family" included other members of the household as well.

<sup>h</sup>For approximately half of the sample, this measure referred only to documented instances of abuse or neglect. For the other half of the sample, the measure also included suspected incidents of abuse.

**Table ES.3**  
**Impacts on Service Receipt**

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
<b><u>Academic Service Receipt</u></b>				
Ever enrolled in a school or educational program	99.1	92.9	6.2 ***	0.000
Received academic advising	81.1	67.6	13.5 ***	0.000
Frequency of academic advising sessions				
More than once per month	38.0	33.8	4.2	0.293
Once per month	19.6	11.5	8.2 ***	0.009
1-3 times per year	23.4	22.4	1.0	0.770
Never	19.0	32.4	-13.4 ***	0.000
<b><u>Social Service Receipt</u></b>				
Received help finding services in the community	38.5	23.3	15.2 ***	0.000
Received mental health counseling or therapy	64.2	45.5	18.7 ***	0.000
Frequency of counseling or therapy sessions				
Once per week or more	39.3	23.9	15.4 ***	0.000
1-3 times per month	19.9	13.4	6.5 **	0.043
Less than once per month	4.6	8.0	-3.5 *	0.081
Never	36.2	54.6	-18.5 ***	0.000
Received help related to sexuality, sex, or sexual and reproductive health	72.0	57.8	14.3 ***	0.000
Received help related to social and emotional skills	80.3	63.0	17.3 ***	0.000
Sample size (total = 668)	407	261		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on girls' responses to the PACE evaluation 12-month follow-up survey.

NOTES: The sample size reported here is based on responses to the follow-up survey among girls randomly assigned between August 2013 and March 2015. Due to missing values, the number of girls included varies by outcome.

Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

girls in the control group to have received mental health counseling or therapy. They were also more likely to have received help connecting to other services in the community, such as transportation or housing, than the control group. And PACE offers more life skills programming focused on the needs and perspectives of girls than is typically available in public schools. For example, program group girls were more likely to report that they had received help related to sex and reproductive health than the control group (72 percent compared with 58 percent). PACE also offers follow-up services to girls after they leave the program, though the intensity of services offered varied among the centers.

## **Summary**

For girls at risk of an array of negative outcomes, this report highlights the ways that PACE is different from the other options available to girls in the communities where PACE operates. Few programs offer the same combination of services. The impact on reported service receipt bears this out.

PACE is also an example of a program that provides similar services and a consistent culture in multiple locations in diverse communities. PACE's approach — specifying its model through both principles and a manual, supporting staff members through training, and using data to monitor implementation and fidelity — offers lessons for the field more broadly. Variation tended to occur in areas where the program model was not specified — for example, the approaches counselors took with girls. Finding the balance between specification and flexibility is an ongoing tension in the replication of human service programs.

The implementation study of PACE also offers an opportunity to understand how a gender-responsive program actually operates, an area where current research is lacking. The report describes how PACE creates a gender-responsive culture as a framework for providing its services. The culture serves as the foundation for its gender-responsive programming and is infused into all aspects of program delivery. Building from this culture, PACE offers a combination of services that is hypothesized to meet the specific needs of at-risk girls.

This implementation report is one in a series of publications from the PACE evaluation that will add to the evidence base regarding gender-responsive programming and its effectiveness. In early 2016, a research brief provided an introduction to the study. Another brief, released as a companion to the current report, delves further into the history and literature around gender-responsive programming, using PACE implementation as a case study. And in 2018, a final report will present the results of the impact study and a cost-effectiveness analysis, which will evaluate the costs of PACE in the context of its outcomes for girls.

## About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.