

# Helping Girls Get Back on Track

AN IMPLEMENTATION STUDY OF THE PACE CENTER FOR GIRLS

Louisa Treskon  
Megan Millenky  
Lily Freedman

April 2017

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE  
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY



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## 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.



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## 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



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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.

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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

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<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

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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.

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<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-**

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<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.

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<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.



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

In Florida, middle and high school-age girls who are falling behind academically or exhibiting behavioral problems may have an opportunity to get back on track through a unique program: PACE Center for Girls. PACE centers, located in 19 counties across the state, employ a “gender-responsive” approach to provide both academic and extensive social services. Girls attend daily and year-round. PACE offers classes with a low student-to-teacher ratio, regular counseling sessions, and a life skills curriculum designed for girls, among other services. PACE began more than 30 years ago as a program to meet the needs of girls involved with the juvenile justice system. The program focuses on serving girls who exhibit multiple risk factors for delinquency.

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 justice involvement 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 help young people avoid involvement in the juvenile system can offer a significant return on investment.<sup>2</sup> Policymakers seek to identify and evaluate promising approaches.

Girls at risk of entering the juvenile court system, or those who are involved in the system already, have profiles that differ from those of their male counterparts: Girls are more often taken in for nonserious offenses, such as truancy or violating probation, and they are more likely to enter the system with a history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, extreme family conflict, or neglect.<sup>3</sup> Girls, more broadly, also have a greater incidence of depression than boys.<sup>4</sup> Girls and boys tend to respond differently to trauma, and there is a stronger association between traumatic stress and mental health problems among girls.<sup>5</sup> As most services are based on the needs of boys, the current juvenile justice system is not well positioned to meet the particular

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<sup>1</sup> Aizer and Doyle (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Aos et al. (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Bright and Jonson-Reid (2008, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Kleinfeld (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Zahn et al. (2010).

needs of girls. According to a report by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty, Inequality and Public Policy, “the juvenile justice system only exacerbates [the girls’] problems by failing to provide girls with services at the time when they need them most.”<sup>6</sup>

Gender-responsive prevention programs offer a promising way to address girls’ unique needs.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, “gender-responsive” describes treatment approaches for serving only girls and women, based on the understanding that the default approach is designed for boys and men.<sup>8</sup> While good gender-responsive services share the basics of any good services — such as a well-trained staff and solid treatment approaches<sup>9</sup> — they are distinctive in bringing an awareness of girls’ particular development and gender-specific issues into the program. (Chapter 4 provides more detailed information on gender-responsive programming.) Federal and local policymakers have lent their support for this type of program. A 1992 amendment to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act provided funding for research and development of gender-responsive services.<sup>10</sup> In 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created a Girls Study Group to further the research base around programming for girls.<sup>11</sup> More recently, OJJDP partnered with a national organization to create the National Girls Initiative, which provides training, technical assistance, and other resources to programs serving this population.<sup>12</sup> And in 2015, OJJDP released a statement affirming its commitment to provide funding for research about girls in the juvenile justice system.<sup>13</sup> Thus, at the federal level, gender-responsive services are considered an important part of the service array.

Even with this growing interest, rigorous research on gender-responsive programs remains scant. The current literature is robust in its description of concepts and principles, but until recently, it was largely unknown how gender-responsive services are implemented, how similar programs are to one another, or how effective they are.<sup>14</sup> Researchers have characterized the empirical literature in this area as “limited and inadequate”<sup>15</sup> and “in its infancy.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Watson and Edelman (2013), p. ii.

<sup>7</sup>Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2016a).

<sup>8</sup>Covington and Bloom (2006); Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, and Whitworth (2008).

<sup>9</sup>Maniglia (1998).

<sup>10</sup>Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015, 2016a).

<sup>11</sup>Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2016b).

<sup>12</sup>National Crittenton Foundation (2016). The National Girls Initiative was formerly known as the National Girls Institute.

<sup>13</sup>Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2016a, 2016b).

<sup>14</sup>Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Stevens (2008); Kerig and Schindler (2013); Hubbard and Matthews (2008).

<sup>15</sup>Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Stevens (2008), p. 183.

<sup>16</sup>Bright and Jonson-Reid (2010), p. 103.

The evaluation of PACE Center for Girls — perhaps the largest and most well-established gender-responsive program of its kind — provides an opportunity to assess this approach. The evaluation is answering foundational questions about the implementation and effectiveness of a gender-responsive program, helping practitioners and policymakers better understand these 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. (See Box 1.1 for further information about the SIF.)

This report specifically provides information on the PACE program model and how PACE implements that model. The key findings from this report include the following:

- The PACE program model was consistently implemented across multiple locations, with a core set of similar services. Services differed somewhat across locations in program areas where the PACE model does not provide detailed guidance or when resources were limited.
- PACE incorporated gender-responsive programming into its services by creating a safe, relationship-focused environment and by using tools and approaches that fit within the gender-responsive principles.
- PACE’s environment and combination of services differed from what girls experienced in a more traditional school setting. Girls invited to attend PACE were more likely than a control group to have enrolled in school, received academic advising, participated in counseling, and received other services in the 12-month period since study enrollment.

## **PACE Center for Girls**

PACE Center for Girls currently operates 19 nonresidential program locations across the state of Florida. Applicants to this voluntary program are 11 to 17 years old and are typically struggling academically and may have behavioral problems. PACE aims to help by providing services in a gender-responsive environment that develops their strengths and addresses their risk factors, such as exposure to abuse or violence, poor academic performance, truancy, risky sexual behavior, substance abuse, and other family or social stressors.

PACE locations are referred to as “centers” — to differentiate them from the school setting that girls were usually coming from — and offer services year-round. Girls travel daily to the program during normal school hours and receive academic services and extensive social

### Box 1.1

#### **The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF) Social Innovation Fund**

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) — an initiative enacted under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act — directs millions of dollars in public-private funds to expand effective solutions in three issue areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development and school support. This work seeks to create a catalog of proven approaches that can be replicated in communities across the country. The SIF generates a 3:1 private-public match, sets a high standard for evidence, empowers communities to identify solutions to social problems, and creates an incentive for grant-making organizations to target funding more effectively to promising programs. Administered by the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the SIF is part of the government’s broader agenda to redefine how evidence, innovation, service, and public-private cooperation can be used to tackle urgent social challenges.

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, in collaboration with MDRC and The Bridgespan Group, is leading a SIF project that aims to expand the pool of organizations with proven programs that can help low-income young people make the transition to productive adulthood. The project focuses particularly on young people who are at greatest risk of failing or dropping out of school or of not finding work; who are involved or likely to become involved in the foster care or juvenile justice system; or who are engaging in risky behavior, such as criminal activity or teenage pregnancy.

EMCF, with its partners MDRC and Bridgespan, selected an initial group of nine programs and a second group of three programs to receive SIF grants: BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life), the Center for Employment Opportunities, Children’s Aid Society-Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program, Children’s Home Society of North Carolina, Communities In Schools, Gateway to College Network, PACE Center for Girls, Reading Partners, The SEED Foundation, WINGS for Kids, Youth Guidance, and Children’s Institute, Inc. These organizations were selected through a competitive selection process based on prior evidence of impacts on economically disadvantaged young people, a track record of serving young people in communities of need, strong leadership and a potential for growth, and the financial and operational capabilities necessary to expand to a large scale.

The EMCF Social Innovation Fund initiative is called the “True North Fund” and includes support from CNCS and 15 private coinvestors: 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, Penzance Foundation, The Samberg Family Foundation, The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Starr Foundation, Tipping Point Community, The Wallace Foundation, and Weingart Foundation.

services. Girls typically plan to attend PACE for about one year and often return to schools in their communities to complete their education.<sup>17</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, with attention to each girl's individual strengths. Figure 1.1 shows program inputs, the services provided, and the intended outcomes.

The gender-responsive PACE program model includes:

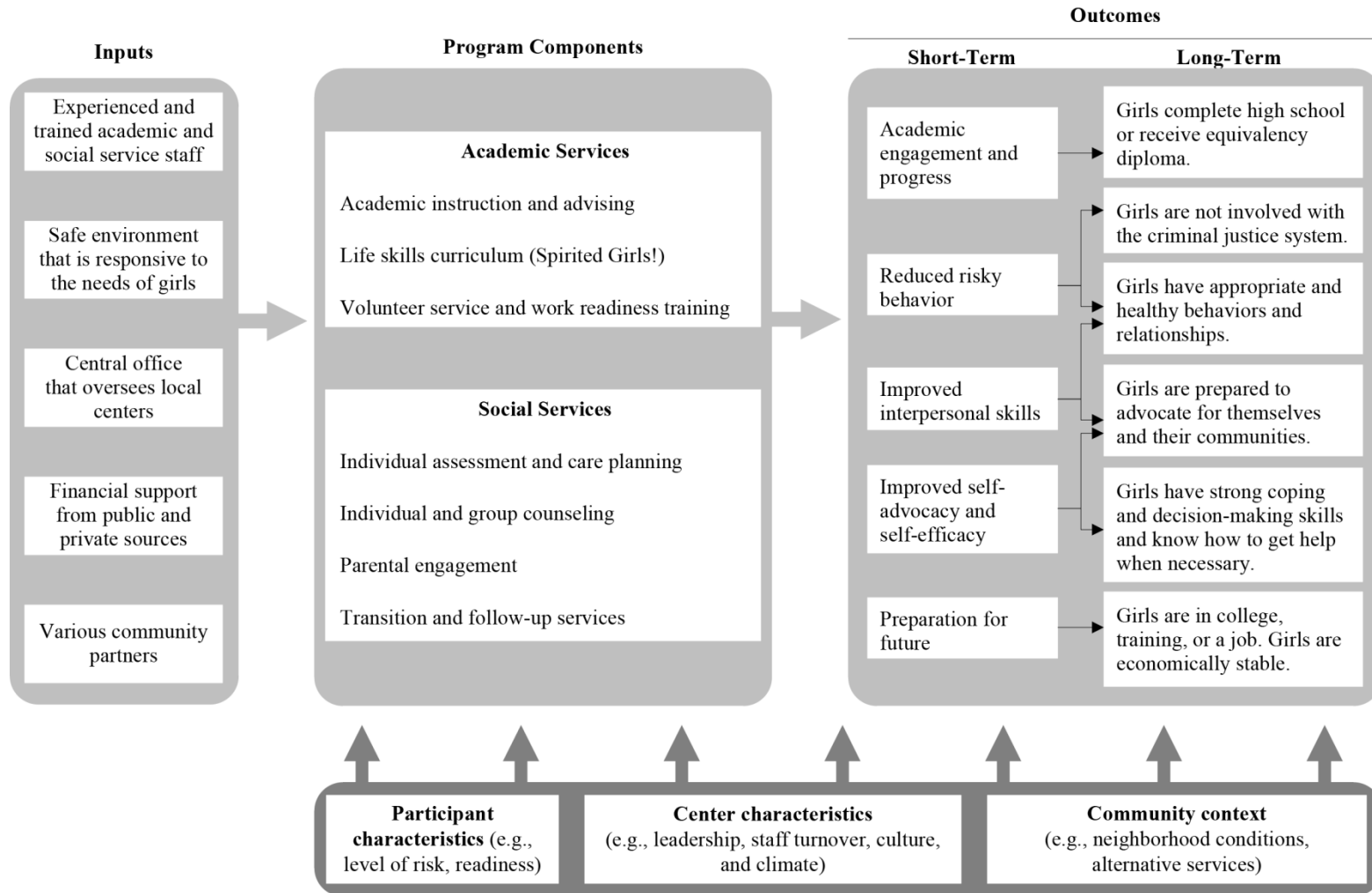
- **Academic instruction.** Girls receive daily middle school- or high school-level instruction in a small class setting. Individual academic plans guide progress, which is monitored through regular advising sessions.
- **Life skills curriculum.** Girls regularly attend a Spirited Girls! class that covers six domains believed to be essential for girls' healthy development: physical, emotional, intellectual, relational, sexual, and spiritual.
- **Individual assessment and care planning.** Assessments of each girl's needs are used to create tailored plans for the girl's time at PACE. Staff members meet regularly to share information and review progress. Staff members refer girls to services outside PACE as needed.
- **Individual and group counseling.** Girls attend frequent individual sessions with counselors and regular psychoeducational group sessions.
- **Parental engagement.** Program staff members maintain parental engagement through initial home visits, monthly progress reports, office sessions, and phone contact.
- **Volunteer service and work readiness.** The centers provide volunteer service opportunities, career exploration, and work readiness training.
- **Transition and follow-up services.** Additional support is available for girls as they make the transition out of PACE and back to their home school or another appropriate placement. Staff members also check in with girls at regular intervals after they leave the program to provide services or referrals, if needed.

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<sup>17</sup>In some cases, girls seek options other than returning to their previous public school or another school in the district; for example, earning a high school equivalency diploma and gaining employment. In rare cases, PACE centers can provide a high school diploma through the local school district.

Figure 1.1

PACE Center for Girls Logic Model





Each center is led by an executive director, with additional leadership provided by a program director and other managers.<sup>18</sup> A social service manager oversees a counseling staff, and an academic manager oversees the academic and life skills teachers. The statewide PACE headquarters provides supportive services to all the centers, assisting with fundraising, finance, human resources, legal matters, training, technical assistance, and information technology. The headquarters management team also advocates for resources and public policy at the state level and coordinates regular meetings of the center staff to allow for information sharing statewide.

PACE receives more than two-thirds of its funding through two sources: the state's educational system and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).<sup>19</sup> For academic services, the centers contract directly with the local school districts to receive per pupil funding that supports a full academic school day.<sup>20</sup> The DJJ funding supports the social services provided to each girl and her family, as well as facility expenses; this funding comes with specific eligibility criteria and limits a girl's length of stay at PACE to 15 months.<sup>21</sup> Additional contributions come from federal and state grants as well as local grants from public, corporate, and private sources.

## The PACE Evaluation

In response to the need to understand and evaluate the services available to girls at risk of an array of negative outcomes, this study aims to provide evidence on implementation and effectiveness of the well-established PACE program. The evaluation has three main components: an implementation study, an impact study, and a cost-effectiveness analysis. In early 2016, a research brief provided an introduction to the study.<sup>22</sup> A second brief, focused on gender-responsive programming, serves as a companion to this implementation report. And in 2018, a final report will present the results of the impact study and evaluate the costs of PACE in the context of its outcomes for girls.

Fourteen PACE centers actively participated in the evaluation.<sup>23</sup> Typically, PACE centers serve a county-wide area. Figure 1.2 shows the location of the PACE centers by population

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<sup>18</sup>Not all PACE centers are staffed with a program director. In some cases, a program director's responsibilities are divided between the executive director and other managers.

<sup>19</sup>PACE (2014).

<sup>20</sup>Specifics of these contracts vary by center. Contracts may provide for academic materials, part-time staff, or transportation, among other items.

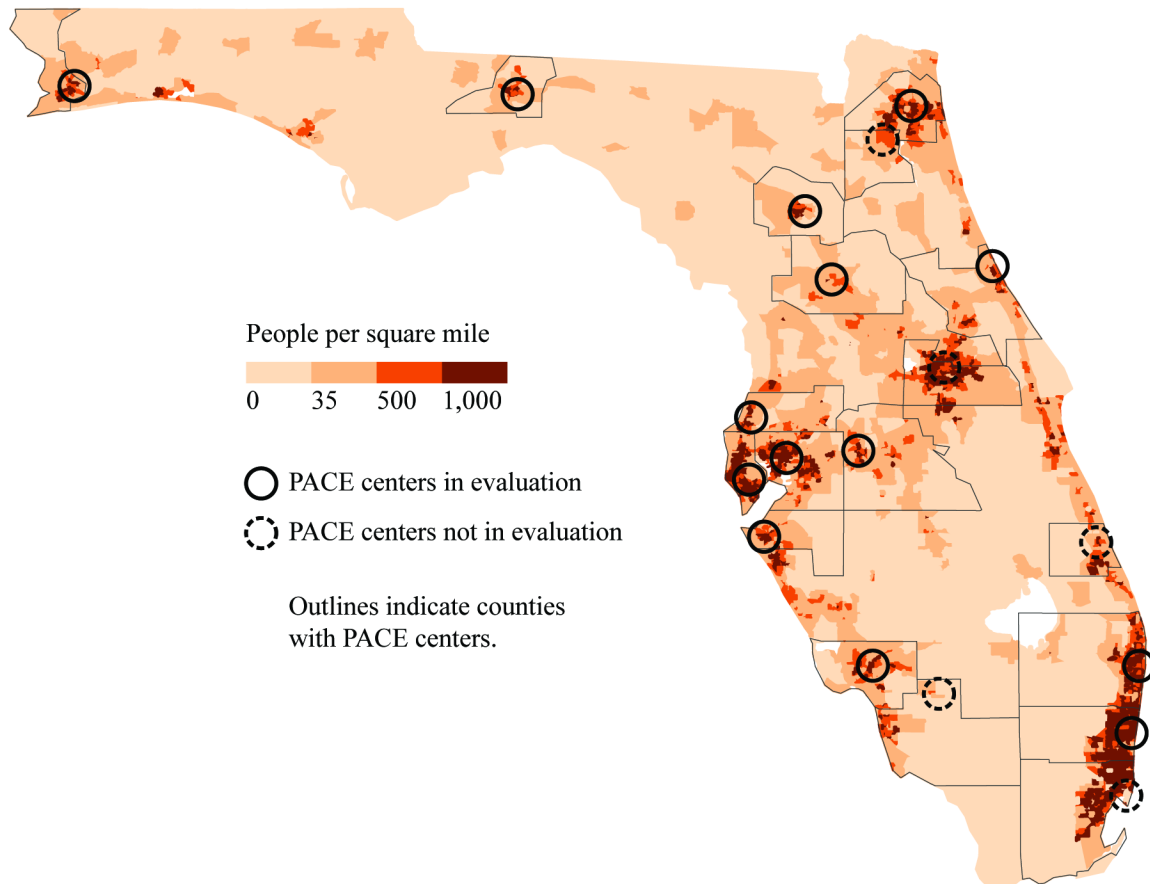
<sup>21</sup>This 15-month maximum length of stay went into effect during the study period. PACE can appeal to DJJ in individual cases to ask for an extension beyond this 15-month period.

<sup>22</sup>Millenky and Mage (2016).

<sup>23</sup>As shown in Figure 1.2, at the time of this report's publication, 19 PACE centers operated in Florida. Two centers opened after the evaluation began and thus were not eligible to be included; two other centers that

(continued)

**Figure 1.2**  
**Population Map of Florida with PACE Centers**



SOURCES: Population density data are from the U.S. Census Bureau. PACE locations are from PACE (2016).

density. Lower-density counties tended to have higher poverty rates.<sup>24</sup> Table 1.1 presents selected characteristics of the participating centers. Most centers had the capacity to serve about

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were initially slated to participate in the study were excluded because of low enrollment during the study period; and one rural center was not included because of ethical concerns about a lack of other services in the community that would be available to a control group.

<sup>24</sup>Florida Legislative Office of Economic and Demographic Research (2011).

**Table 1.1**  
**Characteristics of PACE Centers in the Study**

Characteristic	Mean	Min	Max
Executive director tenure <sup>a,b</sup> (years)	7.5	0.2	22.6
Staff tenure <sup>b</sup> (years)	4.0	1.9	8.1
Years in community	17.9	7.0	28.0
Number of program slots	54.3	41.0	81.0
Number of staff members	18.4	13.0	33.0
Staff-to-slot ratio	1:3	1:4	1:2.33
Cost per slot <sup>c</sup> (\$)	34,486	27,975	39,596
Sample size			14

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on responses to the PACE evaluation staff survey, MDRC site visit data, and program information provided by PACE.

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>This measure is based on data from the PACE evaluation staff survey (N =13).

<sup>b</sup>Tenure refers to years at current center.

<sup>c</sup>This is an average of program costs for fiscal years 2014 and 2015.

50 girls at a time, though the number of program slots ranged from about 40 to 80.<sup>25</sup> Staffing varied accordingly, based on the center size. Nearly all the participating centers had operated for at least 15 years.

For the impact analysis, the evaluation employed a random assignment design. Girls who were deemed eligible for PACE enrolled in the study and were assigned at random either to a program group, whose members were offered PACE services, or to a control group, whose members received referrals to other services in the community. The program’s existing application and screening processes were used to determine eligibility, and 1,134 girls were enrolled in the study between August 2013 and October 2015 (679 in the program group and 455 in the control group).<sup>26</sup> (See Appendix C for further information about the random assignment

<sup>25</sup>This represents the average number of program slots during the two-year study enrollment period, from summer 2013 through summer 2015.

<sup>26</sup>All girls who applied and were eligible for PACE during the study period were included in the study, except girls who had previously attended PACE, siblings of current or recent PACE participants, and girls in  
(continued)

procedures.) The impact analysis will use a 12-month follow-up survey and administrative records to examine outcomes for girls in each research group. Follow-up data collection activities are the same for the program and control groups. Key outcomes are academic progress, academic engagement, juvenile justice involvement, healthy relationships, and risky behavior (such as high-risk sexual activity and substance abuse). Findings from the impact study will indicate whether PACE prevented negative outcomes and created positive opportunities for girls in and out of school.<sup>27</sup>

Focusing mainly on implementation, the current report provides detailed information about the services that PACE provides, how those services are delivered, and whether services vary across PACE centers. As noted earlier, research on implementation and effectiveness of gender-responsive programs is quite limited. The current study addresses this gap and may also inform policymakers and practitioners who are interested in understanding how a program model is implemented across a number of locations. The implementation analysis draws on rich data, such as multiday visits to each participating center, surveys, and program participation records.

- **Site visits:** Members of the research team visited each of the participating centers to interview program staff members at all levels, conduct interviews and focus groups with girls, speak to local board members and stakeholders, and observe classrooms and staff meetings.<sup>28</sup> These visits occurred during the study enrollment period, between May 2014 and March 2015.
- **Staff survey:** A web-based survey was administered to all permanent program staff in the participating programs between October 2014 and March 2015. This survey gathered information about staff roles and backgrounds and about PACE’s organizational culture.<sup>29</sup>
- **12-month follow-up survey of girls:** A lengthy follow-up survey was administered by phone or in person to study sample members approximately

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state custody through the Florida Department of Children and Families. In addition, MDRC granted each center a small number of “hardship passes” to serve girls with specific circumstances who PACE believed could not be served well elsewhere in the community. These girls were not a part of the study.

<sup>27</sup>As a condition of funding, the SIF requires a “large, well-designed and well-implemented randomized controlled, multisite trial” to provide a “strong level of evidence” (Corporation for National and Community Service 2014, p. 3). The impact study follows these guidelines.

<sup>28</sup>Classroom observations used the CLASS-Secondary tool, which is described in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>29</sup>Interns and temporary staff members did not complete the survey. The response rate for the survey was high (91 percent). Information on organizational culture was collected using the 105-item Organizational Social Context instrument (Glisson, Green, and Williams 2012). Management-level staff members were not asked this set of questions.

one year after they applied to PACE and enrolled in the study.<sup>30</sup> The information collected in this follow-up survey will be used mainly in the impact analysis, but responses from the program group girls about their experiences with the PACE program are included in the current report. On average, girls in the program group responded to this survey approximately four months after leaving PACE. In addition, the survey provides information, presented in Chapters 5 and 6, on services received over the one-year period by both the program and control groups.

- **Program participation data:** PACE collects extensive data in a centrally managed management information system (MIS) at its state headquarters.<sup>31</sup> The data are the most complete source of information on the level and types of services girls receive while at PACE. They include baseline demographic and risk factor information (collected during the program application process) and extensive program participation details. As discussed in this report, program staff members regularly enter information about girls' attendance and receipt of services throughout the girls' time at PACE. See Appendix C for further information.
- **Interviews with PACE management and stakeholders:** Members of the research team interviewed the founder of PACE and key members of the PACE leadership team. These interviews occurred in January 2015 and focused on understanding the history of PACE, the responsibilities of PACE's central state office, PACE's funding structure, and PACE's advocacy role within Florida and at the national level.
- **Follow-up interviews with girls and parents:** Girls who completed the 12-month follow-up survey and their parents or guardians were asked to participate in an additional interview. Among those who agreed, girls and parents were contacted between July 2015 and March 2016. A total of 52 girls and

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<sup>30</sup>Fielding of this survey was ongoing at the time the current report was written. Therefore, the survey responses presented throughout the report are from girls enrolled in the study between August 2013 and March 2015, about two-thirds of the full study sample. While all sample members were approached to complete the survey, not all girls could be reached or agreed to participate. Specifically, the response rate was 71 percent overall; 407 girls in the program group (73 percent) and 261 in the control group (69 percent) responded to the survey.

<sup>31</sup>PACE uses Social Solutions ETO (Efforts to Outcomes) software for its MIS.

40 parents were interviewed by telephone in an in-depth, semistructured interview about their experiences with PACE and other schooling or services.<sup>32</sup>

## **Overview of Chapters**

The remainder of this report presents the findings from the implementation study. Chapter 2 provides background information and findings on the overall implementation of the PACE model. Chapter 3 presents information on girls participating in the study and the intake application process at PACE. Chapter 4 provides information on gender-responsive programming and the PACE environment. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss PACE's academic and social services, respectively, including a comparison of the services received by the program and control groups. Chapter 7 summarizes the key findings and discusses the ongoing work at PACE and for the evaluation.

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<sup>32</sup>Girls were selected to represent the different center locations and both program and control groups, as much as possible. The pool of parents was smaller, so all parents who agreed to participate were contacted.

## Chapter 2

# PACE Implementation

This chapter describes how PACE implements its program model and how it ensures that centers provide services as designed. The chapter first describes how PACE codifies its model and how staff members are trained and supported in service delivery, then presents evaluation findings on fidelity to the model. Subsequent chapters build on this context and go into greater detail about PACE implementation and the variation of services across centers. This chapter presents the following key findings on implementation:

- PACE defines its model through a combination of general principles and a highly specific manual. Through ongoing staff training and quality assurance initiatives, PACE headquarters supports individual centers in their implementation of the model to ensure consistency. As a result of these efforts, PACE centers are similar in the types and quantity of services they provide.
- PACE centers had high fidelity to the aspects of the model specified by PACE headquarters. The few instances where fidelity was lower occurred at centers that had lower staff capacity or had struggled with recent staff turnover.
- Variation in implementation mostly occurred in service areas where the program model was not specific and the staff was given flexibility in how to implement the program. Differences in services provided by centers were also associated with access to local resources.

### Implementation of the PACE Model

In order to assess implementation of a program, researchers must understand both the program model and how its developers disseminate that model to the staff. Program developers can take a variety of approaches to dissemination. One approach is described as “principle-based,” in which programs define a set of principles, or broad guidelines, for the activities that the staff should carry out. These principles are based on the program’s theory of change. Although the activities are defined, principle-based models provide staff members with flexibility and discretion in how they implement individual components. At the other end of the spectrum are “manualized” program models. In these models, each program activity is defined in detail, so staff members generally have less flexibility in how program components are implemented.

PACE takes a hybrid approach to defining its model, combining principle-based and manualized approaches. On the principle-based side, PACE has a written set of values and guiding principles that describe how staff members should approach their work. For example, the “Focus on Strengths” principle states: “We look to identify strengths in our girls, their families, our staff and supporters. Using these strengths as our foundation, we build strong, confident, productive community partnerships.” During interviews, staff members described the values and guiding principles as providing the framework for how services are delivered, how decisions are made, and how staff members interact with each other and with families. How PACE puts its principles into operation is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Specific guidance on program activities is provided in the PACE policy and procedures manual, a document of nearly 400 pages that covers policies from staff training to required staff-to-girl ratios to field trip logistics. Box 2.1 provides an example of the content of the manual. Staff members described the manual as central to staff training and decision-making. New hires read the manual upon starting work at PACE. Management and direct service staff used the manual regularly to answer questions that came up in day-to-day work, such as how to respond to chronic absenteeism. Managers also said that the policy manual gave them credibility when giving guidance to other staff members because they could point to a decision as following policy rather than being subjective. Important policies and changes passed down from headquarters were discussed at staff meetings.

Although the manual offers specifics about what activities should occur within a PACE center and how often, the manual is less focused on the content of services or how services should be provided. For example, though the manual specifies that girls should meet every other week with their counselors to review their care plans, there is no policy in the manual outlining the approach that counselors should take in their meetings with girls. One senior manager at PACE described the limitations of the PACE manual in this way: “You can follow the letter of the policy and be accomplishing nothing. Or you can follow the letter of the policy and be making great progress. There’s lots of variability there.”

PACE’s staff recruitment and training practices also support implementation of the program at the centers. Job descriptions are created at headquarters, so the required qualifications and job description for a counselor or a teacher are the same across all centers. Staff training is mostly delivered by each center’s own staff, with PACE headquarters providing guidance and developing some specific training modules. Staff members who work directly with the girls on a daily basis (such as teachers and counselors) must complete 80 hours of training when they first join PACE, plus 40 hours of annual training in subsequent years. New staff members



**Box 2.1**

**Excerpt from PACE Policy and Procedures Manual**

**Policy # 3.11 Policy Title: Staff to Girl Ratio**

Revised Date: 07/01/2013

Original Date: 09/01/1992

**Policy**

PACE will generally adhere to a 1:12 staff to girl ratio.

**Purpose**

- To provide care management services and academic instruction.
- To provide individualized attention to each girl.

**Procedure**

- A. Upon enrollment to the program, a girl will be assigned a Teacher Advisor, advisee group and a social services support staff member.
- B. The [staff to girl] ratio of academic classes may be 1:14 in order to meet the following needs:
  1. To enable the program to effectively meet girls' academic needs by offering classes to girls based on need and interest.
  2. To meet academic special needs by placing a small grouping of girls in a class, thereby increasing the number in other classes.
  3. To enable classes to be staffed in the case of teacher absence and the unavailability of a substitute.
- C. Social service groups will generally adhere to the 1:12 ratio. Some groups may exceed this ratio to meet the needs of the girls.
- D. The number of girls assigned to a specific Social Service Support Staff will be based on the individual Center's organizational chart.
- E. The 1:12 ratio will be maintained during all program activities not mentioned above. The ratio should be reduced when participating in activities outside of the Center.
- F. A group list can be viewed and/or printed from the ETO system to ensure appropriate staff to girl ratio.
- G. Any exception to the policy must have prior approval from the Chief Program Officer or designee.

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SOURCE: PACE policy and procedures manual.

receive training on the PACE model, gender-responsive programming, and trauma-informed care.<sup>1</sup> Each center develops an annual “master training plan” to ensure that training requirements are met; many of the training requirements are passed down through the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) or school district contracts. Although the content of the required training is similar, centers can tailor training sessions to suit their own needs; for example, one center provided staff training on human trafficking when the center saw an increase in the number of girls affected by it.

PACE’s data systems play a key role in supporting implementation. The policy and procedures manual stipulates the frequency and intensity of all key services. These services are tracked for each girl in PACE’s Efforts-to-Outcomes (ETO) database. Counselors and teachers have the primary responsibility for entering data into the database. Managers regularly audit these entries to ensure that staff members are including the proper information in their entries and that girls are receiving services at the prescribed frequency. The focus on data was apparent in staff interviews and the staff survey. Counselors reported that they spent almost a quarter of their time on paperwork and data entry responsibilities; on average, teachers reported spending 13 percent of their time on those tasks.

PACE headquarters further supports implementation through organization-wide training and model development activities, including peer learning, and takes the lead role in quality improvement efforts around identified needs. Examples include creating working groups that draw from both headquarters and center staff to update the Spirited Girls! curriculum or refine eligibility guidelines.

Finally, PACE headquarters plays an important role in monitoring implementation. At the time of MDRC’s implementation visits, PACE was using an extensive pen-and-paper monitoring instrument developed from the policy and procedures manual that focused on ensuring that centers were in compliance with PACE and DJJ policies.<sup>2</sup> The instrument was administered by headquarters staff members and DJJ staff members during a two-day annual visit to each center. Activities during the visits included the review of documents, review of a random selection of entries into PACE’s management information system, and interviews with girls. If the monitoring visit revealed areas where the center was not in compliance with the model, headquarters and the center would together create a plan of action to address the issue.

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<sup>1</sup>Chapter 4 provides details on PACE’s gender-responsive programming and approach to trauma-informed care. In trauma-informed care, staff members are trained to recognize the symptoms of trauma and to understand its effects on behavior.

<sup>2</sup>Headquarters staff members were in the process of changing this monitoring method at the time of MDRC’s interviews.

## Implementation Fidelity and Variation Across PACE Centers

The implementation research sought to understand how closely individual centers implemented the PACE model and the degree to which there were differences in implementation across the centers. These lines of inquiry were important for two main reasons. First, because the research sample is pooled across centers for the impact analysis, it is important to understand whether girls in the study received similar services regardless of which center they attended, in order to interpret the results. Second, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers are interested in successfully replicating program models in new contexts. PACE's approach to implementation may offer lessons for ensuring that multiple providers of a program adhere to an intended intervention.

The MDRC evaluation team developed its own tool to assess the fidelity of PACE centers to the core program model. The tool was based on PACE's manual, with an additional section on gender-responsive programming. MDRC researchers used data gathered during site visits and reviewed documents provided by the centers to rate each center on fidelity to 48 items. The items were divided into six domains:

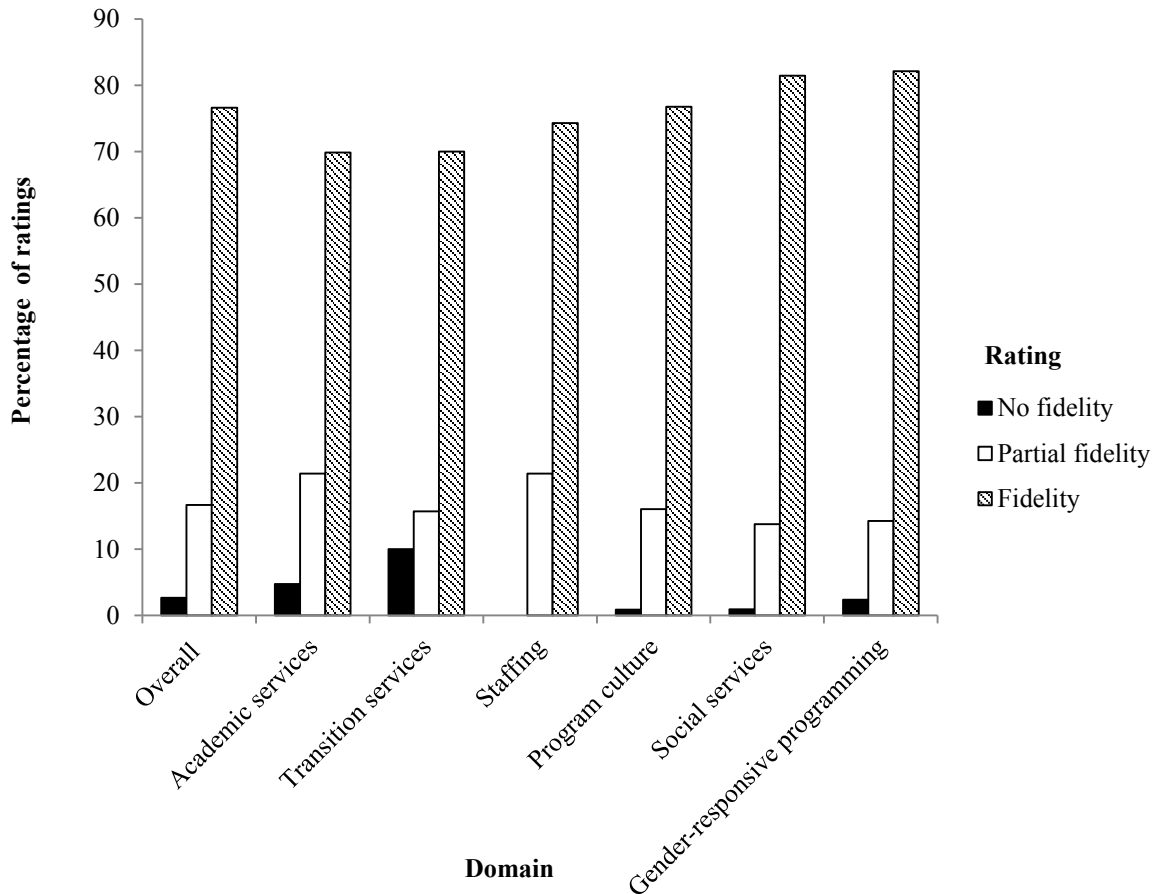
- Staffing, including training and communication among staff (5 items)
- Program culture, including program environment, incentive systems, and facilities (8 items)
- Social services, including intake, assessment, and counseling (15 items)
- Transition services, including follow-up services (5 items)
- Academics, including classes and academic advising (9 items)
- Gender-responsive programming (6 items)

For each item at each center, site visitors recorded a rating of “fidelity,” “partial fidelity,” “no fidelity,” or “unable to observe.” Site visitors were given guidance on what benchmarks needed to be met for each item to achieve a rating of “fidelity” or “partial fidelity.” Each completed tool was reviewed by the lead implementation researcher to ensure consistency across ratings.

Figure 2.1 shows that fidelity in PACE centers was strong overall. Across all centers and domains (a total of 672 ratings), the rating “fidelity” was given 77 percent of the time. Across all centers and domains, about 3 percent of items were rated “no fidelity.” The figure shows that when broken out by domain, “partial fidelity” or “no fidelity” ratings were more likely to occur in academic services or transition services. These two areas, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report, were areas where staffing was less stable.

**Figure 2.1**

**Distribution of Program Fidelity Ratings by Domain**



SOURCE: Calculations based on MDRC site visit data.

NOTES: Fourteen centers were rated on 48 items organized across six domains. For each item, centers earned a rating of either "fidelity," "partial fidelity," or "no fidelity." The percentages shown for each domain are across all centers and items. For example, for academic services, of the 126 ratings given in that domain (9 items × 14 centers), 70 percent were "fidelity."

The fidelity analysis provides one perspective on how similarly PACE centers are implementing the model, but because the evaluation tool was primarily based on the PACE manual, it is limited in terms of assessing the content or quality of services received by the girls in different centers. Counseling approaches, as noted earlier, are not specified in the manual. Interviews with the staff at each center provided further information about service content and

quality that were not reflected in the fidelity instrument. Overall, the research found there was variation in how individual centers provided services, and variation within centers in how individual staff members delivered services.

In the areas where staff members had discretion in how they implemented the model, variation in services was related to the experience and approach of those individuals. As discussed in Chapter 5, analysis of data from a validated classroom observation tool found that teacher quality varied across teachers, rather than across centers. Similarly, as described in Chapter 6, interviews with counselors indicated that the approach a counselor took with a girl depended largely on the girl's individual needs and the counselor's background and training.

At the center level, differences in implementation were primarily associated with the availability of resources. Each center drew on local resources to support its programs and would use these resources to support core services or augment the services it was able to provide. The fidelity analysis found that lower fidelity to the program model was most common in the areas of transition services and, within academic services, volunteer service and work readiness. Centers with lower fidelity in these areas tended to have fewer staff resources to dedicate to these activities, or had recently experienced staff turnover in these roles. A few centers were able to draw on local resources to provide services beyond PACE's core model, such as on-site access to health care and mental health therapy.

This chapter provides a framework in which to understand the findings presented in Chapters 4 to 6, which examine how PACE centers implemented each core service component. Each chapter discusses how services were intended to be provided according to the PACE model and PACE's implementation plan and what services actually were provided, drawing on observations, interviews, and data from PACE's management information system. Areas of variation in implementation among the centers or staff members are also discussed.



## Chapter 3

# PACE Girls

This chapter describes the ways in which PACE recruits girls and determines their eligibility, and draws on interviews to offer the perspectives of girls and their parents on why they came to PACE. The chapter then presents background characteristics of the entire study sample (both the program and control groups) and provides an overview of program group participation in PACE. Key findings are as follows:

- Developing referral relationships is central to PACE’s recruitment efforts; schools are the primary referral source.
- PACE uses a multistep process to assess applicants for suitability for the program. PACE staff members administer a formal assessment and then review the girl’s academic and social service needs, as well as her motivation to attend the program.
- Girls at PACE have a range of risk factors that qualify them for PACE’s services, including behavior problems, academic underachievement, truancy, and a record of suspension or expulsion from school.
- Girls in the program group enrolled in PACE at a very high rate, and their average length of stay at the program was approximately eight months.

## Recruitment

PACE engages in recruitment efforts in order to maintain an active stream of applicants to the program. As PACE’s main funding from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and the school districts is dependent on the number of girls served, consistently receiving referrals to keep program slots filled is central to a PACE center’s financial health. Furthermore, because girls may enter and exit the program at any point during the year, recruitment efforts continue year-round. Each PACE center had an outreach counselor to manage recruitment during the evaluation period.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The outreach counselor position was specifically created to support the additional recruitment and program intake responsibilities brought on by the study. Before the evaluation, these tasks were largely spread among social service staff members. Once study intake activities ended, each center decided whether to continue using an outreach counselor or to use a different staffing structure for recruitment efforts.

A major part of recruitment for PACE involves building relationships with referral sources in the community — conveying what PACE does and what kinds of girls it serves, so that partners can identify potential applicants and direct them to the program. PACE’s main referral relationships are with schools; half the outreach counselors interviewed noted that school guidance counselors or social workers were primary referral sources. Juvenile probation officers (JPOs) are another source; while PACE is primarily a prevention program, girls who have been or are currently involved with the juvenile justice system can also be referred to PACE. JPOs are the source of fewer referrals than schools, however, for at least two reasons reported by outreach counselors: Turnover among JPOs results in a constant need to teach new officers about PACE, and many girls on probation may not be appropriate for PACE.

Besides developing these main referral relationships, outreach counselors post flyers or leaflets in the community to recruit new girls and often receive new applicants by word of mouth from girls who previously attended PACE.

## **The Program Application Process**

After receiving a referral or being contacted by a girl’s parent or guardian, the PACE staff implements a thorough process to determine whether an applicant is eligible for PACE. Figure 3.1 illustrates these steps. This application process is largely specified in the policy and procedures manual. All applicants must first meet a set of basic requirements, including age, sex,<sup>2</sup> and having risk factors across a set of domains (family, school, behavior, victimization, and health).<sup>3</sup>

During the application process, the girl and her family receive an orientation to PACE, which includes an overview of the program and a tour of the facilities. Staff members conduct a formal assessment with the girl, called the Initial Needs Assessment (INA).<sup>4</sup> The assessment consists of questions structured around the domains given above and helps the staff understand the girl’s history and risk factors in greater detail. During the evaluation, an additional step in

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<sup>2</sup>Girls who identify as boys are eligible for the program; however, some PACE staff members questioned whether they were appropriate for PACE. Staff members also noted that sometimes issues related to a girl’s gender/sex identity arose after she enrolled. PACE is reviewing its policies on gender/sex identification to address these questions and concerns.

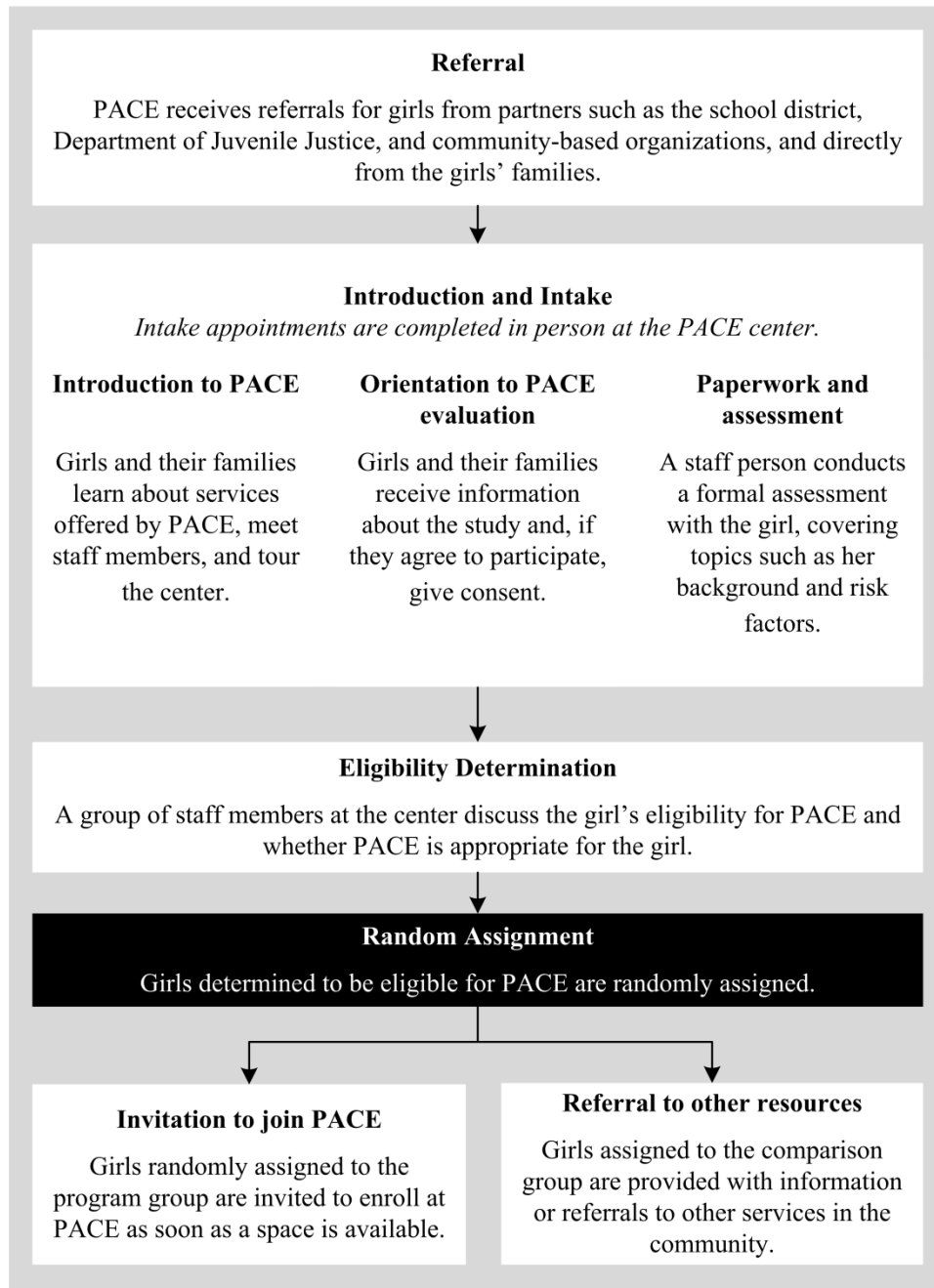
<sup>3</sup>DJJ (a PACE funder) requires that girls exhibit risk factors in at least three domains in order to enroll.

<sup>4</sup>After about half the study sample had been randomly assigned, DJJ required that PACE use a different assessment called the Prevention Assessment Tool (PAT). There are minor differences between the PAT and the INA. Staff members were trained to use motivational interviewing to collect data for the PAT.



**Figure 3.1**

**Eligibility and Enrollment Process**



the application process provided an overview of the study and asked the girl and her parent or guardian to consent to participate in it.<sup>5</sup>

Last, a group of designated staff at the center meets to discuss whether the girl is a good fit for PACE and make a final determination of eligibility. The manual offers broad guidance on determining eligibility, stating that PACE will make “every attempt” to provide services, but that PACE may not be the best fit for all girls referred. Staff members discussed with researchers three main considerations in determining a girl’s fit for the program:

- **Academic needs.** Staff members consider whether PACE has the ability to serve a girl’s academic needs. Almost all outreach counselors noted that they could not serve girls with Individualized Educational Programs that exceed the capacity of the center, such as girls with special needs who require a separate classroom. Centers also considered how close the girl was to graduation; since most PACE centers cannot issue high school diplomas, girls nearing graduation may not be a good fit for the program.
- **Social service needs.** Staff members focus on a girl’s behavioral history to determine whether they can meet her social service needs. The manual does not provide specific guidance on what behavior issues would make a girl a poor fit for PACE; it appeared that centers took an individual approach to each girl. In reviewing a girl’s behavioral history, staff members try to understand the cause of behavior issues and determine whether they would be a problem at PACE, particularly if there is the possibility of harm to other girls at the center. Two counselors also mentioned that PACE was not equipped to serve girls with severe mental health problems. Specifically, if the girl falls under the Florida Mental Health Act,<sup>6</sup> then by state law, PACE must refer her to an institutional facility. There did not seem to be any other firm rules on what mental health issues would mean a girl could not be served by PACE.
- **Motivation.** The manual states that staff members should consider whether the girl’s choice to enroll in PACE is voluntary. Nearly all outreach counselors said that they considered the girl’s motivation in determining eligibility.

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<sup>5</sup>Nearly all girls who applied and met both PACE and study eligibility criteria consented to participate in the study. In a few cases where PACE believed girls could not be served adequately elsewhere, the study participation requirement was waived.

<sup>6</sup>The Florida Mental Health Act, Fla. Stat. § 394.459 (2008), commonly known as the Baker Act, gives people with severe mental illnesses the right to emergency mental health services and temporary detention (University of Florida Health 2017).

Counselors suggested that if girls are not motivated, it would be difficult for them to succeed at PACE, but they indicated that they had a low threshold for what qualified as motivation. Many described motivation simply as a girl's willingness to attend the program or acknowledgment that she needed change in her life, as opposed to showing overt enthusiasm for the program. In fact, many PACE girls reported that they were not originally interested in coming to PACE. Several counselors noted that they worked with resistant girls to persuade them of the value of the program; one explained that often such resistance emerged when a girl was told by her parent to go to PACE, rather than deciding for herself. Overall, while staff members seemed to view motivation as an ideal quality in an applicant, low motivation did not appear to be a reason to turn someone away.

As noted, the manual offered limited guidance on determining eligibility. In December 2014, after the majority of implementation research visits took place, PACE headquarters circulated more specific guidance about eligibility determination and factors to be considered during intake. The overall message was one of inclusivity, stressing that turning a girl away should be a "rare and serious occurrence."

During the study period, as reflected in Figure 3.1, girls were randomly assigned after staff members followed all steps in the eligibility determination process described above and deemed them eligible for PACE. In most cases during the study period, girls assigned to the program group were invited to enroll at the center immediately; if all spaces were filled at the center, program group girls were placed on a waiting list and invited to enroll as soon as a spot opened up. Girls assigned to the control group were provided a referral list of other options in the community. The list was often tailored or customized based on the staff's determination of what other programs would be the best fit for the girl based on their assessment of her during the intake process.

## **Why Girls Come to PACE**

Interviews and focus groups with PACE girls provided insight into the reasons they came to the program. Most girls reported that they had attended a public school before coming to PACE and had been having some sort of trouble at school. The most prevalent issues included behavior problems (such as disrespecting teachers, skipping classes, or not following the rules at home), failing classes, truancy, expulsion, and suspension. Girls also cited mental health issues, drug and alcohol use or abuse, negative peer influence, and bullying as factors in their arrival at PACE.

In one interview, a girl discussed her experience with drug use and negative peer influence before PACE and how it affected her progress in school. She said she was spending time with the wrong group in high school; her best friend was doing drugs and pressured her to smoke marijuana, and the more she smoked, the more her grades dropped. She also struggled with grief after two of her friends died.

Many girls said that they did not want to attend PACE initially; some girls did not want to go to an all-girls school, and others reported that their mothers or other family members made them go to PACE. At the same time, many girls had seen potential benefits to attending PACE. Girls had looked forward to the opportunity to catch up academically, to the access to counselors, and to a caring staff and community. Some of these sentiments are illustrated in excerpts from individual interviews with the girls. In one interview, a girl described what she found most appealing when she first visited PACE — a place where she felt welcomed: “It is actually going to feel like a school. The other ones [programs] didn’t really feel like a school. It just felt like, this is where bad people come when they get in trouble. Here it’s not all about bad people. Some people just come to get their school work done.” One girl said that she wanted to come to PACE because of the program’s close-knit community: “When I first came here I was seeing how everyone was so close and how it was like a big family and it made me think of my own family, so I just like, fell in love with it.” Another girl was especially drawn to the idea of having her own counselor, since at her previous school it was very difficult to meet with the counselor. She explained, “It was hard having nobody to talk to.”

## **Background Characteristics of the Study Sample**

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 present demographic and risk characteristics of the study sample at the time the girls applied to PACE.<sup>7</sup> This sample closely resembled the types of girls PACE serves more generally.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the risk factors presented are consistent with girls’ self-reports to the implementation research team about the issues that brought them to PACE.

As shown in Table 3.1, the majority of girls in the study (82 percent) were 13 to 16 years old. Most came from low-income families (77 percent). About half the sample lived in single-parent households, and just over one-third came from two-parent households. Forty-two percent of sample members came from families that had had some type of involvement with the Department of Children and Families, which handles cases of abuse and neglect.

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<sup>7</sup>See Appendix Tables A.1 and A.2 for characteristics by research group.

<sup>8</sup>In fiscal year 2015, PACE served a total of 2,130 girls. As context for some of the figures cited in the rest of this section, among all girls served in fiscal year 2015, 74 percent came from low-income families, 74 percent had failed a class recently, 29 percent exhibited runaway behavior, and 28 percent had been arrested in the past.

**Table 3.1**  
**Characteristics of Sample Members at Baseline**

Characteristic (%)	Full Sample
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
School level at time of referral to PACE	
6th grade <sup>b</sup>	8.8
7th-8th grade	37.2
9th-10th grade	45.3
11th-12th grade	8.7
English is second language	2.1
Qualifies for special education or ESE <sup>c</sup>	11.2
People participant lives with	
Two parents	34.8
Single parent	51.8
Relative	10.6
Other <sup>d</sup>	2.8
Family income <sup>e</sup>	
\$28,050 or lower	41.2
\$28,051-\$44,900	35.5
Above \$44,900	23.3
Family has had case with the	
Florida Department of Children and Families <sup>f</sup>	42.2
Sample size	1,134

(continued)

### Table 3.1 (continued)

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

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

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

<sup>c</sup>PACE uses the Florida Department of Education definition of Exceptional Student Education (ESE), referring to programs for students with disabilities and gifted programs.

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

<sup>e</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>f</sup>This measure is a reflection of what sample members self-reported; it is not according to their parents or guardians.

These data indicate that sample members struggled in school before coming to PACE. As shown in Table 3.2, at the time of random assignment, three-quarters of girls in the study had failed a class recently, and just over half had been held back at least once. Significant portions of the study sample also had low school attendance (42 percent) or had been recently suspended or expelled (40 percent).<sup>9</sup> These rates of academic risk are considerably higher than the rates among all students in the counties where PACE centers are located; in the 2013-2014 school year, only 5 percent of students were held back, 10 percent had low school attendance, and 15 percent were expelled or suspended.<sup>10</sup>

Girls in the study sample face a number of health and safety risk factors. As shown in Table 3.2, a significant portion of the sample, 44 percent, had been or were currently sexually active. This figure is similar to the percentage of *high school* girls in Florida in 2013 who had ever had sexual intercourse (40 percent), even though the PACE study sample consists of both

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<sup>9</sup>Low school attendance is defined as more than 15 absences in the past three months.

<sup>10</sup>These data were not available by grade. They were calculated from Florida Department of Education data as the number of students absent 21 or more days over total enrollment for the counties where participating PACE centers are located.

**Table 3.2**  
**Risk Factors of Sample Members at Baseline**

Characteristic (%)	Full Sample
<b><u>School engagement</u></b>	
Recently expelled or suspended <sup>a</sup>	39.6
Currently enrolled in school	73.1
Skipped school at least 3 times in past 2 months	34.7
Had more than 15 absences in past 3 months	41.7
Held back at least once	51.8
Failed 1 or more classes in past 6 months	76.6
Has a learning disability	29.6
Attention deficit disorder	19.4
Dyslexia	1.5
Other learning disability	8.8
<b><u>Delinquency</u></b>	
Ever been arrested <sup>b</sup>	27.7
Ever stolen from family, home, or neighbors	16.7
Ever been on probation	12.6
Currently on probation	10.1
Has family member with criminal history <sup>c</sup>	64.1
Has friends with delinquent record or who engage in delinquent behavior	49.8
<b><u>Health and safety</u></b>	
Currently using tobacco <sup>d</sup>	9.9
Currently using drugs or alcohol <sup>e</sup>	14.8
Ever sexually active	44.1
Currently pregnant	1.4

(continued)

**Table 3.2 (continued)**

Characteristic (%)	Full Sample
Ever run away from home	27.6
Ever had thoughts about harming/killing herself	39.3
Abused/neglected <sup>f</sup>	38.1
Neglected	8.9
Physically abused	15.9
Sexually abused	15.1
Emotionally abused	21.7
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>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>b</sup>In the juvenile justice system, people are not technically "arrested"; the terminology used is either "incurred a charge" or "referred."

<sup>c</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>d</sup>For approximately half of the sample, this was defined as having used tobacco three or more times in the past 30 days. For the other half of the sample, this was defined as currently using tobacco.

<sup>e</sup>For approximately half of the sample, this was defined as having used drugs or alcohol three or more times in past 30 days. For the other half of the sample this was defined as current drug and or alcohol use.

<sup>f</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.

middle and high school girls.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 28 percent of sample members had ever run away from home. In line with some of the issues girls reported during interviews, 38 percent of

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<sup>11</sup>Florida-wide percentages refer to female-only Florida responses to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey in 2013 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016).



girls in the study had experienced at least one type of abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional) or neglect, and 39 percent reported having thoughts about harming or killing themselves. The high incidence of these experiences presents a need for what is known as trauma-informed care, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6.

About 28 percent of sample members reported having been arrested before coming to PACE. Unsurprisingly, given PACE's target population, this percentage is much higher than the official arrest rate for the broader population. In 2014, only 1 percent of the Florida female population ages 10 to 17 had ever been arrested. Ten percent of the study sample were on probation at the time of study enrollment, while less than 1 percent of the Florida female youth population had been on probation in fiscal year 2013-2014.<sup>12</sup> In terms of other delinquency risk factors faced, a majority of the sample had a family member with a criminal history (64 percent).

## **Program Group Participation**

Most girls assigned to the program group enrolled at PACE (90 percent) and did so fairly quickly — within about two weeks. Table 3.3 provides measures of participation at PACE among the program group.<sup>13</sup> According to PACE's program data, among those who enrolled at PACE, about three-quarters stayed for longer than 90 days.<sup>14</sup> On average, girls were enrolled for just under eight months, but some girls in the study sample stayed much longer, up to 33 months.

In the 12-month follow-up survey, the percentage of girls who reported having attended PACE matched the program's administrative records.<sup>15</sup> As Table 3.3 shows, among the few who did not attend, the most commonly reported reason was the decision to enroll in another school or program instead (36 percent). Almost one-quarter reported not coming to PACE because they lacked transportation; this was also an issue regularly noted by center staff members in interviews with the implementation team. Nonattendees also reported that they did not enroll in PACE because they decided they did not like the program (23 percent) based on their introduction to it during the application process. This disinclination could involve not wanting to go to an all-girls school or other components of PACE that are unlike the traditional public school.

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<sup>12</sup>Data derived from Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (2016).

<sup>13</sup>These figures are based on data from the PACE management information system and a partial sample from the 12-month follow-up survey. The final report will update these figures for the full sample.

<sup>14</sup>This measure captures only a girl's first enrollment at PACE.

<sup>15</sup>Only 31 program group girls among the survey sample respondents thus far had not attended PACE for at least one day.

**Table 3.3****Program Participation (Program Group Only)**

Service	Program Group
Enrolled in PACE day program (%)	90.3
<i>Among girls who enrolled in PACE</i>	
Time from random assignment to enrollment (days)	19.4
Average daily attendance (%)	72.0
Length of stay <sup>a</sup> (months)	7.9
Length of stay <sup>a</sup> (%)	
Less than 30 days	7.3
Between 30 and 90 days	18.3
90 days or more	74.4
<i>Among girls who did not enroll in PACE<sup>b</sup></i>	
Reasons for not coming to PACE (%)	
Enrolled in another school or program	35.5
Did not have transportation	22.6
Did not like the program	22.6
Moved	12.9
Family member became ill	9.7
Parent or guardian did not like the program	9.7
Other <sup>c</sup>	25.8
Sample size	679

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the PACE management information system and the 12-month follow-up survey.

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>This measure represents only a participant's initial stay at PACE.

<sup>b</sup>Calculations are based on responses to the 12-month follow-up survey and include girls randomly assigned through March 2015 (N = 31).

<sup>c</sup>The percentage in the "other" category appears high, but it represents only eight girls.

## Chapter 4

# Gender-Responsive Programming and PACE's Program Environment

This chapter provides a description of the key components of PACE's intended program environment and approach to gender-responsive programming and explains how staff members put these concepts into action.<sup>1</sup> The chapter presents the following main findings:

- PACE's program environment is its foundation for providing gender-responsive programming. The key components of this environment are a focus on safety, relationships between staff members and girls, recognizing and promoting girls' individual strengths, and responding to the needs of girls who have experienced trauma.
- Ensuring that programs foster a common culture across multiple locations is a challenging task. PACE has successfully done so, with staff members describing a similar program environment regardless of their role or location. Interviews with girls and parents corroborate this: They experienced a safe and welcoming program environment similar to what the staff intended.
- Findings from the Organizational Social Context tool, a measure of organizational culture and climate, were consistent with staff descriptions from interviews. Results indicate a culture and climate that gave priority to meeting the needs of the client; high morale among the staff; and indications that staff members felt a limited ability to change organizational processes, likely reflecting PACE's formalized approach to model implementation.

## Gender-Responsive Programming

Gender-responsive programming grew out of the recognition that girls involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems have particular needs. Girls' pathways into the justice system are typically different from those of boys. Girls in the juvenile justice system are more likely than boys to have experienced sexual violence, extreme family conflict, and child maltreatment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In this chapter, program environment refers to the internal environment of the PACE centers, specifically the environment that girls, families, and staff members experience while at the centers. This chapter does not cover the external program environment in which the center operates.

<sup>2</sup>Bright and Jonson-Reid (2008, 2010).

Because of these different experiences, girls and boys need different services, but most prevention programs have been designed for boys.<sup>3</sup> Gender-responsive programs were developed to provide an approach that is tailored for girls. However, the field is still developing, and evidence on the effectiveness of gender-responsive programming is sparse.<sup>4</sup>

A key research question for this evaluation was to understand how PACE puts the theory of gender-responsive programming into action. There is no single definition of gender-responsive programming, but Table 4.1 presents commonly cited principles and shows how the components of PACE's model correspond to these principles. The components fall into four main areas:

- **Program environment.** Providing girls with a program environment that is safe and that integrates relational, strengths-based, and trauma-informed approaches in all aspects of program delivery (detailed in this chapter).
- **Assessment.** Employing a comprehensive assessment process to understand a girl's history, strengths, and risk factors for delinquency (detailed in Chapter 3).
- **Life skills.** Providing girls with a gender-specific life skills curriculum that focuses on issues particular to a women's health, supports career readiness, and offers connections to community (detailed in Chapter 5).
- **Parental engagement.** Engaging the family in a girl's care at PACE (detailed in Chapter 6).

## Program Environment

Program environment is often a focus in youth programs because it is viewed by many researchers and practitioners as a key aspect of service delivery and as connected with youth outcomes. Aspects of program environment include how staff members interact with participants, rules governing behavior, the program's physical space (decorations and security features), and how participants are involved in leadership within the program. Program environment is also seen as central to the implementation of gender-responsive programming.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, MDRC's implementation research examined PACE's program environment in depth.

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<sup>3</sup>Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, and Whitworth (2008).

<sup>4</sup>Hubbard and Matthews (2008).

<sup>5</sup>Covington and Bloom (2006).

**Table 4.1**  
**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 Kerig and Schindler (2013) and interviews with PACE staff members.

PACE staff members at all levels and across all participating centers were asked to describe the environment they intended to create for girls. Staff members were also asked how they implemented a gender-responsive approach in their day-to-day work. In all, 112 staff members across 14 centers were asked questions about the environment and gender-responsive programming. Responses to these questions focused on the program environment principles listed in Table 4.1: safety, high-quality relationships, a strengths-based approach, and a trauma-informed approach. These components are also more generally cited as important to effective programs for young people.<sup>6</sup> Staff responses related to each of these topics are summarized below. The following sections also describe the perspectives of girls and parents based on interviews and the 12-month survey of girls.

## **Safety**

In line with the principles of both youth and gender-responsive programming, staff members first and foremost emphasized that the environment should be safe from both physical and emotional threats. One senior manager at PACE described the importance of safety at PACE and its impact on girls: “I’ve never seen anything like the level of ... emotional and physical safety that’s present in a center. And you can see it in the girls in the way they act. And the way they show up as girls, as kids, instead of with all those extra sort of layers.”

PACE employed several strategies to support physical safety. To control who enters and leaves the facilities, all PACE centers are secured with locked external doors that require visitors to be buzzed in and registered at a front desk. Girls were required to store their personal belongings in a designated area upon entering to prevent them from bringing in unsafe or distracting items. Rooms that were not in use were locked to prevent girls from accessing areas that were not supervised by staff. The main physical threat mentioned was fighting between girls enrolled in the program. To prevent this, the staff practiced “sight and sound” supervision, which meant ensuring that all girls were within hearing or sight of a staff member at all times. Staff members also emphasized the importance of knowing the girls and their current situations as a way to maintain safety within the center. Staff members would pay closer attention to girls they knew were in crisis. Daily communication, such as morning meetings, were used to update staff members on emerging issues with or between girls in the program.

PACE’s discipline policy promotes safety. Many staff members said the response to a behavior issue was tailored to each girl and her circumstances, but staff members would consider the safety of all girls in the center when deciding on consequences. Some centers had zero tolerance policies around fighting, and girls who fought would be expelled (“transitioned”). Nonphysical infractions, such as bullying or being insubordinate to a teacher, could result in a

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<sup>6</sup>Catalano et al. (2004); Ko et al. (2008).

suspension, either in school or out of school (known as “days of reflection”). The PACE policy and procedures manual provides guidance on discipline policies, outlining the approaches that centers should take and prohibiting discipline techniques such as “use of isolation.” Some centers were required to adopt the local school district’s student code of conduct and zero-tolerance policies.

Preventing bullying was a particular focus, and centers provided antibullying education through Spirited Girls! (life skills) classes or special events, such as schoolwide assemblies dedicated to celebrating diversity and promoting a “sisterhood” culture within PACE. Centers structured responsibility for discipline in different ways. At about half the centers, management staff members rather than counselors disciplined girls so as to preserve the therapeutic relationship between counselors and girls. At the other half, counselors did have a role in discipline, and managers believed it was beneficial to have a counselor help a girl process the issues that caused the behavior.

Most girls and parents described PACE as a safe place. Parents were also overwhelmingly positive about the environment they encountered at PACE; most described it as a safe environment and said incidents of bullying were dealt with appropriately. In describing the safe aspects of the environment in interviews, girls said that staff members monitored the center closely, and girls who were a threat to the safety of the school would be expelled. One girl said: “If the staff finds out there’s going to be a fight they are on top of it and end it right then and there.” Girls and parents liked that the buildings were secure and that PACE limited access by outsiders. Most girls did not think bullying was a problem, noting that staff members were on the lookout for bullying and would address it immediately. Not all girls felt safe, however: 15 percent of girls in the follow-up survey said they felt concerned about safety while at PACE.

Girls did say that being in an all-girls environment could lead to “drama,” which was described as distinct from bullying, referring instead to minor issues between girls, such as two girls having the same romantic interest. Though girls in interviews could be cavalier about the “drama,” the follow-up survey of girls suggests that it could become a more significant issue for some; of girls who had left PACE, nearly a third of them reported that not liking or getting along with other girls in the program was a contributing factor.

### **High-Quality Relationships**

After emphasizing that the centers should have a foundation of safety, staff members most often said that the environment should provide nurturing relationships for the girls. Common terms used by staff members included “loving,” “family-like,” “positive,” and “supportive.” One counselor said: “It’s a loving environment. When girls walk in the door, they know that PACE staff care for them.” Staff members described their relationships with girls as central to implementing a gender-responsive approach, and their answers aligned with gender-

responsive theory about the relational needs of girls. This theory holds that relationships are central to girls' lives and to their self-esteem.<sup>7</sup> In the words of one female staff member: "Girls are relational, everything that happens in our lives is based on a relationship, whether it's good, bad, or indifferent." Staff members reported that most girls at PACE have had harmful relationships in their lives, and staff members attempted to counteract that by building positive, affirming relationships.

Staff members described a number of strategies to create nurturing relationships, most of which focused on the staff's role and interaction with the girls. They emphasized the importance of knowing each of the girls and their backgrounds, both to help the girls feel welcomed and to try to avoid actions or activities that might be a trigger, or reminder, of a girl's prior trauma. Staff members described being friendly with all the girls at the center, not just those who were in their classes or on their caseloads. Research team members observed this strategy in practice during site visits; staff members would greet all the girls who walked by them, and it appeared that many girls felt comfortable dropping in on the executive director or other members of the management staff.

Noting that girls might have had limited opportunities to see what a healthy relationship looks like, staff members reported modeling such relationships both with the girls and with each other: For example, they would interact with girls in the way that they wanted girls to interact with them, being positive and upbeat in their exchanges. Staff members would also encourage other positive relationships in girls' lives. Within the center, these efforts could involve peer mediation between girls who were not getting along, to address the source of conflict and help girls learn how to prevent further problems; in addition, counselors would work with girls on ways to promote healthy relationships with their families and romantic partners.

Girls described positive relationships with the staff members at PACE. Most girls interviewed said the staff members were the best thing about PACE. They described them as "family-like" and "loving," similar to how the staff described the intended environment. In the words of one girl, there was "unsolicited, genuine care between the staff and the students." Nearly all girls interviewed said there was at least one PACE staff member with whom they could discuss personal issues; this was most commonly a girl's counselor but also included others at the center. Positive feelings toward PACE staff members were not universal, however: In the follow-up survey, 18 percent of girls in the program group said they felt misunderstood by the PACE staff.

Though most girls interviewed had positive feelings about the program culture, some expressed dislike or discomfort with the way staff members related to them. These girls tended

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<sup>7</sup>Gilligan (1982).



to say they felt “babied” by the staff, giving the example of teachers or counselors talking down to them or treating them as if they were younger than they were. One girl felt uncomfortable at PACE because, in such a small school, she could not “hide” in the way she could at her larger district school.

Nearly all parents interviewed said that they felt comfortable at their daughter’s PACE center, many because the staff made them feel welcomed. Parents said they could get to know the staff at the center because of its small size compared with public school. Describing the environment at PACE, one parent said: “I had a smile on my face when I first went into that school.”

### **A Strengths-Based Approach**

Staff members also talked about the importance of building girls’ self-confidence through a strengths-based approach. The strengths-based approach, which originated in the social work field, focuses on identifying and building on a client’s strengths and assets to help her achieve her goals. Staff members noted that girls may not get much encouragement from their families and may not be used to hearing positive things about themselves. This emphasis on strengths was implemented formally through PACE’s rewards system and informally through the day-to-day interactions between the staff and the girls.

The PACE manual requires each center to implement a rewards system to recognize and encourage positive behaviors in the girls. The specifics of the rewards program varied by center, but in general girls could advance to reward “levels” by completing specified milestones, such as maintaining a certain attendance rate. Rewards were either tangible (such as clothes or make-up) or privileges (a lunch date with a staff member or allowances in the dress code). Some centers also had a points system that was separate from the level system and offered girls ways to earn rewards by the day or week. The points systems offered girls more immediate recognition for positive behavior, while the level system focused on longer-term goals. Although each center offered a rewards system, interviews with staff members and girls revealed that girls’ involvement varied. Staff members strived to create a system that would appeal to diverse interests, but not every girl wanted to participate. In addition to the system, staff members would be on the lookout for positive behavior and used “gotchas” (where a staff member would provide immediate and spontaneous recognition) to reward a girl for doing something positive.

Counselors also took a strengths-based approach in their one-on-one sessions with girls. In these sessions, counselors helped girls recognize their strengths and referred back to those strengths when helping girls develop strategies to address the challenges in their lives. Counselors also tried to help parents see their daughters’ strengths by noting them in parent-counselor meetings along with areas for improvement. Some staff members focused on “female empow-

erment” themes when talking about their strengths-based approach, such as helping girls understand that their job opportunities in life were not limited by their gender.

In follow-up interviews about PACE’s impact on their lives, girls most commonly said that they learned to recognize positive things about themselves while at PACE: for example, helping others with school work, being a good listener, and being a good mother. More broadly, many girls said they had higher self-esteem after attending PACE. Reflecting on her time there, one girl said she learned that “I was worth helping, worth giving a second chance, and worth realizing my potential.”

### **A Trauma-Informed Approach**

A trauma-informed approach describes an organization’s response to the needs of those who have experienced trauma. A *trauma-informed approach* refers to a component of an organization’s culture; *trauma-specific interventions* refer to clinical approaches used to promote a client’s recovery from trauma. Commonly cited components of a trauma-informed approach include a focus on safety, transparency in organizational operations to build trust, a focus on collaboration and relationships, a strengths-based approach, and recognition of cultural, historical, and gender issues.<sup>8</sup> PACE’s implementation of several of these key components were described in earlier sections of this report. The current section describes how PACE supports the implementation of a trauma-informed approach through training and ongoing professional development.

All PACE staff members who interact with girls go through trauma training when they first start at PACE and annually thereafter. Staff members are trained to understand the impact of trauma on a person’s life, to recognize the symptoms of trauma, and to interact with girls in a way that avoids inadvertently contributing to their trauma and supports their healing. Staff interviews indicate that PACE has been successful in this training. Staff members described efforts to ensure that PACE was a safe place emotionally and that its environment would not trigger the girls’ prior traumas. For example, staff members would ask permission before touching a girl or warn girls if the content of a movie or book being read in class dealt with a difficult subject.

Another aspect of PACE’s trauma-informed approach involves understanding the impact of trauma on a girl’s behavior. For example, staff members said, if a girl was being disruptive in class, they would try to recognize how her experience might be affecting her as opposed to taking a punitive approach. One staff member put it this way: “If [the girls] had a trauma that caused them to have high anxiety about social situations, then that’s going to come

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<sup>8</sup>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (2014).

up in everything that they do every day. You have to keep that in mind that she has had this horrible experience.”

## **Fostering a Gender-Responsive Program Culture**

Fostering a similar program culture across multiple program locations is challenging, as each center operates in its particular external environment and staff members are not shared across centers. PACE promotes its program culture primarily through a set of values and guiding principles, shown in Box 4.1. These values and guiding principles were woven into many aspects of program operations. They were prominently displayed at the centers, and staff members referred to them when they talked to girls and sometimes when they talked to each other. New staff members received training on the values and guiding principles, as well as training on staff role modeling, gender-responsive programming, strengths-based behavior management, and trauma-informed care.

The research found that each PACE center reflected a program culture that was consistent with the overall PACE values and guiding principles. Staff responses to the interview questions about program environment showed strong consistency in descriptions of the ideal PACE environment and the strategies to achieve it across roles and centers. Moreover, most staff members at different levels in the centers — executive directors, middle management, and counselors — gave similar answers to questions about how they incorporate a gender-responsive approach into their work.

Teachers were the only group that gave less consistent responses. Although many teachers provided answers that demonstrated use of a gender-responsive approach, about 40 percent of teachers interviewed either had difficulty describing how they used a gender-responsive approach or said that they do not use such an approach in their work. A few teachers admitted to not fully subscribing to the gender-responsive approach. Others would offer descriptions of how they incorporated such programming into their classrooms, but the examples they provided did not in fact reflect gender-responsive principles. For example, in describing the primary way that they were gender responsive, one teacher said that girls should be taught to be “civil” while another said she focused on the decorations in the classroom. The lower level of knowledge among the teachers about gender-responsive approaches was associated with shorter tenures at PACE. The majority of teachers who had difficulty describing their use of a gender-responsive approach had been at PACE for less than a year; half of them had been at PACE for less than six months.

Broadly, however, the PACE centers in this study shared a common program culture, even though they were operating in different local contexts. The uniformity of staff responses

#### Box 4.1

### PACE Values and Guiding Principles

**Honor the Female Spirit.** We value and promote the female perspective by respecting its distinct needs, creating safe gender-responsive environments, and celebrating the female experience.

**Focus on Strengths.** We look to identify strengths in our girls, their families, our staff and supporters. Using these strengths as our foundation, we build strong, confident, productive community participants.

**Act with Integrity and Positive Intent.** We believe that all actions and decisions must be guided by the highest ethical principles, respecting the uniqueness of all involved and honoring the differences.

**Embrace Growth and Change.** We believe that everyone is capable of remarkable growth, and only by encouraging change can individuals, organizations and society reach their full potential.

**Value the Wisdom of Time.** We understand that patience can be as powerful as immediate action, and each has its place. We value the discernment required for their effective use.

**Exhibit Courage.** We think courage is essential in making a difference, enabling us to speak for those who cannot, take risks to do what is right, deliver just and fair consequence and be accountable for our actions.

**Seek Excellence.** We strive for excellence in all we accomplish by holding true to our mission while consistently meeting high standards of performance, reflecting critically upon our accomplishments, seeking innovative solutions, and believing all things are possible.

**Create Partnerships.** We believe in developing effective partnerships and long-term relationships, by listening to our staff, our girls, their families and our communities, incorporating their input and involving them in our decision-making.

**Invest in the Future.** We place our faith in the long-term growth and development of our girls, staff, agency and communities, believing it is the best strategy for creating results that have lasting impact.

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SOURCE: PACE policy and procedures manual.

(with the exception of some teachers, noted above) is related to the training staff members receive and the structured approach to model implementation. The consistency of staff descriptions of the program culture may also be a reflection of the consistency of messages from PACE leadership: The chief executive officer and executive directors used a common language to

describe the intended environment and gender-responsive programming, and the language used by direct service staff members mirrored that of their managers. The finding that teachers with shorter tenures had a difficult time articulating PACE gender-responsive approaches indicates that staff turnover, and the need to train new staff members on the program environment, can cause barriers to implementing the program environment as intended.

### **Measuring Program Environment**

Measuring the environment of a program is often a difficult and subjective task — programs sometimes refer to their program environment as the “secret sauce” that no one knows how exactly to measure or replicate. This evaluation used the Organizational Social Context (OSC) tool as a measure of PACE’s program environment.<sup>9</sup> Social context, or an organization’s culture and climate, is thought to be a factor in human service program implementation, associated with staff adoption of organizational practices, fidelity, staff turnover, and relationships between the staff and clients.<sup>10</sup> This study uses the OSC as one measure of the social context at PACE centers. As described in this section, the OSC results are consistent with the research team’s findings from interviews with PACE staff members.

The OSC is designed to measure organizational culture, organizational climate, and worker morale, discussed further below. These constructs are assessed through a 105-item survey that asks staff members to rate on a five-point scale how often each statement applied to their center experiences. The scale ranges from “never” to “always.” Culture and climate are each made up of subscales, described in Box 4.2. Morale, also shown in Box 4.2, measures individual job satisfaction and commitment to the center.<sup>11</sup> OSC scores are calculated for each organizational unit as t-scores, or standardized scores, where the mean is 50 and the standard deviation is 10.<sup>12</sup> The mean and standard deviation were established from a national sample of 100 mental health organizations across the nation; the respondents in the national sample were all mental health clinicians providing services to children and adults.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The OSC was administered to all direct service staff members.

<sup>10</sup>Glisson et al. (2007); Hemmelgarn and Glisson (1998); Glisson and Green (2006).

<sup>11</sup>Scores for culture and climate subscales are calculated at the organizational level, which in this case was each PACE center. Morale scores are first calculated at the individual level and then averaged for each center.

<sup>12</sup>Standardized scores ensure that the scores are normally distributed, with half the scores falling below the mean and half falling above the mean. As an example, a center that had a score of 60 on proficiency would fall above the scores of more than 84 percent of the agencies in the sample.

<sup>13</sup>The sample was derived from a subset of participating clinics in the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being. Across the participating clinics, 1,154 clinicians took the OSC. See Glisson, Green, and Williams (2012).

## Box 4.2

### Organizational Social Context Subscales

#### Culture

*Proficiency* measures competency and responsiveness. Competency is the degree of emphasis an organization places on job knowledge and expectations of excellence from employees. Responsiveness measures the extent to which the staff is expected to place the well-being of clients first and meet their unique needs. One example of a survey statement that measures proficiency is “Members of my center are expected to be responsive to the needs of each client.”

*Rigidity* measures centralization (the extent to which power is diffused within the organization) and formalization (the extent to which procedures guide work-related interactions). In rigid environments, the staff has less ability to exercise discretion and limited power to influence key management decisions. One example of a survey statement that measures rigidity is “The same steps must be followed in processing every piece of work.”

*Resistance* measures apathy toward change and suppression of change. Apathy is the extent to which the staff is resigned to the status quo versus interested in actively seeking new ways of providing service. Suppression looks at how attempts at change are handled within the organization. One example of a survey statement that measures resistance is “Members of my center are expected to not make waves.”

#### Climate

*Engagement* looks at the degree to which the staff feels connected and involved with clients, as well as the degree to which staff members feel that they are effective in their roles. A survey item that measures engagement is “I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.”

*Functionality* looks at cooperation among staff members, clarity of staff roles, and opportunity for growth and advancement. Two survey items that measure functionality are “My job responsibilities are clearly defined” and “PACE provides numerous opportunities to advance if you work for it.”

*Stress* measures whether staff members feel overloaded, overwhelmed, and emotionally exhausted by their jobs. Survey items include “I feel like I am at the end of my rope” and “The amount of work I have to do keeps me from doing a good job.”

#### Morale

*Morale* measures staff satisfaction with and commitment to their jobs. Survey items include “I really care about the fate of this organization.”

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SOURCE: Paraphrased from a report provided to MDRC by the Center for Behavioral Health Research.

The scores for PACE centers are shown in Figure 4.1. Each dot represents the t-score for a center, and the national mean of 50 is shown as a horizontal line. As shown, nearly every center had a t-score above 50 on each subscale. These scores indicate that PACE centers exhibited a different OSC profile from that of the national comparison sample, which likely reflects, at least in part, the different contexts that PACE programs operate in compared with mental health organizations (for example, academic services rather than health care) and the different types of roles that staff members at PACE play compared with mental health clinicians. While t-scores tended to be high, the culture and climate subscales show a range of scores. Morale scores, by contrast, are clustered. The next paragraphs discuss possible interpretations of these scores and limitations of their use.

Organizational climate is defined by the OSC as “the psychological impact of the work environment on the individuals who work there.”<sup>14</sup> Compared with a national sample of mental health organizations, most PACE centers scored above the mean on the OSC climate subscales: engagement, functionality, and stress. Engaged cultures reflect organizations where staff members feel personally invested in their jobs, which is how many staff members described their work at PACE. Nearly all PACE centers scored high on the OSC’s measure of functionality, which indicates that PACE staff members generally feel that there is clarity around individual staff roles and opportunities for advancement within the organization. Most PACE centers scored near or above the mean on stress, indicating that although they were engaged in their work and there was clarity around roles, they still found their jobs to be emotionally exhausting or overwhelming to some degree. This is not surprising given the needs of the population PACE works with.

Organizational culture is defined by the OSC as “how things are done” and the expectations of the organization for its staff.<sup>15</sup> Compared with the national sample of mental health organizations, most centers scored above the mean on the culture subscales: proficiency, rigidity, and resistance. According to OSC documentation, a high proficiency score is associated with organizations where employee excellence and competence are valued and staff members are expected to put the needs of clients first.<sup>16</sup> As described in the previous section, a strong “client first” culture emerged from the interviews with staff members, where staff decision-making is driven by what is in the best interest of the girls. PACE’s scores on the rigidity and resistance subscales indicate that staff members feel they have limited discretion over job tasks and limited input into organizational practice. PACE’s manual and implementation support,

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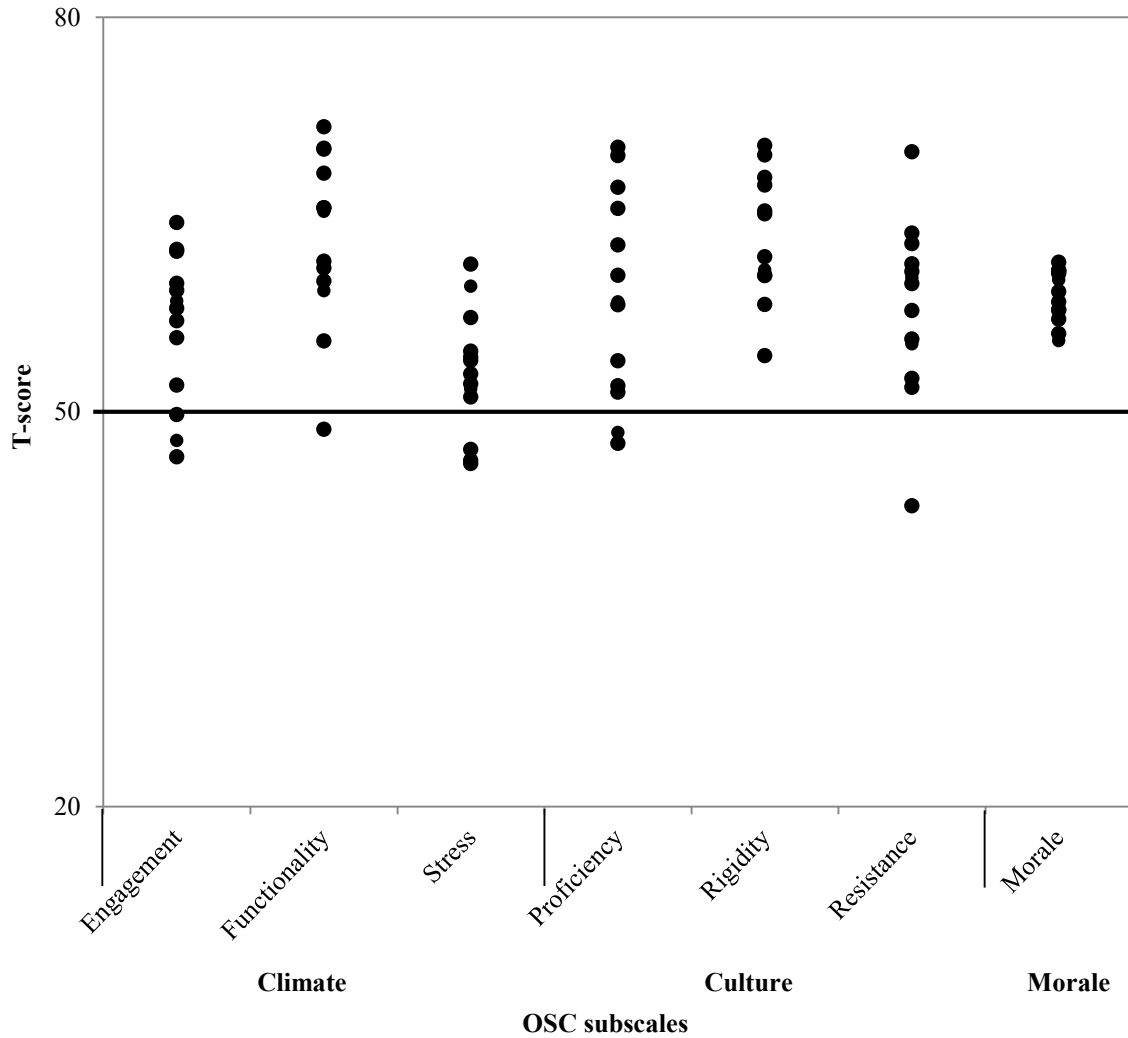
<sup>14</sup>Center for Behavioral Health Research (2016).

<sup>15</sup>Center for Behavioral Health Research (2016).

<sup>16</sup>This information is from a report prepared for MDRC by the Center for Behavioral Health Research.

**Figure 4.1**

**Distribution of Organizational Social Context Scores by Center**



SOURCE: PACE evaluation staff survey using the Organizational Social Context (OSC) tool (Center for Behavioral Health Research 2016).

NOTE: OSC scores are calculated as t-scores, or standardized scores, where the mean is 50 and the standard deviation is 10. Each dot represents the t-score for a center, and the national mean is shown as a horizontal line. Standardized scores were calculated by the OSC developer, the Center for Behavioral Health Research at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.



including extensive training and quality assurance audits described in Chapter 2, may be reflected in these scores. Policy and procedures are promulgated by PACE headquarters in Jacksonville, so most staff members who work with girls would have limited interaction with the PACE policymakers. Additionally, many components of the PACE model are highly specified in the manual, such as how frequently data should be entered into the management information system. The specificity of many aspects of staff responsibilities seems to be reflected in the high OSC rigidity subscale score.

OSC morale scores reflect “employees’ satisfaction with their jobs and their commitment to the organization.”<sup>17</sup> PACE centers’ scores clustered above the mean, indicating that morale at PACE is higher than the average from the national sample of mental health organizations. This finding aligns with the personal investment in PACE that staff members described during interviews and that researchers observed during site visits.

## **Summary**

As the chapter shows, PACE’s intended program environment appears to be central to providing gender-responsive programming. Analysis of staff interview data found that the program environment provided across the study centers was similar, with staff members focusing on safety, building positive relationships with the girls, recognizing girls’ strengths, and being aware of the girls’ prior exposure to trauma. The program environment provides the internal context for PACE’s academic and social services, which are detailed in Chapters 5 and 6.

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<sup>17</sup>Center for Behavioral Health Research (2016).



## Chapter 5

# Academic Services and Life Skills

PACE's academic services include academic advising, assessment, and middle school and high school classes. PACE also provides a gender-responsive life skills class called Spirited Girls!, as well as opportunities for volunteer service and career exploration. This chapter details how these services are provided at PACE centers and presents parents' and girls' perspectives of these services. The chapter concludes with data on the credits that girls earned while at PACE and findings on academic service receipt from the 12-month follow-up survey. Key findings are as follows:

- Although the content of academic classes was similar to what girls would learn in regular public school, academics at PACE differed in student-teacher ratio, availability of academic advising, and a focus on individual, self-paced work. Classes were also provided in the context of a gender-responsive program environment, as described in Chapter 4.
- Evidence was mixed as to whether the quality of instruction was similar to or better than what the girls received in public schools. PACE classrooms were rated similarly to public school classrooms on the CLASS-Secondary, a validated tool for assessing the quality of classroom instruction. Although small class sizes offered an opportunity for teachers to work closely with girls, classroom observations found that many teachers offered limited academic support during independent work. Still, girls described the support they received from teachers as being superior to what they received in public school.
- Spirited Girls!, PACE's life skills curriculum, was offered at every center and was central to PACE's gender-responsive programming. Spirited Girls! was the main vehicle for delivering career readiness activities and played an important role in providing opportunities for girls to volunteer in the community.
- On average, girls at PACE accrued credits at a rate that was on track with what is needed in Florida for on-time high school graduation. The program group was more likely to have been enrolled in school and to have received academic advising than the control group during the 12-month follow-up period.

- Staff members closely followed the PACE model for frequency of academic advising, assessment, and volunteer service. In areas where the model was less specific, such as the instructional approaches teachers should use and the types of career development activities centers should offer, there was more variation in the services girls received.

## **Introduction to the PACE Academic Services Model**

The primary goal of academic services at PACE is to provide girls with the opportunity to earn credits and progress toward middle and high school completion. The PACE policy and procedures manual details what academic services each center should provide, including procedures for assessment, advising, course offerings, and instructional hours. The academic curriculum at PACE is driven by the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, Florida's modified version of the Common Core. All schools in Florida follow these standards; thus the content of the curriculum at PACE mirrors that of all public schools in Florida.

Although the curriculum and academic services are similar across centers, how centers provide those services varies. These differences are primarily driven by the contracts that individual PACE centers have with their local school districts. These contracts specify how much the centers are reimbursed per girl served, what support the district provides to the center, and whether PACE has the authority to grant high school diplomas. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the key differences in academic services across the centers.

The local school district also determines how girls will accrue credits while at PACE, which is one of the most significant differences between the centers in how academic services are structured. There are two models for earning credits while at PACE: programs based on seat time and, more commonly, competency-based programs. In competency-based education programs, girls earn credits by demonstrating mastery of the subject matter, typically through completing a packet that includes worksheets, quizzes, and tests for the subject following the Sunshine State Standards. In seat-time programs, girls earn credits much as they would in a traditional school: They must spend a certain amount of time in class and pass the class requirements. Five centers had seat-time programs, and one center used seat time for middle school girls only. PACE managers described pros and cons of each approach. Competency-based education programs, in use at nine centers, were viewed as advantageous to girls for catching up on credits: Girls who were motivated could finish classes faster than girls in seat-time programs. On the other hand, seat-time programs were seen as providing girls with a structure more similar to regular school and thus better preparing girls for their eventual transition out of PACE.

**Table 5.1**

**Academic Characteristics of PACE Centers**

Characteristic	Centers
System for accruing credits <sup>a</sup>	
Competency	8
Seat time	5
Combination of seat time and competency	1
Able to grant high school diploma	6
Offers GED preparation	4
Serves ESE students <sup>b</sup>	14
Consultation-only services	4
Offers credit for Spirited Girls! classes	13
Academic staff turnover is a problem	11
Sample size	14

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based MDRC site visit data.

NOTES: GED = General Educational Development certificate.

<sup>a</sup>Competency programs award credits based on girls' mastery of the subject matter. Seat-time programs award credits based on girls' time in class and other class requirements.

<sup>b</sup>PACE uses the Florida Department of Education definition of Exceptional Student Education (ESE), referring to programs for students with disabilities and gifted programs. Centers that provide consultation-only services are restricted to serving students who have low-level or periodic needs.

Staffing of academic services was similar across centers. Teachers at PACE are certified and often have experience in the public school system before they come to PACE. Paraprofessionals support teachers and assist with testing at some of the larger centers, but for the most part teachers are alone in their classrooms. An academic services manager or program director oversees the teachers and academic program.

The average tenure at PACE for academic staff is shown in Table 5.2. Academic teachers (excluding those teaching Spirited Girls!) had an average tenure of less than three years.

**Table 5.2**

**Academic Staffing Characteristics at PACE Centers**

Characteristic	Mean	Sample Size <sup>a</sup>
Class size	11.0	81
Academic advising caseload	17.1	53
Tenure of academic service manager (years)	3.6	14
Teaching staff tenure at PACE (years)		
Spirited Girls! Teachers	4.6	9
Other than Spirited Girls! Teachers	2.9	66
Years of teaching experience	8.9	75

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the PACE evaluation staff survey.

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Sample consists of program staff members who completed the survey; sample size varies according to staff position.

Interviews with management staff members at PACE revealed that staff turnover was greatest among teachers; 11 of 14 centers said that teacher turnover was an issue (Table 5.1). Staff members identified several reasons why they struggled to hire and retain teachers; competition with the school district was the primary reason. As a year-round program, PACE centers could not offer the same amount of time off to teachers as traditional schools. In addition, management staff members reported that girls at PACE could be more difficult to work with than the general student body in public schools, which also contributed to staff turnover.

## **Classes at PACE**

When a girl enters PACE, her school transcripts and test scores are reviewed to determine her academic level and what credits she needs, and her academic schedule is created. Since girls enter the program at different points and need different credits, each girl at PACE will have a different schedule of classes. As a result, girls in the same classroom are often working on different subjects. For example, half of a social studies class may be working on world history while the other half is focusing on U.S. history. Due to rolling enrollment and the flexibility for girls to do self-paced work in competency-based programs, girls may be at different points in the curriculum even when they are working on the same subject in the same classroom. This means that the teachers must be able to support different levels and curricula within the same

class period. This type of “mixed” class was less common in seat-time programs, because seat-time classes needed a critical mass of girls to be working on the same subject at the same time — a scheduling challenge in itself, academic staff members reported.

Teachers described a number of complications related to the mixed nature of the classes. They noted that teaching multiple subjects at once requires familiarity with different curricula and each girl’s point of progress in the class. Mixed classes also limited the amount of full-group instruction that a teacher could provide during a class period. One tactic that teachers employed at many centers was to start the class with a “warm-up” lesson that involved the full class and was targeted to a subject that the whole class could benefit from before breaking up the class into smaller groups or independent work. Ultimately, the mixed nature of the classes meant that a large percentage of class time focused on independent work, with girls working on packets while the teachers provided individual support.

PACE classes were much smaller than classes in the public schools that many girls attended before PACE. PACE classes are generally capped at 12 students,<sup>1</sup> while Florida class sizes for high school approach 20 students per class.<sup>2</sup> Teachers reported that classes usually had fewer than 12 students, which they unanimously said was a manageable size. In classroom observations during research visits, the average class size was just under seven. The smaller class sizes were due to student absences or girls being pulled from class for counseling or other activities.

The PACE manual offers minimal guidance on the instructional methods teachers should use in their classes, simply stating that instruction should be individually tailored to the girl and teachers should accommodate different learning styles. In interviews, teachers said they made the primary decisions about the instructional approaches they used in class, and they reported using a wide variety of approaches. Classroom observation supported these reports. The research team observed 80 teachers across 14 centers during site visits, typically for the length of a full class period (50 minutes).<sup>3</sup> Researchers recorded the types of instructional methods teachers employed during the observations using four categories: teacher-led, group work, independent work, and other. During the observations, most teachers used two or more methods during the class period. Nearly two-thirds of classes included teacher-led instruction. About one-third included group work and about one-fifth included some other type of instruction, such as watching a video or playing a game. The overwhelming majority of classes

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<sup>1</sup>PACE policy and procedures manual.

<sup>2</sup>Florida Department of Education (2014b).

<sup>3</sup>For each center, the research team attempted to observe each full-time teacher (excluding substitutes) for one full class period. Four to seven teachers were observed at each center. Three observations were subsequently dropped from the analysis, because the usual classroom teacher was not present for the observation.

included individual work (84 percent), and 18 percent of class periods observed consisted of only independent work.

### **Findings from the CLASS-S Observations**

During classroom observations, the team assessed interactions between teachers and students in the areas of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary (CLASS-S), a validated tool. Box 5.1 describes the CLASS-S domains of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support; Appendix B provides more details about the CLASS-S observations. During a 50-minute session, researchers conducted two cycles of CLASS-S observations, with each cycle lasting approximately 25 minutes (15 minutes for observation and 10 minutes for coding). The researchers observed each teacher only once, rather than making repeat visits over a period of time, as is the procedure when CLASS-S is used for teacher performance evaluations; this limits what conclusions can be drawn about the quality of individual teachers, but the average scores across PACE provide an indication of the quality of PACE teachers overall. The distribution of scores by classroom is shown in Figure 5.1.<sup>4</sup>

Most PACE classrooms received midrange to high scores in the emotional support domain, which reinforces the finding in Chapter 4 that PACE centers strive to create a positive environment where staff members are sensitive to the needs of the girls. Most classrooms received scores in the mid- to high range in the positive climate and teacher sensitivity dimensions within this domain. However, PACE teachers scored lower on regard for adolescent perspectives, which reflects two findings: Girls were infrequently given leadership roles in the classroom, and teachers did not focus on connecting the content of the lessons to the girls' lives. In an example of a class with high scores on regard for adolescent perspectives, the teacher involved the students in creating the rules for classroom behavior, offering them leadership opportunities and the chance to have input on the program. Classrooms with low scores tended to focus on independent work.

Nearly all PACE classrooms scored in the mid- to high range on all classroom organization dimensions, indicating that classrooms were orderly and productive, and behavior was generally not a problem. The high classroom organization scores are notable given that many girls have a history of behavioral issues when they come to PACE. Very few teachers received

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<sup>4</sup>For each dimension, the lowest possible score is 1 and the highest possible score is 7. Low, midrange, and high scores were assigned to each calculated score using the ranges described by the CLASS-S developers: Scores of 3 or below were classified as low and scores of 5 or higher were classified as high.



### Box 5.1

## Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary (CLASS-S) Domains

**Emotional support** focuses on how the teacher supports students' social and emotional functioning in the classroom. This includes classroom climate, the relationship between the teacher and students, the responsiveness of teachers to student needs, and how the teacher creates opportunities for student autonomy and leadership. This domain comprises the following dimensions:

- Positive climate
- Teacher sensitivity
- Regard for adolescent perspectives

**Classroom organization** reflects the organization and management of students' behavior, time, and attention in the classroom. This domain comprises the following dimensions:

- Behavior management
- Productivity
- Negative climate

**Instructional support** assesses the quality of instruction provided and the strategies that teachers use to develop understanding of content among students. Attention is paid to the format of the lesson, teaching methods, and feedback provided to students. This domain comprises the following dimensions:

- Instructional learning formats
- Content understanding
- Analysis and inquiry
- Quality of feedback
- Instructional dialogue

In addition, one dimension stands alone:

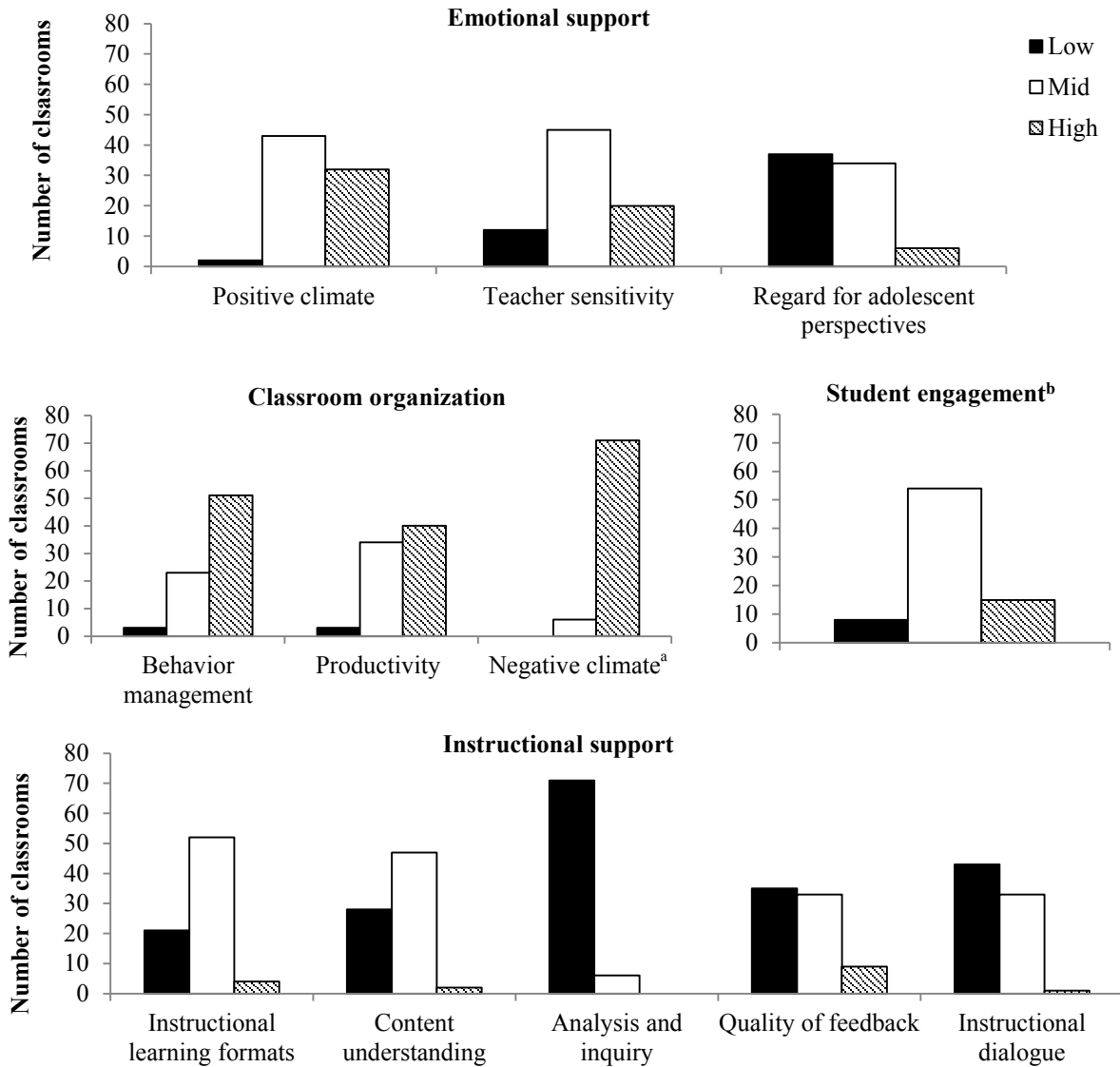
- Student engagement

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SOURCE: Pianta, Hamre, and Mintz (2012).

**Figure 5.1**

**PACE CLASS-S Scores Across Classrooms, by Dimension**



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on observational assessments using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS-S; Pianta, Hamre, and Mintz 2012).

NOTES: For each dimension, the lowest possible score is 1 and the highest possible score is 7. Each calculated score was assigned to a category: Scores of 3 or less were classified low; scores greater than 3 but less than 5 were classified midrange; scores 5 or more were classified high.

<sup>a</sup>Negative climate scores are displayed here in reverse: Higher scores mean a less negative climate.

<sup>b</sup>Student engagement is considered a separate dimension outside the three domains.

low scores for behavior management or productivity; no teachers received low scores for negative climate.<sup>5</sup> However, though disruptive behavior was rare, off-task behavior by girls was commonly observed by the researchers and infrequently redirected by the teachers. Teachers noted during interviews that they would let girls who were having a bad day put their heads down or spend time outside class as a way of being sensitive to their needs, which may explain some of the allowances for off-task behavior.

Most PACE classrooms scored in the mid- to low range in the instructional support domain, which is a common finding in other studies that have used the CLASS-S tool. The instructional support domain captures how teachers format lessons to engage students, the depth at which content is explored to support student learning and the development of higher-order thinking skills, and the quality of the feedback that students are provided on their work. PACE classrooms tended to score in the lower range in part due to the focus on independent work. The range of scores on the quality of feedback, with many classrooms scoring low and a few classrooms scoring high, reflect that teachers varied widely in their approach to supporting students during independent work. In classes with high quality of feedback scores, teachers consistently circulated among girls to provide support. They were aware of girls' needs; sometimes, questions from a girl would prompt them to provide unplanned group instruction if it seemed like it would benefit others. In classes that scored low on quality of feedback, teachers gave responses that did little to advance girls' understanding of the material, such as pointing them to a section of the textbook. There were also instances where teachers merely provided answers to the questions that the girls were struggling with, rather than helping the girls figure out the answer.

Most PACE classrooms scored in the midrange for student engagement, reflecting that girls' participation in classroom activities was mixed. A low score indicates that the majority of the class is distracted or disengaged, while a high score indicates that most students are actively participating in the classroom discussions and activities. Although some observed classrooms fell at each end of the range, most were in the midrange. Some girls would be on task, while others were off task.

Analyses of the CLASS-S scores showed that they varied primarily across teachers within centers, with little variation in scores across centers. Further analyses (not shown) examined CLASS-S score differences by classroom or teacher characteristics, such as class size, instructional method, and teacher tenure, and found several statistically significant differences. Classes that used only independent work had lower scores on all dimensions within emotional support, as well as lower scores in instructional learning formats, content understand-

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<sup>5</sup>Negative climate is reverse coded; a low score on negative climate would indicate the presence of a negative climate.

ing, and instructional dialogue. Longer teacher tenures were associated with higher scores in the classroom organization domain. Spirited Girls! classes scored higher on teacher sensitivity, regard for adolescent perspectives, and instructional dialogue, discussed further below.

Several published studies have used the CLASS-S tool to evaluate the quality of instruction in middle and high schools in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Each of these studies used a different methodology to select and observe classrooms. However, when comparing the CLASS-S scores across the studies, PACE classrooms performed similarly. Like PACE, teachers in the other studies tended to have midrange scores on emotional support dimensions, midrange to high scores on Classroom Organization dimensions, and midrange to low scores on instructional support dimensions. As in PACE, the lowest scores were observed in the analysis and inquiry dimension.

PACE scores on the CLASS-S should be considered in the context of serving girls who were struggling in traditional schools, indicating that maintaining a productive learning environment may be more challenging, though PACE's low staff-to-student ratio may help offset those challenges. Additionally, the reality of girls entering PACE at different levels and with different class needs means that PACE is not able to form classes in which every student is working on the same lesson at the same time, as typically seen in traditional schools, and instead must rely more on independent work. The instructional support scores reflect a very different style of classroom organization and teaching at PACE from what is common in traditional schools.

## **Assessment and Advising**

The amount of academic advising girls receive at PACE sets the program apart from the traditional school environment. Florida public schools are not required to provide school guidance counselors. One study from 2012 found that Florida schools' average ratio was one counselor for every 480 students.<sup>7</sup> At PACE the ratio was closer to one academic adviser per 12 students. PACE requires that girls receive advising on their academic progress every other week from their assigned academic adviser. This adviser is different from the girl's assigned social services counselor (discussed in the next chapter) and is usually a teacher, though two centers had a separate guidance counselor on staff who served as the academic adviser. Advising meetings cover academic progress (grades, progress toward earning credits, test results).

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<sup>6</sup>Donaldson, LeChasseur, and Mayer (2016). CLASS results from MyTeachingPartner-Secondary Study and Measure of Effective Teaching Study appear in the CLASS-Secondary manual (Pianta, Hamre, and Mintz 2012).

<sup>7</sup>Todd (2014).

PACE also requires each girl to have an Individual Academic Plan (IAP), which includes goals in reading, math, writing, and career. The goals are often focused on skill gaps. PACE uses the STAR assessment to evaluate a girl's reading and math needs, which then informs the IAP.<sup>8</sup> Teachers said the STAR assessment was useful because it gives specific information on a girl's knowledge and needs and can help a teacher understand whether a girl's prior grades reflect her actual knowledge and ability. The STAR assessment may be administered periodically to check on progress, and it is administered before girls make the transition out of PACE.

According to the management information system data (shown in Table 5.3), the frequency of academic advising and assessment met PACE's specifications. Among girls who enrolled in PACE, 93 percent took the STAR assessment and 96 percent had an IAP in place. Girls received academic advising on almost a biweekly basis, and advising sessions lasted, on average, about 13 minutes. Most girls who did not have an IAP or STAR assessment on file had short tenures (less than three months) at PACE.

## **Life Skills Training**

As described in Chapter 4, key components of gender-responsive programming include providing education about women's health issues, promoting career opportunities for successful transitions to adulthood, and providing connections to the community. This section discusses PACE's approach to providing gender-responsive programming through life skills training.

### **Spirited Girls!**

Spirited Girls! (SG), PACE's life skills class, is a central component of its gender-responsive programming. Box 5.2 provides an overview of the six developmental domains it covers. The study found that SG was taught for the most part by teachers, supervised by the academic manager, and included in a girl's schedule alongside her other classes. The schedule for SG varied at each center, but at minimum classes would meet weekly. At some centers, SG classes met daily. The PACE model requires that girls take two semesters of the class, and at all but one of the centers girls could receive credit for the class.

Until recently, PACE had used an SG curriculum developed in-house in the 1990s. Recognizing that the curriculum had become outdated, PACE recently began piloting the

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<sup>8</sup>The STAR assessment is widely used in K-12 education throughout Florida and the United States. See Renaissance Learning Inc. (2016).

**Table 5.3**  
**Participation and Satisfaction in Academic Services**

Measure	Program Group
Individual academic plan developed (%)	96.1
Received academic advising (%)	93.5
Number of sessions	17.0
Number of sessions per month enrolled	1.8
Time spent per session (minutes)	13.1
STAR assessment administered <sup>a</sup> (%)	92.8
Credits earned by length of stay <sup>b</sup>	
3 months or less	0.4
More than 3 months to 6 months	1.7
More than 6 months to 10 months	4.0
More than 10 months to 15 months	7.3
More than 15 months	10.1
Participated in service learning projects (%)	73.6
Number of projects participated in	6.8
Number of projects participated in per quarter enrolled	1.9
Time spent on service projects (minutes)	88.5
<i>Among survey respondents<sup>c</sup> (%)</i>	
Felt academic classes met needs	88.8
Felt that PACE staff helped with job or career planning	82.1
Felt Spirited Girls! taught her something new	78.9
Sample size	613

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the PACE management information system and responses to the 12-month follow-up survey.

NOTES: Calculations include all program group members who enrolled at PACE, except as noted.

<sup>a</sup>The STAR assessment (Renaissance Learning 2016) is widely used in K-12 education.

<sup>b</sup>This measure includes only girls who were no longer enrolled as of October 2016 and refers to a girl's cumulative length of stay (N = 556).

<sup>c</sup>Percentages are based on responses to the 12-month follow-up survey among program group members randomly assigned through March 2015 (N = 376).

### Box 5.2

#### **Spirited Girls! Curriculum: Content by Developmental Domain**

**Physical.** Healthy eating, drugs and alcohol, physical fitness.

**Sexual.** Menstruation, sexual activity, sexual transmitted infections, contraception.

**Intellectual.** Basic computer and test-taking skills, understanding grade point average and credit requirements, career exploration, job readiness.

**Emotional.** Self-esteem, anger and stress management, coping skills, recognizing feelings.

**Relational.** Healthy relationships, friendships, romantic relationships, family relationships.

**Spiritual.** Topics are secular and aim to help girls think about their place in the world and their own approach to spirituality.

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SOURCE: PACE Spirited Girls! curriculum.

evidence-based and gender-responsive Girls Circle curriculum, developed by the One Circle Foundation.<sup>9</sup> Researchers visited two centers that were using the Girls Circle curriculum. The remaining centers were using SG, and teachers explained that they would tailor the original SG curriculum to current topics, drawing on resources from outside the curriculum.<sup>10</sup> For example, the SG curriculum does not cover the topic of online bullying, so the teachers would bring in outside resources or news stories to cover that topic.

SG classrooms were different from other academic classes. Unlike in many of the academic classes, all girls in SG receive the same lesson at the same time.<sup>11</sup> This gave the teachers more opportunities to lead full-group lessons or engage the girls in group work. Indeed, SG classes had the highest frequency of teacher-led instruction and group work of all subjects observed by researchers. SG classes also showed statistically significant differences from other academic classes on the CLASS-S scores, scoring higher in teacher sensitivity, regard for adolescent perspectives, and instructional dialogue. These differences reflect the content-oriented discussions about real-life issues that were more prevalent in SG classrooms than in regular classrooms.

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<sup>9</sup>One Circle Foundation (2012). The Girls Circle curriculum was first developed in 1994.

<sup>10</sup>At the time of publication of this report, all PACE centers were implementing Girls Circle as part of Spirited Girls! class.

<sup>11</sup>Since enrollment at PACE is rolling, not all girls in the SG classes would have been exposed to the same parts of the curriculum.

## **Career Exploration and Volunteer Service**

The PACE model includes a career component, which focuses on educating girls about possible career options and strengthening academic and soft skills to support work readiness. Upon entering PACE, girls take an assessment to identify career interests, and these become part of their IAP. The PACE model also requires each girl to participate in a volunteer service project each semester. SG was the primary vehicle to expose girls to career options and work readiness activities; activities in SG included résumé writing, mock interviewing, and filling out job applications. Three centers had a separate career class apart from SG.

Career development activities outside SG varied among the centers; though a few centers provided robust career activities outside SG, such as internships or job shadowing, they did not seem to involve many girls. The ad hoc nature of such career development activities could be attributed to the lack of dedicated staffing and reliance on external partnerships to deliver the services. Also, since most girls return to middle or high school (or attend another alternative school) after PACE, careers may be a lower priority for centers than getting girls ready to go back to regular school.

Girls' participation in volunteer service projects is seen by PACE as promoting self-esteem, building work readiness skills, and contributing to the community. Most centers described providing volunteer service activities on a monthly basis. These were also typically delivered through the SG class or through another class or group. Activities included on-site activities, such as letter writing or putting together care packages for the homeless, and off-site activities, such as volunteering at nursing homes. Staff members said the off-site activities were more engaging for the girls but more challenging to implement for a variety of logistical and behavioral reasons. Some centers used participation in off-site community service projects as an incentive, so not all girls were eligible to participate in all projects. As shown in Table 5.3, about three-quarters of girls participated in projects, with a frequency of two projects per quarter enrolled. This level of participation in community service corresponded to PACE requirements.

## **Girls' and Parents' Reflections on Academic Services**

Overall, girls and parents had positive experiences with academic services at PACE. As shown in Table 5.3, 89 percent of program group girls surveyed felt the academic classes met their needs. Eighty-two percent of girls felt that staff members were helpful with job or career planning, and most girls felt that they learned something new from SG. Box 5.3 presents one girl's story about the benefits of PACE's academic services and SG.

In interviews, both while they were still in the program and after they had left, girls had mostly positive things to say about academic services. Most commonly, girls praised their



### Box 5.3

## One Girl's Perspective on Classes at PACE

### **Brittany: Appreciated academic assistance and Spirited Girls!**

A guidance counselor at her previous high school referred Brittany\* to PACE because she had fallen behind in credits. She was working toward her high school diploma and planned to graduate from PACE.

Brittany emphasized the benefits of the engaged teachers and small class sizes she has experienced at PACE. "The classes are small . . . they don't have a lot of students, so it's better because they are able to focus on the students more, instead of public school where they have a whole lot of kids so they don't have enough time to help you." Brittany appreciated the way teachers interacted with the students: "The teachers are very helpful, and they do like to help the students, and they like their job."

Brittany also said she was more focused on her academic classes at PACE and therefore able to complete more work. She compared this with public school, where she was "busy listening to [her] friends," which distracted her from her school work. The one drawback of PACE was that the classes offered were "basic," meaning that PACE does not offer electives like foreign language or physical education as regular public schools do.

Brittany also said that as a pregnant young woman, she benefited from the knowledge she gained in Spirited Girls! She enjoyed learning about her body, about health, and about how to care for herself and her baby.

\*Name has been changed.

teachers and found them to be helpful. Some attributed teachers' helpfulness to the small class size. One girl explained: "Because there weren't a lot of students, you could have one-on-one time with the teacher and they can explain stuff to you more." The small class also meant that there were fewer distractions. Some girls remarked that they felt the teachers were more invested in them, in line with the relational focus of the program environment described in Chapter 4. One girl put it this way: "I guess I felt like they were more than just a teacher; they actually cared about you."

A minority of girls interviewed did not like the academic program. For some, the self-paced nature of the classes did not work for their learning style; they found the independent work boring and would have liked more teacher-led instruction. One girl said, "I just don't like how I have to do the work on my own. When I do my work, I don't really read it; I just skim and skim. I don't learn nothing."

Girls were also generally positive about the SG class. Among girls interviewed, four times as many girls said they liked SG as said they disliked it. Girls who liked SG mentioned enjoying the conversations in class, both the variety of topics covered and the relevance of the topics. One girl described it this way: “You learn about yourself as a girl. Your body. Some of the activities we do make you look at yourself differently, and your relationships differently. You get more in tune with yourself.” The minority of girls who did not like SG expressed discomfort with the topics discussed in SG and with group discussions about those topics.

Girls interviewed described receiving a variety of career services from PACE. Services ranged from general career readiness activities, such as mock interviewing and career exploration, to more in-depth college and career planning services around specific career tracks. Girls also offered positive reflections on their participation in community service activities; they appreciated the opportunity to help others and thought the activities were fun.

Parents and guardians interviewed had mostly favorable things to say about PACE’s academic services. In fact, most parents said that it was the academics that drew them to PACE in the first place. Like the girls, parents liked the small class sizes, which they viewed as providing more individual attention for the girls. Parents also liked the self-paced nature of the academic program and felt that it was a good opportunity for girls to catch up on credits.

## **Academic Progress**

Catching up on credits was the primary academic goal for most girls at PACE. As described in Chapter 3, more than half the girls entering PACE had been held back in school at least once, and three-quarters had recently failed a class. PACE offers the opportunity for girls to earn those credits, and in centers with competency programs, staff members said that girls who were motivated could get back to grade level faster than they could in regular school.

Table 5.3 shows the number of credits earned by girls who enrolled in PACE.<sup>12</sup> As expected, the longer a girl was enrolled in PACE, the more credits she received. In Florida, students must earn 24 credits in high school to earn a standard diploma.<sup>13</sup> A yearlong course, such as Algebra I, would earn a student one credit. The PACE credit data suggest that girls on average earned credits at a rate similar to what they would in high school; students who were in PACE for more than six months but less than a year (the equivalent of one or two semesters) earned four credits. Students progressing normally in regular high school earn about six credits in two semesters. It is not possible to make direct comparisons between regular school semes-

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<sup>12</sup>This measure includes only girls who were no longer enrolled as of October 2016 and refers to a girl’s cumulative length of stay; 57 girls in the study were still enrolled as of October 2016.

<sup>13</sup>Florida Department of Education (2014a).

ters and credits earned at PACE by length of stay. However, considering that most girls in PACE were not accruing credits at the rate needed to graduate on time before they came to PACE, these data suggest that PACE helped girls catch up on their credits. The final report will include an analysis of school records data to estimate PACE’s impacts on school progress for study participants.

## Services Received

Table 5.4 presents preliminary impacts on academic services received. These measures come from the 12-month follow-up survey and represent only a partial sample, because the 12-month

**Table 5.4**  
**One-Year Impacts on Academic Services Received**

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
Ever enrolled in a school or educational program in past year	99.1	92.9	6.2 ***	0.000
Received academic advising in past year	81.1	67.6	13.5 ***	0.000
<i>Primary source of academic advising<sup>a</sup></i>				
<i>Parent, guardian, or other relative</i>	8.6	44.1	-35.5	
<i>Someone from school</i>	8.5	44.9	-36.4	
<i>Someone from PACE</i>	82.1	2.2	79.9	
<i>Other</i>	0.8	8.9	-8.1	
<i>Frequency of academic advising sessions</i>				
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
Sample size <sup>b</sup> (total = 668)	407	261		

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

NOTES: 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.

<sup>a</sup>Responses include only sample members who reported receiving academic advising. Therefore, the measures are nonexperimental and statistical significance was not calculated.

<sup>b</sup>Due to missing values, the number of girls included varies by outcome. The sample size reported here is based on responses to the 12-month follow-up survey among girls randomly assigned through March 2015.

follow-up period was not complete for the full sample at the time this report was written. Overall, findings are promising. Nearly all the girls in the study sample enrolled in a school or educational program during the follow-up period. The program group was statistically more likely to have been enrolled in school than the control group (99.1 percent versus 92.9 percent). The majority of girls in the control group enrolled in a traditional middle or high school, but many girls enrolled in other types of schools, including charter, alternative, and virtual schools, reflecting the wide array of academic options available in Florida.

Girls in the program group were 13.5 percentage points more likely to have received advising. They received this service more frequently, and more often from a professional — either someone at PACE or another school. The control group was much more likely than the program group to report receiving academic advising from a family member. This finding reinforces the indications discussed above that PACE provides more academic advising than traditional schools, where many in the control group were served.

## Chapter 6

# Social Services

Through social services, PACE strives to address the nonacademic needs that may hinder a girl's success in the program and beyond. Social services include case management and counseling, parental engagement, connections to supportive services, support for transitions, and follow-up contact. This chapter describes PACE's social service provision, the experiences of girls and parents with those services, and the difference in social service receipt between program and control groups as reported in the 12-month follow-up survey. The key findings on social services are as follows:

- PACE's comprehensive social services set the program apart from most public schools. Girls in the program group were more likely than girls in the control group to have received counseling and case management during the 12-month follow-up period.
- PACE centers closely followed the prescribed PACE model for the frequency of assessment, counseling, and parental engagement while girls were in the program. PACE does not specify the approach counselors should take with girls during their meetings, so the content of these sessions varied considerably.
- Once girls left PACE, follow-up services were limited. Transition and follow-up services tended to be understaffed, which helps explain why implementation of these services was more uneven.
- Girls and parents reflected mostly positively on the social services they received while at PACE, describing the counselors as helpful and supportive. Girls were less satisfied with follow-up services.

### Social Services Structure and Staffing

The goal of social services is to provide each girl with the support she needs to be successful in academics and build the foundation for success in the future. As one executive director explained: "Social services give girls stability as they go about academics. They are able to focus on themselves for the first time at PACE." Social services are where the differences between PACE and regular public school are most apparent — PACE offers far more support outside the classroom. As a point of comparison, one study found that the average ratio of social workers to

students in Florida was greater than 1 to 2,500.<sup>1</sup> As shown in Table 6.1, the ratio at PACE was 1 to 17.

Typically, a social service manager oversaw a team of three to five counselors in a few types of positions. Outreach counselors focused on recruitment and intake activities and had limited interaction with girls once they were enrolled in the program.<sup>2</sup> Day counselors had primary responsibility for girls enrolled in the program. Transition counselors typically became involved with a girl's care as she neared the end of her time at PACE and were also responsible for follow-up services. Table 6.1 presents the characteristics of social service staff members. Counselors were at both the bachelor's and master's levels. Counselors had an average caseload size of about 17 girls. In the staff survey, about 10 percent of day counselors said that their caseload was not manageable; 30 percent of survey respondents indicated that their caseload was very or extremely manageable. Since counselors are not clinical staff, they are not required to have a license, and few reported that they were licensed. As Table 6.2 shows, a small number of centers had additional social services capacity, including staff therapists and nurses. Most centers also had interns on staff, and interns might carry a caseload at some centers. Unlike the situation with teachers, no managers reported that counselor turnover was an issue.

## **Assessment and Care Planning**

PACE evaluates the needs of each girl enrolled through a comprehensive assessment process, which is documented in PACE's management information system (MIS). The process starts with the Initial Needs Assessment (INA), described in Chapter 3, which helps determine whether the girl is a good fit for the program. The On-going Needs Assessment (ONA) is administered within the first 30 days of a girl's enrollment in the program and provides a more detailed assessment of the girl's history and her current needs.

The ONA is organized into six domains: relational, intellectual, physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual. The ONA is primarily administered through interviews between the girl and her assigned counselor, but the counselor can also involve other sources in completing the ONA, including parents, outside case managers or counselors, and a review of the girl's files from previous schools or other providers. The ONA probes into sensitive areas, such as a girl's sexual and abuse history. Counselors described tailoring the administration of the ONA to each girl: With some girls the ONA could be administered in one sitting; with others the counselors

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<sup>1</sup>Student Support Services Project (2012).

<sup>2</sup>Most centers added this position during the study period. Some centers eliminated this position after study enrollment concluded.

**Table 6.1****Characteristics of PACE Counselors**

Characteristic	Value	Sample Size
Average tenure at PACE (years)	3.7	66
Average years of experience <sup>a</sup>	7.3	66
Percentage with master's degree	62.1	66
Percentage with bachelor's degree	37.9	66
Percentage with license <sup>b</sup>	9.4	53
Average counselor caseload <sup>c</sup>	17.1	53

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on responses to the PACE evaluation staff survey.

NOTES: Values are based on responses to the PACE evaluation staff survey and include counselors, transition counselors, and outreach/intake counselors.

<sup>a</sup>Measure includes experience during practicum and internships.

<sup>b</sup>A license is not required for counseling positions at PACE. The sample size is smaller than for questions above because this question was added to the survey after staff members at three centers had completed it.

<sup>c</sup>Sample includes only social service staff members who carry a caseload of girls for counseling.

**Table 6.2****Social Service Staffing Characteristics at PACE Centers**

Characteristic	Centers
Full-time transition counselor on staff	5
Full-time therapist on staff	4
On-site nurse <sup>a</sup>	2
Interns on counseling staff	13
Interns carry a caseload	9
Counseling staff turnover is a problem	0
Sample size	14

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data collected during site visits.

NOTE: <sup>a</sup>Measure includes nurses provided by an outside partner.

would break it up over several meetings and build trust and rapport with the girl before asking the most sensitive questions. PACE requires that the physical domain of the ONA be completed on a girl's first day in order to determine whether a girl has immediate medical, dental, or mental health needs.

Counselors used the information gathered in the ONA to create each girl's care plan. Care plans are organized along the same domains as the ONA and focus on the specific goals that a girl will work on while at PACE. As shown in Box 6.1, care plans included up to six goals, aimed at both reducing risk factors and building strengths. Counselors used these goals to guide their sessions with each girl and to update parents on her progress during monthly meetings. Care plans were not directly used by noncounseling staff, but the counselors used the care plan and goals to inform discussions with other staff members about a girl's care.

Each girl's progress is required to be reviewed at least monthly during a meeting of the care team, which includes the girl's assigned counselor, academic adviser, and at least one manager. Typically, PACE centers held care review meetings every week or every other week. The researchers observed that these meetings were attended by most staff members — counselors, teachers, and managers. During these meetings, counselors discussed a girl's progress toward her care plan goals and shared updates on her issues or needs, and teachers shared information on her progress in class. Staff members discussed any steps that needed to be taken to help the girl reach her goals, such as addressing problems with attendance or behavior. For girls who were progressing well, the team would discuss ways to reward or acknowledge her performance and keep her on track. Care review was the formal way PACE staff members shared information about girls. Outside these meetings, staff members shared emergent issues about the girls through morning staff meetings, emails, and ad hoc meetings.

The MIS data indicate that centers were closely following PACE requirements for administering assessments and creating and monitoring care plans. As shown in Table 6.3, 96 percent of girls had their ONA administered within 30 days of enrollment, and 98 percent had their care plan developed within 30 days. Girls who did not have an ONA or a care plan tended to be those who left the program shortly after enrollment.

## **Individual Counseling**

Based on the PACE policy and procedures manual, a girl should meet with her assigned counselor every two weeks to review her progress. According to MIS data (see Table 6.3), meetings between counselors and girls happened more frequently than the recommended twice per month. The average time per session was 39 minutes. Counselors reported that rather than



**Box 6.1**

**Example of Care Plan Goals**

Decrease substance abuse	Increase anger management skills
Decrease self-harm	Increase positive self-esteem
Decrease social isolation	Increase healthy relationships

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SOURCE: PACE's management information system.

following a set schedule for the meetings, they would pull the girls from class at a time that was convenient for the counselor and the girl. For example, counselors would avoid pulling girls from classes in which they were behind on their work.

Although the primary purpose of these biweekly meetings is to review the girl's progress toward the care plan goals, the research team found that counselors used a broad range of approaches in the meetings. Most counselors described the care plan goals as a jumping-off point for discussions with the girls. Interviews with counselors revealed that there was a fine line between discussing goals with a girl and delving into sensitive topics that might require a more therapeutic approach. A quarter of counselors interviewed said they did not use clinical approaches in their work with girls, with some of those counselors stating that they were not qualified to provide clinical therapy. The majority of counselors, however, described bringing aspects of clinical practice into their session with the girls; the most common approaches mentioned were cognitive-behavioral therapy, solutions-focused therapy, and art therapy. Interview data suggest that the nature of topics girls discussed with their counselors often led counselors into playing a more therapeutic role. For example, a girl might have the goal of better handling her anger, which might stem from abuse by a family member. Helping the girl find a strategy for responding in upsetting circumstances could require addressing the underlying trauma or depression.

Counselors used a variety of strategies in their work with the girls; most counselors said they tailored the approach to a girl's individual needs and personality. For example, a counselor might use hands-on activities like worksheets or art projects with girls who were having trouble opening up to the counselor. A review of counselor case notes entered into PACE's MIS system provides examples of the range of content these sessions could have. One type of session focused more on helping a girl support her academic progress or address behavior issues within the program. As an example of this type of session from the case notes: "[Counselor] reviewed

**Table 6.3**  
**Counseling and Parental Involvement at PACE Centers**

Service	Program Group
Ongoing needs assessment (ONA) ever administered <sup>a</sup> (%)	94.0
ONA administered within 30 days of enrollment	96.2
ONA updated every 6 months <sup>b</sup>	73.7
Physical domain assessment completed at enrollment (%)	95.9
Care plan ever developed (%)	96.9
If yes, initial care plan developed within 30 days	97.8
Girl reviewed at care review staff meeting (%)	99.5
Initial care review staff meeting held within 1 week (%)	88.5
Number of times reviewed at a care review staff meeting	12.5
Girl received individual counseling <sup>c</sup> (%)	97.4
Number of sessions	21.9
Number of sessions per month enrolled	2.5
Time per session (minutes)	38.7
Girl attended psychoeducational or extracurricular group <sup>d</sup> (%)	85.2
Number of group sessions	18.4
Number of group sessions per month enrolled	1.8
Time per group session (minutes)	59.5
Parent/guardian ever contacted <sup>e</sup> (%)	97.2
Number of parent/guardian contacts attempted over course of enrollment	18.7
Number of parent/guardian contacts attempted per month enrolled	2.5
Sample size	613

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

NOTES: Calculations include all program group members who enrolled in PACE.

<sup>a</sup>Measures are based on ONAs administered only during a girl's first enrollment.

<sup>b</sup>Measure includes only girls who were enrolled for at least six months.

<sup>c</sup>If a girl received more than one counseling session in a given day, only the most recently entered session of that day was accounted for in these calculations.

<sup>d</sup>If a girl attended more than one group session on a given day, only the most recently entered group session of that day was accounted for in these calculations.

<sup>e</sup>If there was more than one parent/guardian contact on a given day, only the most recently entered instance of contact was accounted for in these calculations. Initial home visits could also be captured in these measures.

girl's progress and addressed some concerns about girl's academic performance because she is not showing as much progress as she could. She blames peers in the class for distracting her by their behavior. We discussed some options available to her in the classroom to separate herself and focus on her own academic success." Another type of session included a focus on relational issues in the girl's life, for example: "Girl reports feeling very anxious about a friend's family situation. Girl reports that she is worried about this friend and cannot stop worrying about her. Discussed with girl the importance of maintaining personal awareness of how others' issues impact her and the need to 'fix' other people's issues." Often, sessions would cover more than one topic.

### **Girls' Perspectives on Counseling**

Most girls interviewed had positive things to say about the counseling they received at PACE. They described talking with their counselor about their goals and the issues they faced at school and at home, and most girls said that their sessions with their counselor were helpful. Girls reported that the counselors were both problem-solvers who helped them with strategies to address the challenges in their lives and sources of emotional support, providing them with encouragement and reassurance. One girl said: "I feel like sometimes I'm going to break down. She believes in me. She tells me I can do it." A minority of girls interviewed (less than 20 percent) said that they did not open up to their counselors, either because they did not feel that they connected with the counselor or because they did not open up to anyone. Box 6.2 provides two different perspectives on counseling.

### **Case Management and Ancillary Services**

Counselors also functioned as case managers, working with girls to identify unmet health or other needs and connect them with appropriate services, either through PACE or through partners. All PACE centers had informal partnerships with outside providers to connect girls to ancillary services. The most common referrals to outside services were for health services, such as reproductive or dental care, or for mental health services, when a girl needed services beyond what the center could provide. Counselors described several challenges with connecting girls with services outside PACE. One challenge was the availability of services in the community. Services available to the girls, such as free counseling, often had long waiting lists or were perceived to be of low quality. Another challenge with outside referrals involved the parents — referrals often required the parent to give approval or to schedule the appointment and arrange transportation. Lack of parental follow-through could mean that the girls were not able to receive the services they were referred to.

## Box 6.2

### Two Perspectives on Counseling

#### **Kendyll: Counseling was helpful**

“It was okay to be me and to keep being who I am and not change for nobody.”

This was among the key lessons that Kendyll\* learned over the eight months she spent at a PACE center in central Florida.

Kendyll began at PACE when she was 17. The center proved to be a safe, secure, and supportive environment for her. She was able to make close connections to staff members as well as to some other girls at the center.

In particular, Kendyll identified counseling as the most helpful component of PACE. She was struggling with depression and anxiety when she arrived, and though she continues to experience those issues, she said that they were “not as bad” now, an improvement which she attributes to the work she did with her counselor. She and her counselor talked about how to handle herself when she became upset. Her counselor also gave Kendyll small projects. For one of them, Kendyll wrote down her good qualities and kept the list in her binder so that she could easily remind herself of them whenever she got upset. Kendyll appreciated that her counselor and other PACE staff members took her depression seriously and made dealing with it a priority. She found it easy to talk to PACE staff members about her goals and problems because they would try to help her, rather than judge her.

#### **Roxane: PACE was not the right fit**

Although Roxane\* spent about eight months at a PACE center in central Florida, she ultimately did not find the program to be a good fit for her and does not believe that her experience at PACE benefited her.

Roxane, who was 15 when she started at PACE, struggled most with how much she was expected to share her feelings there. She said that her counselor was nice and sometimes helpful, but she did not have the right type of attitude to respond to counseling because she did not want to talk about her feelings. Roxane was uncomfortable with discussing issues in her life or her goals with PACE staff members, though she said that she did talk with them about problems she had with friends and her grandfather, with whom she lives. Similarly, Roxane strongly disliked Spirited Girls! because the class also asked her to talk about her feelings.

\*Names have been changed.

A few centers were able to provide health and mental health services on site. Four centers had therapists on staff to work with girls who had clinical or more intensive needs. Two centers had a nurse on site, provided through a contract with an outside provider. These centers

reported that having these additional services on site not only lowered the barriers to services but also improved access to providers with experience serving the PACE population.

Counselors also provided support to girls who needed it outside their biweekly sessions. Girls who were having emergent issues, such as a crisis at home, could request a same-day meeting with a counselor — either with their regular counselor, depending on availability, or a counselor-on-call. Counselors might also be called by a teacher to meet with a girl who was having behavior problems in the classroom. Counselors reported meeting daily, if needed, with girls who were in crisis.

## **Group Counseling**

PACE centers provide psychoeducational or therapeutic groups to girls who need them. The PACE manual stipulates that participation in therapeutic groups is voluntary. Centers determined which groups to offer based on the needs of the girls enrolled. Therapeutic group topics included anger management, grief and loss, and sexual abuse. Some centers offered nontherapeutic groups that were more like extracurricular clubs offered in regular high school, such as gardening or book clubs. A few centers did not have any groups operating at the time of the implementation visits. Staffing for groups varied quite a bit — from counselors to interns to outside providers.

Staff members described groups that generally met weekly for about an hour for 8 to 10 weeks. Some centers had a specific day and time in their weekly schedule when girls would attend groups, with some girls attending therapeutic groups and other girls attending nontherapeutic groups. Centers that had groups built into their weekly schedule required all girls to be enrolled in a group, though girls could choose a group that interested them. As shown in Table 6.3, 85 percent of girls participated in groups, attending an average of 18 sessions. The data do not differentiate between therapeutic groups and nontherapeutic groups; thus the high participation rate is likely to be related to the broad range of groups offered and the requirement at some centers that all girls participate. Interviews with girls supported the rates calculated using the MIS; 80 percent of girls reported participating in a group. Many girls said these groups were required, and their description of the groups emphasized extracurricular-type activities more than therapeutic ones. A few girls reported attending therapeutic groups at the recommendation of their counselors.

## **Parental Engagement**

Parental engagement is a central component of the PACE model and gender-responsive programming more broadly. Parental engagement is built into the program model in several ways. First, counselors are required to conduct a home visit within 30 days of a girl starting the

program. The purpose of this visit is to assess the home environment, such as sleeping arrangements and the availability of food. Counselors then meet monthly, ideally face to face, with a parent to provide an update on the girl's progress. Counselors must also make a home visit if a girl has three unexcused absences, and staff members check in with parents on an ad hoc basis if there are issues to be discussed, including positive updates on a girl's progress.

According to the MIS data (Table 6.3), counselors attempted to contact parents about two and a half times per month on average. Due to limitations in how the data on contacts were documented in PACE's MIS system, it is not possible to determine how many of these contacts were successful. Staff surveys and interviews with counselors indicate that, in fact, many of the attempted contacts were not successful. The majority of staff survey respondents (84 percent) said that no more than half the parents were actively engaged in supporting their daughter's goals. During site visits, counselors also described difficulties reaching and engaging parents, noting that parents' phone numbers would change or they would not respond to phone calls. In addition, counselors said, it was difficult to schedule meetings with parents around their work schedules. Counselors reported that some parents were part of the daughter's struggles, but the parents did not want to see or acknowledge their role.

Some staff members described engagement strategies to improve parental involvement, such as helping meet the parents' needs by connecting them to resources for food stamps or counseling. Another tactic was reaching out to parents when things were going well, not just when there was an issue, which was an element of PACE's strengths-based approach. These positive reports could be a new experience for many parents accustomed to hearing from school only when their daughter was in trouble. Counselors described being flexible with meeting locations, such as going to a parent's workplace to meet if the parent's work schedule made it difficult to come to the center. Some centers tried to involve parents in special events or as volunteers at the center to encourage their connection to PACE. The PACE manual states that staff members should make "every attempt" to meet with parents face to face, but counselors provided varying descriptions of how far they would go to involve parents. About half described aggressive efforts to involve parents, such as going to their houses and workplaces to track them down.

In interviews with the research team, parents described positive interactions with the staff at PACE.<sup>3</sup> Most parents said that the counselors did a good job of keeping them up to date on their girls' progress and appreciated that the counselors would work around their schedules for meetings. Parents said that PACE initiated most of the interaction with the parents, and

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<sup>3</sup>Parents who participated in the interviews cannot be considered a representative group of parents. Parents interviewed were those who answered the phone when the interviewer called to survey the girl and expressed interest in being interviewed by the researchers.

some were surprised when PACE would call them to check on a girl's attendance or share something about her progress. The minority of parents who had less positive things to say about their interactions with PACE found the home visits intrusive or felt that the counselor should have shared more information, such as telling the parent what was discussed in counseling sessions. To illustrate some of the tensions counselors may experience in working with parents, one parent interviewed told of being upset with the counselor because the counselor reported her to the police for abusing her daughter.

## Transitions

PACE is not intended to be a girl's final step on an academic or career pathway. Most commonly, the girl returns to her zoned school or enrolls in an alternative or charter school in the school district. There are two main limits on a girl's stay at PACE. First, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice funding caps a girl's time at PACE at 15 months, granting an extension in limited circumstances. Second, only six centers in the study were authorized by the local school district to grant high school diplomas; in the remaining centers girls had to enroll in a different school in order to graduate. Many girls made the transition in less than 15 months, depending on their academic progress and progress on care plan goals. Unplanned transitions — in which a girl drops out of the program or is asked to leave — were also common; two-thirds of transition staff members at centers said that unplanned transitions happened at least monthly. Table 6.4 shows girls' survey responses to why they left PACE without completing the program. Most commonly, girls gave reasons that indicated that the program was not a good fit for them, such as not liking the program, not getting along with other girls there, or being asked to leave by PACE. Some girls selected multiple reasons for leaving the program.

PACE's motto on transitions is "transition begins at intake"; planning for transition is a key part of the model. Girls are given a planned transition date when they start at PACE, and the eventual transition is supposed to be part of the care planning process and monthly meetings with parents. Interview data indicated that most planning for transition fell within 90 days of the transition date. Counselors had the primary role in planning for transitions for the girls on their caseload.

Counselors described two main ways they supported the transition process. Most commonly, they described working closely with the girl and her family to determine the best school placement, including helping the family with the enrollment paperwork. Counselors also worked to prepare the girl emotionally for leaving PACE. Some centers, often those with dedicated transition staffing, did this through a formal transitions group attended by girls nearing that point. Other counselors did this one on one by talking with the girl about her feelings about transition during regular biweekly meetings and working with her on coping strategies.

**Table 6.4**  
**Transition Services at PACE Centers**

Service (%)	Program Group
Transition planning before exit	
Transition outcome checklist completed	93.9
Exit plan completed	95.7
Transition care plan developed <sup>a</sup>	58.1
<i>Among survey respondents</i>	
Girl felt transition planning was helpful after leaving PACE <sup>b</sup>	59.2
Reason for leaving PACE before completing the program <sup>c</sup>	
Did not like the program	27.8
Did not like or get along with girls	31.7
Was asked to leave or transition	22.2
Did not like or get along with staff	10.6
Moved	12.8
Did not have transportation	11.1
Parent or guardian did not like the program	9.4
Expecting child or had child care problems	6.7
Had health problems or an injury	6.1
Incarcerated	4.4
Family member became ill	1.1
Other <sup>d</sup>	29.4
Sample size	578

SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on data from the PACE management information system and the PACE evaluation 12-month follow-up survey.

NOTES: Calculations include all program group members who have made the transition out of PACE, except as noted.

<sup>a</sup>Calculations include only girls who were enrolled for at least 30 days and are based on a girl's first transition period (N = 523). PACE is not required to create a transition care plan or provide transition services to girls who were enrolled for fewer than 30 days.

<sup>b</sup>This measure is based on responses to the 12-month follow-up survey among respondents randomly assigned through March 2015 who attended PACE (N = 218).

<sup>c</sup>These measures are based on responses to the 12-month follow-up survey among respondents randomly assigned through March 2015 who left PACE but did not graduate or complete the program (N = 180). Respondents could select more than one reason.

<sup>d</sup>Examples of "other" responses include feeling the program was not helping, wanting to return to a prior school or go to a different school, having trouble with attendance, and finding academics at PACE inadequately rigorous.



In the final weeks before transition, the counselor is to complete the transition outcome checklist, which summarizes the girl's progress while at PACE, and create an exit plan. The exit plan has information about the girl's next placement and is used to set academic and personal goals for her during the transition period. As shown in the top panel of Table 6.4, there was high compliance in completing the required paperwork before transition, with nearly all girls having complete transition paperwork. During interviews, counselors explained that in the case of unplanned transitions where there is not much warning, the counselor can complete the paperwork without the involvement of the family. The high compliance rates reflect such flexibility.

Girls interviewed described varying transition experiences, which seemed to be associated with their experience in the program and the terms of their transition. Girls who stuck with the program and had to leave because they reached their goals or the 15-month limit described a coordinated transition process similar to that outlined in the manual. Girls who had unplanned transitions, such as having to leave because of behavior issues, said their transition process was not smooth and reported problems transferring credits accrued while at PACE.

For the most part, parents interviewed had positive things to say about the transition process. They said that the staff provided them with information on the transition well in advance and helped with the logistics of the new placement. The parents who did not feel supported during the transition process were mostly parents of girls who had unplanned transitions, some of whom had been removed from the program by the parents. These parents described limited communication or support from the PACE staff.

## **Follow-Up**

For girls who attended the program for at least 90 days, PACE requires 12 months of follow-up services after the transition.<sup>4</sup> The manual specifies that a designated PACE staff person makes contact monthly for the first three months and then quarterly. The purpose of these contacts is twofold: to document the girl's situation (in school and in her living situation) and to connect girls with services if needed. As one counselor explained, "Just because they are leaving us doesn't necessarily mean that we're leaving them. They always have a safe place to go."

The staffing structure for follow-up services varied by center. For 9 of 14 centers, follow-up was a part-time role, either staffed by a part-time person or part of the duties of a full-time staff member, such as a day counselor. At five centers, the transition counselor was a full-time role, and the counselor would typically become involved in a girl's care during her last few

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<sup>4</sup>At the beginning of the evaluation period, PACE required three years of follow-up services, but this was reduced to 12 months during the study enrollment period. Since MDRC's visits to study implementation occurred after PACE had changed the policy, this report focuses on the 12-month follow-up period.

months at PACE to enable the girl to get to know the transition counselor before transition. Transition staff members who responded to the staff survey reported an average caseload of 35 girls in follow-up; 29 percent said their caseload was not manageable. The academic staff played a minimal role in follow-up. Follow-up contacts between academic staff members and girls mainly occurred when girls reached out to teachers with whom they had been close.

Staff members responsible for transitions described a few methods for keeping in contact with the girls, including phone calls, social media (such as Facebook), and in-person visits to the girl's school. It was often difficult to stay in touch; respondents to the staff survey reported that they were able to reach fewer than half the girls on their caseload during follow-up. The level of effort varied. Five centers reported minimal efforts to contact girls, limited to calling the numbers on file, leaving voice mails, and taking girls off the call list after the required three attempts. The remaining centers described more intensive efforts that included going to girls' homes or trying to use their social networks to get in touch with them.

Many staff members indicated that the girls drove the level of follow-up: If a girl wanted help from PACE she would reach out to the program. Girls who did not want support from the program essentially opted out of services by not responding to contact attempts. In the words of one girl: "They call me but I ignore it." A few staff members indicated that their personal relationships with the girls affected follow-up efforts: "Sometimes we try really hard to find them, sometimes if we can't reach them we just let them go."

The PACE model requires that each girl in the follow-up period have a transition care plan in place, which the transition staff will review with the girls during the required contacts; similar to the first care plan, it contains academic, behavioral, and vocational goals. At most centers, however, the transition care plan did not seem to be a focus of follow-up services. Most transition staff members reported using it either not at all or in a limited way. The MIS data (Table 6.4) support this finding: Only 58 percent of girls had had a transition care plan. Centers varied in their completion rates. On the high end, five centers had transition care plans for at least 75 percent of girls, while four centers had rates of 25 percent compliance or below.<sup>5</sup> Most, but not all, of the centers with a full-time transition staff had higher compliance rates. A few centers without a full-time transition counselor also fell in the high range. This indicates that centers could have high compliance in this area with or without a full-time transition staff member.

Because MIS data are not available on services provided to girls during the transition period, it is not possible to say what proportion of girls received services and the intensity of

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<sup>5</sup>Transition care plan compliance is calculated among girls in transition who had a length of stay longer than 30 days.

those services. Staff members described mainly connecting girls to resources in the community, though PACE centers offered a limited amount of services directly. The most common services provided to girls in follow-up were help connecting to academic services, help with job searches (such as providing interview clothes or résumé writing), and counseling (either directly or through referrals to outside providers).

Follow-up services were an area where implementation was more uneven across the centers, with lower rates of fidelity in quantity of services provided compared with other services. Although a few centers described robust services, most did the minimum — calling girls at the required intervals and connecting girls who sought help with supportive services. This finding is not surprising, given that PACE does not receive funding for follow-up services from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice or the school district, so funds to support this work must be raised from other sources. As a result of the lack of funding, follow-up services lacked a dedicated staff person at most centers. Uneven implementation may also be reflected in the girls' reported satisfaction with transition services — compared with the overwhelmingly positive responses on other measures, only 59 percent of girls surveyed reported that the transition plan was helpful after leaving PACE (Table 6.4). Girls interviewed also described mixed experiences with follow-up services. Of the girls who had made a transition, about half reported being in regular contact with PACE and receiving support. The remaining girls said they were not in contact with PACE; girls indicated that they program did not contact them or they were not interested in keeping in touch with the program.

## **Impacts on Services Received**

Table 6.5 shows that girls in the program group were more likely to receive support for nonacademic needs than girls in the control group, according to the 12-month follow-up survey of girls. The program group reported much higher rates of receiving mental health counseling or therapy (64 percent compared with 46 percent) and having more frequent sessions. More girls in the program group also reported receiving help connecting to additional services (such as transportation, housing, or food) than in the control group (39 percent compared with 23 percent). These impacts demonstrate that PACE offers girls greater access to counseling and case management than they would receive in a traditional school setting.

Table 6.5 also shows differences in the receipt of services that are closely connected to the PACE model, such as attention to women's reproductive issues and healthy relationships. The program group was much more likely to receive help around reproductive health (including access to contraception or testing for sexually transmitted infections). The program group was also more likely to have received help with social and emotional skills, such as dealing with peer pressure and developing self-confidence.

**Table 6.5**  
**One-Year Impacts on Social Services Received**

Outcome (%)	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
Received help finding services in the community	38.5	23.3	15.2 ***	0.000
<i>Primary source of help finding services in the community<sup>a</sup></i>				
<i>Public, alternative, or virtual school</i>	8.1	36.2	-28.1	
<i>PACE</i>	56.5	6.9	49.7	
<i>Department of Children and Families</i>	7.3	6.6	0.7	
<i>JPO or person from Department of Juvenile Justice or the court system</i>	8.2	19.2	-11.0	
<i>Health or mental health center, clinic, or private practice</i>	7.9	13.3	-5.4	
<i>Other</i>	12.1	17.8	-5.7	
Received mental health counseling or therapy	64.2	45.5	18.7 ***	0.000
<i>Primary counseling or therapy provider<sup>a</sup></i>				
<i>Health or mental health center, clinic, or private practice</i>	17.9	47.3	-29.5	
<i>Public, alternative, or virtual school</i>	1.9	12.7	-10.8	
<i>PACE</i>	65.1	2.6	62.5	
<i>Department of Children and Families</i>	2.9	5.0	-2.1	
<i>Department of Juvenile Justice, parole office, or the court system</i>	4.6	5.8	-1.2	
<i>Community organization</i>	2.3	7.4	-5.1	
<i>Other</i>	5.4	19.2	-13.8	
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 <sup>b</sup> (total = 668)	407	261		

(continued)

### **Table 6.5 (continued)**

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

NOTES: JPO = juvenile probation officer.

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.

<sup>a</sup>Responses include only sample members who reported receiving the services. Therefore, the measures are nonexperimental and statistical significance was not calculated.

<sup>b</sup>Due to missing values, the number of girls included varies by outcome. The sample size reported here is based on responses to the 12-month follow-up survey among girls randomly assigned through March 2015.



## Chapter 7

# Conclusion

This report, along with the companion brief on the principles and evidence behind gender-responsive services that uses PACE as a case study, adds to the body of knowledge about how gender-responsive programs operate in actuality. Specifically, PACE creates a culture that is sensitive to the needs of girls as a framework for providing its services: PACE centers provide a safe, relationship-focused environment, and program staff members emphasize fostering girls' individual strengths while understanding how the effects of trauma may influence the girls' responses and behavior. This culture is infused into all aspects of program delivery, as PACE offers a combination of services that is hypothesized to meet the specific needs of girls at risk for poor life outcomes. Program components such as comprehensive assessments, life skills classes, and parental engagement — along with the program environment — align with principles of gender-responsive programming.

The report also highlights the ways that PACE is different from the other services available to girls in the communities where PACE operates. Few programs offer the same combination of services, and those that do provide a similar array of services to both girls and boys. In most cases, girls in the control group attended a more traditional public school in their community. Girls attending PACE were more likely to participate in counseling sessions and receive academic advising — and with greater frequency — than girls in other academic settings. PACE's staff-to-girl ratio provides for more individual attention and support in both academic and social services.

This evaluation also examines replication of the program — often a difficult task, and one of great interest to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. PACE was able to implement its model consistently in a diversity of locations — not only providing the same services but establishing a similar program culture in centers across the state of Florida. As described in this report, PACE successfully specifies its model through principles shared with the centers and a lengthy policy and procedures manual, bolstered by comprehensive staff training and the use of program data to track implementation. The central office plays a key role, monitoring fidelity and providing guidance or support as needed. This combination of methods offers lessons for the field.

PACE centers did vary in some ways. Variation tended to occur in areas where the program model did not offer specific guidance: for example, the approaches used by counselors in their sessions with girls. This is another important lesson, underscoring the trade-offs programs face when thinking about how — and how thoroughly — to define their model and monitor fidelity. Programs must decide how much discretion staff members have in providing services:

Research on adaptation and fidelity suggests that in some cases adaptation is beneficial, as it allows staff members to tailor an intervention to the needs of the population served.<sup>1</sup> Finding the balance between specification and flexibility is an ongoing discussion for programs such as PACE.

PACE continues to assess the services provided and its implementation practices. Over the course of the evaluation period, PACE implemented a new management structure at its central office and revised policies on program eligibility, among other changes. On the subject of eligibility, the management team at the state office collaborated with leaders at the centers to draw on their hands-on knowledge of current practices. A revamping of the life skills curriculum is under way as well. Working groups have been formed to delve into findings shared from the implementation research, such as the content of counseling sessions and the instructional methods used in the classrooms. In addition, PACE continues to evaluate whom it should serve and how the larger societal conversation about gender identity plays out at the centers.

The organization also must continue to examine its place in the ever-changing academic landscape in Florida. Some communities offer a wide array of academic options, and PACE seeks to differentiate itself and the services it offers. As a whole, the state offers an increasing number of charter, alternative, and virtual (online) school options. In the 2013-2014 school year, more than a quarter of kindergarten through twelfth-grade public school students chose a school other than the one they were assigned.<sup>2</sup> Florida offers more virtual school options than any other state; online learning is available in all its school districts.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Florida has experienced an increasing enrollment in charter schools. From the 2010-2011 school year to 2015-2016, over 130 charter schools were created, serving an additional 90,000 students from prekindergarten to twelfth grade.<sup>4</sup> Finally, there has been a notable increase in single-gender education options within the state, including in the communities served by PACE.<sup>5</sup>

Attitudes about approaches to delinquency continue to evolve as well, both within Florida and nationwide. In schools, there has been a move away from “zero tolerance” discipline policies that resulted in expulsions and a move toward handling behavior problems within the school setting.<sup>6</sup> This probably means fewer referrals for girls with behavioral issues to programs like PACE. Or, perhaps, girls might now be referred further down the line, when their behavioral problems have grown to be too much for a school to handle.

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<sup>1</sup>Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, and Hansen (2003).

<sup>2</sup>Florida Department of Education (2015).

<sup>3</sup>Florida Department of Education (2017).

<sup>4</sup>Florida Department of Education (2016).

<sup>5</sup>Thompson (2015).

<sup>6</sup>Alvarez (2013).



Similarly, practices in the juvenile justice system are shifting. Recently, there has been a nationwide movement to confine fewer delinquent youth.<sup>7</sup> In Florida, 38,267 young people (ages 10 to 17) were arrested in fiscal year 2015-2016, down 34 percent from 57,597 in fiscal year 2011-2012. Females are making up a smaller percentage of juvenile arrests, falling from 30 percent to 28 percent in the same period.<sup>8</sup>

The implementation findings herein add to the evidence base on gender-responsive programming and its effectiveness. The companion brief delves further into the history and literature of the gender-responsive approach, using PACE implementation as a case study.<sup>9</sup> In 2018, a final report will present the results of the impact study, further reflections from girls on their experiences, and a cost-effectiveness analysis. The impact findings, which will provide a rigorous assessment of PACE's effectiveness as a gender-responsive program for girls, will look at such outcomes as academic engagement and progress, involvement in the juvenile justice system, healthy relationships, and risky behavior (such as high-risk sexual activity and substance abuse). The cost-effectiveness analysis will evaluate the costs of PACE in the context of its outcomes for girls. Together these reports will provide needed evidence on a gender-responsive approach to helping girls.

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<sup>7</sup>Data from Kids Count Data Center (2013): In 2006, 289 per 100,000 young people resided in a juvenile detention center, correctional facility, or residential facility. By 2013, the rate had dropped to 173 per 100,000 young people.

<sup>8</sup>Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (2016).

<sup>9</sup>Treskon and Bright (2017).



**Appendix A**

**Supplementary Tables on Sample Member  
Characteristics and Risk Factors**



**Appendix Table A.1**

**Characteristics of Sample Members at Baseline, by Random Assignment Group**

Characteristic	Program Group	Control Group
Age (years)	14.6	14.8
Age (%)		
11-12	8.8	7.9
13-14	33.7	30.8
15-16	47.9	51.9
17 or older	9.6	9.5
Race/ethnicity (%)		
Black, non-Hispanic	44.6	45.9
Hispanic <sup>a</sup>	15.8	16.3
White, non-Hispanic	38.9	36.9
Other	0.7	0.9
School level at referral to PACE (%)		
6th grade <sup>b</sup>	9.8	7.2
7th-8th grade	35.3	40.1
9th-10th grade	45.9	44.4
11th-12th grade	9.0	8.2
English is second language (%)	2.1	2.1
Qualifies for special education or ESE <sup>c</sup> (%)	11.0	11.7
People participant lives with (%)		
Two parents	34.9	34.7
Single parent	52.9	50.2
Relative	9.8	11.7
Other <sup>d</sup>	2.4	3.3
Family income <sup>e</sup> (%)		
\$28,050 or lower	43.0	38.5
\$28,051-\$44,900	35.2	35.8
Above \$44,900	21.8	25.7
Family has had case with the Florida Department of Children and Families (%)	43.0	41.0
Sample size	679	455

(continued)

### **Appendix Table A.1 (continued)**

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

NOTES: No statistically significant differences were found between the program and control groups on any characteristics.

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

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

<sup>c</sup>PACE uses the Florida Department of Education definition of Exceptional Student Education (ESE), referring to programs for students with disabilities and gifted programs.

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

<sup>e</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 the statewide income limits for low income and very low income for a four-person household in Florida in fiscal year 2014.

**Appendix Table A.2**  
**Risk Factors of Sample Members at Baseline,**  
**by Random Assignment Group**

Characteristic (%)	Program Group	Control Group
<b><u>School engagement</u></b>		
Recently expelled or suspended <sup>a</sup>	39.5	39.8
Currently enrolled in school	72.6	73.8
Skipped school at least 3 times in past 2 months	33.0	37.5
Had more than 15 absences in past 3 months	42.9	39.7
Held back at least once	51.2	52.8
Failed 1 or more classes in past 6 months	76.3	77.2
Has a learning disability	30.5	28.1
Attention deficit disorder	20.9	17.2
Dyslexia	1.3	1.7
Other learning disability	8.7	9.1
<b><u>Delinquency</u></b>		
Ever arrested <sup>b</sup>	28.3	26.9
Ever arrested for domestic violence	4.8	7.8 *
Ever charged with burglary	4.4	4.0
Ever charged with a drug crime	4.2	2.4
Ever stolen from family, home, or neighbors	16.9	16.4
Ever been on probation	12.3	13.0
Currently on probation	10.0	10.3
Has family member with criminal history <sup>c</sup>	63.8	64.5
Has friends with delinquent record or who engage in delinquent behavior	48.9	51.2

(continued)

**Appendix Table A.2 (continued)**

Characteristic (%)	Program Group	Control Group
<b><u>Health and safety</u></b>		
Currently using tobacco <sup>d</sup>	10.6	8.8
Currently using drugs or alcohol <sup>e</sup>	15.0	14.5
Ever sexually active	44.1	44.1
Currently pregnant	1.8	0.7 *
Ever run away from home	27.9	27.3
Ever had thoughts about harming/killing herself	38.6	40.5
Abused/neglected <sup>f</sup>	38.4	37.6
Neglected	9.4	8.3
Physically abused	14.9	17.3
Sexually abused	15.0	15.3
Emotionally abused	21.3	22.2
Sample size	679	455

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.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

<sup>a</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 most recent school term.

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

<sup>c</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>d</sup>For approximately half of the sample, this was defined as having used tobacco three or more times in past 30 days, and for the other half of the sample this was defined as currently using tobacco.

<sup>e</sup>For approximately half of the sample, this was defined as having used drugs or alcohol three or more times in past 30 days, and for the other half of the sample this was defined as current drug and or alcohol use.

<sup>f</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.



**Appendix B**

**CLASS-Secondary Observations**



As part of the implementation data collection on PACE’s academic services, the research team used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary (CLASS-S) observation tool. The CLASS-S is a validated measure for assessing interactions between teachers and students in a secondary classroom setting.<sup>1</sup>

## The CLASS-Secondary System

Observers using the CLASS-S score the classroom on 12 dimensions. These dimensions are organized under three domains, except for student engagement, which stands alone.

<b>Emotional support</b>	<b>Classroom organization</b>	<b>Instructional support</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive climate</li> <li>• Teacher sensitivity</li> <li>• Regard for adolescent perspectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavioral management</li> <li>• Productivity</li> <li>• Negative climate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional learning formats</li> <li>• Content understanding</li> <li>• Analysis and inquiry</li> <li>• Quality of feedback</li> <li>• Instructional dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> </ul>

Observers give a score ranging from 1 to 7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 the highest. Individual scores must be whole numbers. CLASS-S coders generally observe for a cycle, take time to note the scores, and then repeat the process for another observation cycle.

## Training in CLASS-Secondary

A trainer from Teachstone, the company that oversees the CLASS-S, led a two-day training for PACE evaluation team members in September 2014. The training materials included a manual, scoring sheets, and an extensive library of videos. Following the training, team members completed and passed a reliability test to receive formal certification. Team members who visited centers more than six months after training was complete were required to take and pass a calibration test (provided through Teachstone) before the visits.

## Observations at PACE Centers

During implementation research visits to the 14 participating centers, all teachers (except substitutes) who were present on the day or days of the visit were observed in their academic classrooms, including the life skills instructor. The researchers conducted a total of 80 observa-

<sup>1</sup>University of Virginia, Curry School of Education (2015); Piante, Hamre, and Mintz (2012).

tions between November 2014 and March 2015.<sup>2</sup> No interviews with teachers were scheduled before observations of their classes to avoid causing bias on the part of the observer.

The goal at each center was to observe each teacher for one class period. This allowed for two cycles of CLASS-S observations, with each cycle involving one 10- to 15-minute period of observation, followed by a period of scoring. Observers referred to their CLASS-S manuals during the scoring process for guidance. Observations were not conducted if the class spent the entire period in testing or watching a video. No specific minimum class size was required for the observation to take place, as long as the number of students present was not atypical. In a handful of cases, classrooms with very few students (one to three) were observed.

Observers occasionally encountered challenges to scoring classrooms on site, such as teachers who engaged them in the lesson or disruptions from students entering and leaving the classroom during the observation cycle. Questions and concerns were discussed regularly during team meetings and sometimes in consultation with Teachstone, which provided useful guidance.

## **Inter-Rater Reliability**

To determine whether classroom visitors were scoring in a consistent manner, about 25 percent of classes observed were “double-scored,” meaning that they were observed and scored by two site visitors during the same period. Inter-rater reliability (IRR) was established by comparing the scores of the two observers. For CLASS-S, the two scores on each dimension had to be the same or within one point of each other to be considered in agreement. Overall, the IRR was 88 percent, comfortably above the standard threshold of 80 percent. In comparisons on specific dimensions, IRR scores ranged from 79 percent to 97 percent.

## **Calculating CLASS-S Scores**

CLASS-S scores were calculated for each dimension by averaging the scores from the two observation cycles in a specific classroom. For classrooms that were double-coded, the classroom score was calculated by taking the average of the two observers’ average scores. To create the overall score for a dimension at each center, the scores for all classrooms on that dimension were averaged. The negative climate score was reverse coded so that higher scores mean less negative climate. Scores of 1 to 3 are classified as low, scores above 3 but below 5 are classified as midrange, and scores of 5 to 7 are classified as high.

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<sup>2</sup>Three observations were subsequently dropped from the analysis because the usual classroom teacher was not present for the observation. In two cases, a substitute teacher was present; in the other, the academic services manager had stepped in.

**Appendix C**

**Data Collection and Analysis**



## **Random Assignment Procedures**

Each of the 14 PACE centers used similar procedures to conduct random assignment from August 2013 through October 2015. Specifically, each center used its existing intake and eligibility procedures to determine whether an applicant was a good fit for PACE. During intake meetings, trained PACE staff members used MDRC-provided tools, including a short video, to discuss the evaluation and gather consent from the girl and her parent or guardian.

Once a girl was determined eligible for PACE and her study paperwork was complete, PACE staff members entered a few pieces of her information into MDRC's web-based random assignment system. The system was set up to assign 60 percent of girls to the program group and 40 percent to the control group. This random assignment ratio was consistently used across sites. Random assignment was usually conducted the same day a girl was deemed eligible for PACE, and she was notified of the random assignment result within 24 hours.

## **PACE's Management Information System**

MDRC processed two types of data from the PACE management information system (MIS): data collected at intake on all sample members' demographics and risk factors, and program participation data collected once a sample member enrolled at PACE.

Every two months from August 2013 through December 2015, MDRC pulled the intake data directly from the PACE MIS. Though each data pull was cumulative, any demographic or risk factor information that had been updated from a prior pull was not used. Information on program enrollment and transition dates, also included in the intake data, was updated with the processing of each pull. In order to capture the most recently updated information on program entry and exit for this report, MDRC made a few additional pulls of these data in 2016, with the last file processed in October 2016.

Because retrieving program participation data from the MIS was more complex, the PACE administrator performed this task. From August 2014 to November 2016, cumulative program participation data records were periodically pulled for study participants only. MDRC worked extensively with the PACE administrator to understand which elements from the Efforts-to-Outcomes (ETO) software corresponded to the program participation measures of interest. Each data pull produced about 20 separate extracts, with each extract providing data on a specific type of program activity. MDRC then processed each data pull, which included performing checks for duplicates and invalid data and restructuring the data as needed to produce final measures of program participation across several domains. If any study participants were missing from an extract, MDRC notified the PACE administrator, who was often

able to recover the missing data. Most of the program participation data recorded in ETO is documentation of an activity that occurred. In most cases, if a girl did not have any data entered for a specific activity, MDRC assumed no participation.

## **Twelve-Month Follow-Up Survey of Girls**

A follow-up survey was administered to sample members by phone or in person approximately one year after random assignment. Fielding of the survey began in October 2014 and ended in December 2016. The survey covered a number of domains, including program satisfaction, academic progress and employment, outlook and positive youth development, social support and mental health, risky behavior, and control group service receipt. Survey responses presented throughout this report are from participants enrolled in the study between August 2013 and March 2015, about two-thirds of the full study sample. While all sample members were approached to complete the survey, not all girls could be reached or agreed to participate. Specifically, the response rate for this period was 71 percent overall; 407 girls in the program group (73 percent) and 261 in the control group (69 percent) responded to the survey.

## **Staff Survey**

The staff survey was fielded to 299 PACE staff members at 16 centers using a list of email addresses obtained from PACE headquarters. The list included all staff members employed at the centers, including part-time administrative support staff. The survey was piloted in Fall 2014 to the staff at three centers, and a revised version of the survey was fielded to the remaining 13 centers in early 2015. Two centers receiving the survey ultimately did not participate in the implementation study because of an inadequate number of girls in their research samples. The survey results for these two centers are not included in the results presented in this report. The staff survey had a response rate of 91 percent.

## **Missing Data in Quantitative Data Processing**

Program staff members enter the baseline data as part of their existing intake procedures. This information is required for a program eligibility determination *before* random assignment. Values were imputed for any missing baseline data used in the service receipt impact analysis.

Sample members with missing data on any of the survey responses or outcomes were removed from the impact analysis for that particular measure. In the case of the 105-item Organizational Social Context measure administered in the staff survey, cases were eliminated if they had 11 or more items missing, were inconsistent in responses, or showed irregularity of response patterns. In all, eight cases were eliminated.



## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data were primarily gathered from interviews with staff members, girls, and parents using structured interview and observation protocols. A team of 12 researchers participated in the site visits. After the visits, the researchers recorded the information gathered in structured write-up templates designed to ensure that similar data were collected across staff roles and centers. A team of two implementation leads reviewed each write-up for clarity and consistency.

All qualitative data were uploaded and coded in Dedoose, a mixed-methods analysis software. Data were coded by a small team of four researchers using a prespecified set of codes. All coded data used in this report were checked for proper code application by the lead implementation researcher. Qualitative data were also attached to both a staff- or individual-level descriptor set and a center-level descriptor set in Dedoose. Descriptor sets are categorical or numeric variables that can be used to create subgroups of centers or staff members within Dedoose to aid in the analysis of the qualitative data. The descriptor sets were used to analyze the coded data across staff roles and centers to assess variation.



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## 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.