

A young woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and a red backpack, is riding a bicycle. She is smiling and looking back over her shoulder towards the camera. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green and yellow foliage.

# Gender transformative health promotion, harm reduction, support and treatment programming for girls

**Nancy Poole, PhD**

**Iceland, February 2019**



Centre of Excellence  
for Women's Health 

# **GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES**

**Gender-transformative** approaches actively strive to examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and imbalance of power as a means of reaching health as well as gender equity objectives.

**Source:** E. Rottach, S.R. Schuler, and K. Hardee, *Gender Perspectives Improve Reproductive Health Outcomes: New Evidence* (Washington, DC: IGWG, 2009).

## A Continuum of Approaches to Action on Gender and Health



Greaves, L., Pederson, A., & Poole, N. (Eds.). (2014). *Making it Better: Gender-Transformative Health Promotion*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press. p.22

# Why do we need gender transformative approaches?

- 40 years of health promotion has not integrated gender, despite gender being a well-studied determinant of health
- Many approaches take an individualistic approach to changing behaviour
- Do not always identify structural, gendered factors affecting girl's and boy's, women's and men's health and power

Therefore it is important to offer programming that influences unhelpful gender norms and relations as well as, and as a way of, improving health outcomes.

# GT Example 1: True Child USA

Gender transformative approaches highlight, challenge and change the systemic culture of gender conformity and intolerance that drives middle school social violence, both online and off.

We believe research must begin to inform practice, and move gender norms to the center of the debate.

## Gender Norms: A Key to Combating School- and Cyber-Bullying and Homophobic Harassment Among At-Risk Youth



TrueChild is an action tank of leading authorities that promotes gender transformative approaches to reproductive health, educational under-achievement, and gender-based violence.

Gender transformative approaches are those which highlight, challenge and ultimately change harmful gender norms. TrueChild is especially interested in the challenges faced by at-risk youth, like

### RESEARCH

More than a decade of research—often originating in US colleges and universities—has established the strongest possible links between middle school violence and gender norms.

### RITE OF PASSAGE

Learning to enact masculinity and femininity and being publicly acknowledged as a young man or woman is a major rite of passage for nearly every adolescent or teen. This can be especially true during the “gender intensification” years of ages 9-13, when interest in traditional gender norms intensifies, and belief in them solidifies.

### MISNOMER

Yet the language of school violence often obscures the importance of gender norms. “Bullying” sounds like a problem of individual acts by singular male-factors. “Sexual harassment” sounds like sexual coercion or pressure being applied, yet adolescent bullying is almost never about sex per se.



3 groups of adolescents are consistently targeted for victimization in middle school:

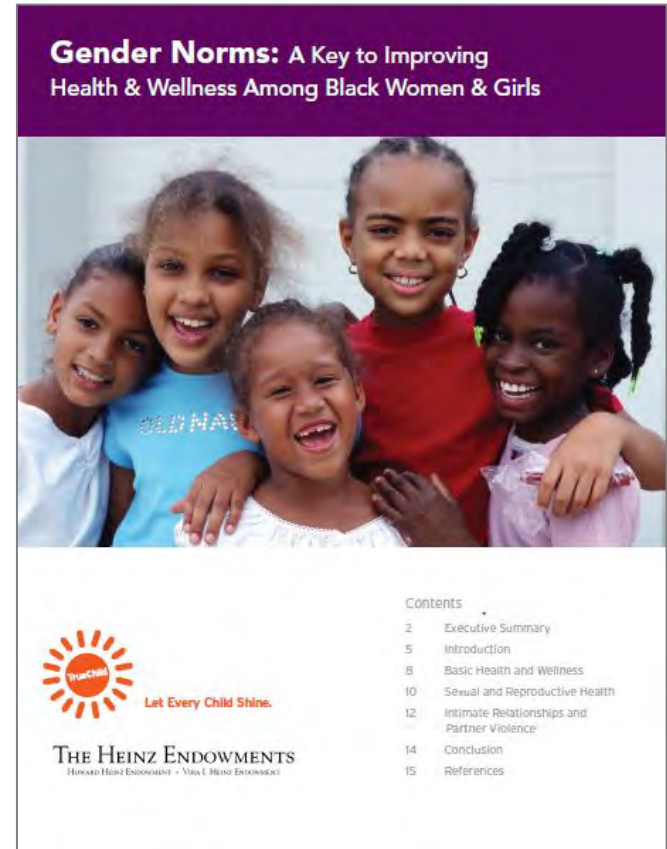
1. Boys who are perceived as not masculine enough;
2. Girls who are perceived as not feminine enough;
3. Girls whose bodies mature before their peers.

In each case, policing gender norms or punishing some sort of perceived gender non-conformity is integral to the attack.

# GT Example 2:

## True child - USA

- Black girls must cope with a gender system that pushes males to be strong, independent and dominant, and females to be dependent, passive and weak.
- Black girls may face pressure to prioritize caretaking from an early age. The value placed on self-sacrifice may become internalized causing girls to focus on others while disregarding their own health



[truechild.org](http://truechild.org)

# **GIRLS HEALTH PROMOTION**



# Promising practices in health promotion with girls

- The following Program Examples are organized by 9 promising practices for health promotion with girls identified in *Girls' Perspectives on Girls' Groups and Healthy Living* study



[http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/files/english\\_research\\_summary\\_for\\_gaf\\_website\\_-\\_september\\_5\\_2012\\_0.pdf](http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/files/english_research_summary_for_gaf_website_-_september_5_2012_0.pdf)

# Promising Practices for Health Promotion with Girls

1. Skill building
2. Gender-based (e.g., girl-focused, girls-only programs, promoting development of a sense of self as a girl)
3. Participatory/Girl-driven
4. Enhancing Social Connections (family, school, peers, community)
5. Self-esteem building
6. Multi-component
7. Culturally safe (culturally sensitive or culturally specific)
8. Strengths/Asset-based (e.g., focus on health vs. illness, strengths vs. risks)
9. Empowerment-oriented/Voice-centred



**HOW GIRLS' GROUPS CAN PROMOTE HEALTH**  
PROMISING PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Girls' groups provide an important space for girls to come together to address personal, social and political issues. Many girls' groups directly or indirectly promote health and well-being and can have an important role in addressing healthy living issues such as smoking prevention, nutrition and obesity, physical inactivity and dating violence.

Research shows that girls' groups can be an effective model for health promotion with girls. In this information sheet, we describe some of the elements of community programs that can make a difference to the health and well-being of girls.

- 1** Incorporate skill-building activities. Most community programs emphasize building a wide range of skills in girls. Skill-building has been shown to be successful in a range of health areas, including reducing smoking and other substance use, sexual violence prevention, and mental health.
- 2** Advocate for and promote the value of girls-only programs. Many health issues for girls have different face for boys. In addition to differences in specific health concerns, attitudes and behaviors may require different approaches. Research shows that girls-only spaces can be effective in addressing certain health issues (e.g., increasing physical activity), create opportunities to address sensitive topics (e.g., sexual harassment or pregnancy), and can build trust, confidence, and skills which lead to increased health knowledge, self-advocacy, and improved health outcomes.
- 3** Involve girls in program planning and delivery. Programs that are "girl-driven" or provide opportunities for girls to participate in developing or implementing activities are more successful. Research shows that when girls helped to develop programs related to physical activity, mental health, and smoking prevention that these programs were more effective and relevant and enhanced feelings of safety and being respected.

[http://www.coalescing-vc.org/virtualLearning/section3/documents/HowGGCanPromoteHealth\\_Apr142014.pdf](http://www.coalescing-vc.org/virtualLearning/section3/documents/HowGGCanPromoteHealth_Apr142014.pdf)

# **1. SKILL BUILDING**

# Safeteen (Canada/International)

- Based on violence prevention assertiveness model – life skills
- Elementary (boys and girls separated, runs concurrently) - Assertiveness, healthy relationships, verbal violence, physical violence
- Secondary (girls and boys programs) – includes a focus on sexual boundaries and consent
- SafeTeen reports that youth consistently rate their program as highly valuable to their lives. For example, since 1983, on an annual average 98% of students who have completed their workshops have given it the highest possible rating for content and delivery
- Programs run on 5 continents, approx 25,000 youth every year.



<http://safeteen.ca/>

# GoGirlGo! Program, Women's Sports Foundation (United States)

- Dedicated to **advancing the lives of girls and women through sports and physical activity.**
- GoGirlGo!, the organization's landmark educational program, was launched in 2001 for elementary, middle and high school girls and works across the country to keep girls involved in physical activity and to improve the health of girls who are sedentary.
- The basic GoGirls! Guide to Life includes eight sessions, each featuring the athlete's story and accompanying educational information and activities. The topics covered in the Guide are alcohol and drugs, body image, diversity, smoking, emotions, nutrition, bullies and family issues. Additional stories on sleep, anger, dating, harassment and environmentalism are also available.



[www.womenssportsfoundation.org/GoGirlGo.aspx](http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/GoGirlGo.aspx)

# Youth Advocacy Training Institute (Ontario)

- Program of the Ontario Lung Association
- Training for youth on: “Creating Effective Health Promotion Campaigns”, “Creative Ways to Advocate”, “Improving the Health of Your Community”, “Industry Marketing and Media Literacy”, etc
- Numerous resources on website

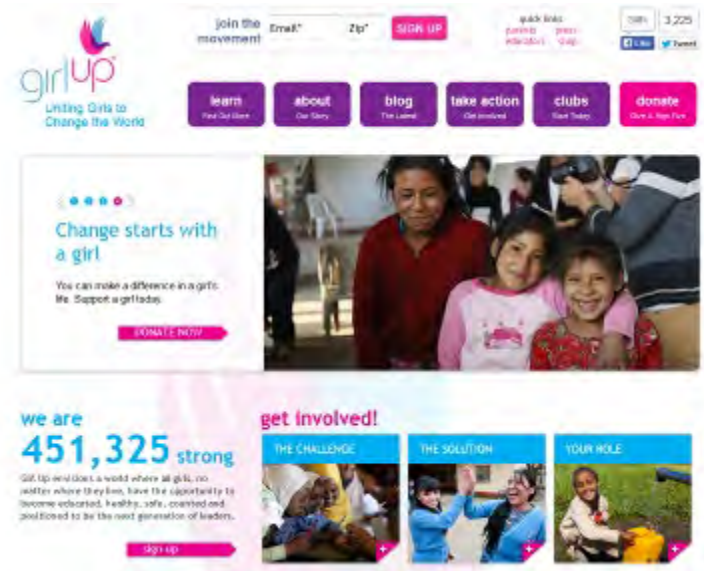


[www.youthadvocacy.ca](http://www.youthadvocacy.ca)

## **2. GENDER BASED/GIRL ONLY**

# Girl Up! (USA/United Nations Foundation)

- Girl Up, a campaign of the United Nations Foundation, gives American girls the opportunity to channel their energy and compassion to raise awareness and funds for programs of the United Nations that help some of the world's hardest-to-reach adolescent girls
- Since 2012, Girl Up has helped more than 20,000 girls in developing countries
- **350 active clubs, 12 college campuses, 44 countries**
- Supporting leadership in American girls
- **“Uniting girls to change the world”**
- **Health** is one of five critical areas of work the program addresses



<https://girlup.org/>



# Bikes Not Bombs – Girls In Action Program (Greater Boston and New England)

- **Bikes Not Bombs uses the bicycle as a vehicle for social change.**
- **Girls In Action (GIA) combines bicycle mechanics and riding and is a great way for girls aged 12-18 to learn new things, make friends, get active and earn a bike of their own**
- **In addition to mechanics, GIA offers fitness, safety, and environmental activities, as well as weekly workshops or field trips. Girls visit an urban farm, learn how to do henna tattoos, or do community service, all while meeting other cool girls and learning how to completely rebuild a bike.**



The screenshot shows the website for Bikes Not Bombs, featuring a green header with a logo of a bicycle and a parachute. The main content area is titled "Girls In Action" and includes a navigation menu on the left with options like "About Us", "Youth Programs", "International Programs", "Bike Shop", "Bike-A-Thon", "Help Out", and "Resources". The main text describes the program as an intensive, all-girls program for girls aged 12-18, offering bicycle mechanics, riding, and various activities. It also mentions that the program runs Monday through Thursday from 4 pm to 7 pm each day. A "How to Apply" section provides information on downloading applications and the cost of the program, which is \$25-\$50 sliding scale. A sidebar on the right lists "Upcoming Sessions" for the 2015 Spring Girls In Action, starting on May 4th.

<https://bikesnotbombs.org>

# Grassroots Soccer – Girlz Got Skillz (South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe)

- Grassroot Soccer (GRS) uses the power of **soccer** to educate, inspire, and mobilize young people to stop the spread of **HIV**
- To date over 1.2 million participants in 40 countries have taken part in GRS programming. GRS impacts approximately 100,000 youth per year
- A **girls-targeted intervention**, Skillz Street combines an activities-based HIV prevention and life skills curriculum with fair play soccer and peer-led community outreach activities.



<http://www.grassrootsoccer.org/what-we-do/skillz/girlz-got-skillz/>

### **3. PARTICIPATORY/ GIRL-DRIVEN**

# Project Girl (USA)

- PROJECT GIRL combines art, media literacy, and youth led activism
- Media literacy curriculum, peer-driven



[www.projectgirl.org](http://www.projectgirl.org)

# Youth RISE (International)

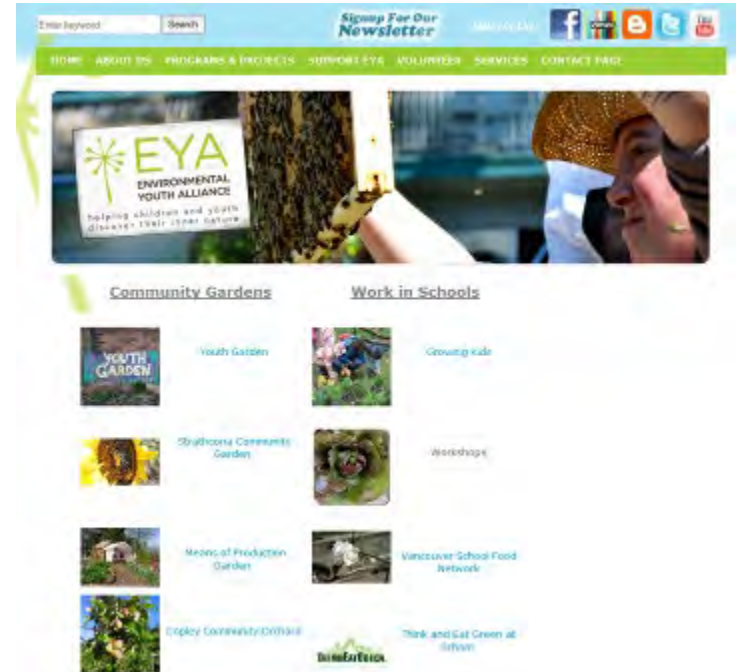
- Youth RISE (Resource. Information. Support. Education) is an international, youth-led organisation
- Youth RISE engages in a range of activities centred around drug policy reform and advocacy for harm reduction interventions for young people
- Peer education, policy & advocacy, capacity building



[www.youthrise.org](http://www.youthrise.org)

# Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA) (Vancouver)

- Local, youth driven non-profit organization
- Several projects related to healthy living/eating – youth community garden, food preservation, natural medicine, Think and Eat Green at School



[www.eya.ca](http://www.eya.ca)

## **4. ENHANCING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

# Canadian After School Partnership

- CASP is a comprehensive, collaborative and multi-dimensional initiative - uses a program delivery framework targeting all levels of government, decision makers, non-profit and for profit organizations and front line staff as well as others with a commitment in quality after school programs.
- Focus on quality physical activity, nutritional support and skills building in the critical 3-6pm time period
- Online resource for After School Program Staff in Canada - free training and planning tools

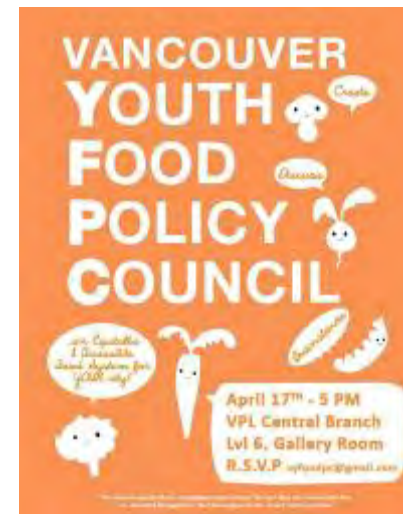


<http://activeafterschool.ca/>



# Youth Food Policy Councils (Toronto, Vancouver)

- Adjunct to city food policy councils – includes farmers, food distributors, nutritionists, processors, waste managers, activists, and academics engaged in the food system
- Toronto - engages youth in food policy work by facilitating *Food Policy 101* workshops at schools and community groups, by providing youth an opportunity to become [community members](#) and attend meetings on local food policy issues, and by providing a platform for youth to share their academic and creative work in a [youth food journal](#)
- Vancouver – advocacy, education and networking
- Healthy eating is one component of focus; also connects to global youth food movement and activism



<http://tyfpc.ca/>

<https://vyfpc.wordpress.com>

# Midnight Basketball (Australia)

- The Midnight Basketball program is a **national social inclusion program** to help young people aged 12 to 18 years, identify and embrace positive opportunities.
- Activities are run in stadiums throughout different communities on Friday or Saturday nights from 7.30pm till midnight, followed by a bus home, providing a safe and motivating environment.
- The activities include: dinner, compulsory life skills workshops, tournament basketball games.
- Activities enable participants to deal with real issues such as: healthy living, alcohol and other drug use, anger management, employment , financial issues.
- The first *Midnight basketball* program was launched in Redfern, Sydney, in 2007 and was later expanded nationally due to its success.
- Social inclusion focus – gender, race, culture, etc. considered



[www.midnightbasketball.org.au](http://www.midnightbasketball.org.au)

## **5. SELF-ESTEEM BUILDING**

# Embody Love Movement (USA)



<http://embodylovemovement.org>

- Embody Love Movement's mission is to empower girls and women to value their inner beauty, commit to kindness, and believe in their purpose
- Inner Beauty workshops, Embody Love Clubs in high schools, facilitator training
- Support girls' leadership

# Go Girls! Group Mentoring (Big Brothers, Big Sisters)

- **Go Girls! Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds** is a group mentoring program for girls ages 11-14 that focuses on physical activity, balanced eating and self-esteem.
- The most important goal of the program is to positively shape the lives of girls by helping them build a positive self-image – setting them on a path to reach their full potential.
- Go Girls! consists of 8 weekly sessions that are facilitated by volunteer mentors (ages 19-25) and held after school at our partner schools
- Each two hour session is structured around themes of: physical activity, healthy eating, self-esteem, and communication skills.



[http://www.bigbrothersbigsisters.ca/en/home/mentorin  
gprograms/gogirls.aspx](http://www.bigbrothersbigsisters.ca/en/home/mentorin<br/>gprograms/gogirls.aspx)

# The Elisa Project (USA)

- Dedicated to the development of healthy children and adolescents by promoting the awareness and prevention of life-threatening disordered eating through [education](#), [support](#) and [advocacy](#)
- Awareness Programs: 4 different awareness programs – both lecture-style and interactive, provide knowledge on a variety of topics concerning nutrition, self-concept, and eating disorders
- Prevention Programs: 4 prevention programs for the classroom - designed to combat issues of obesity, disordered eating, eating disorders, and negative body image.

<http://theelisaproject.org>

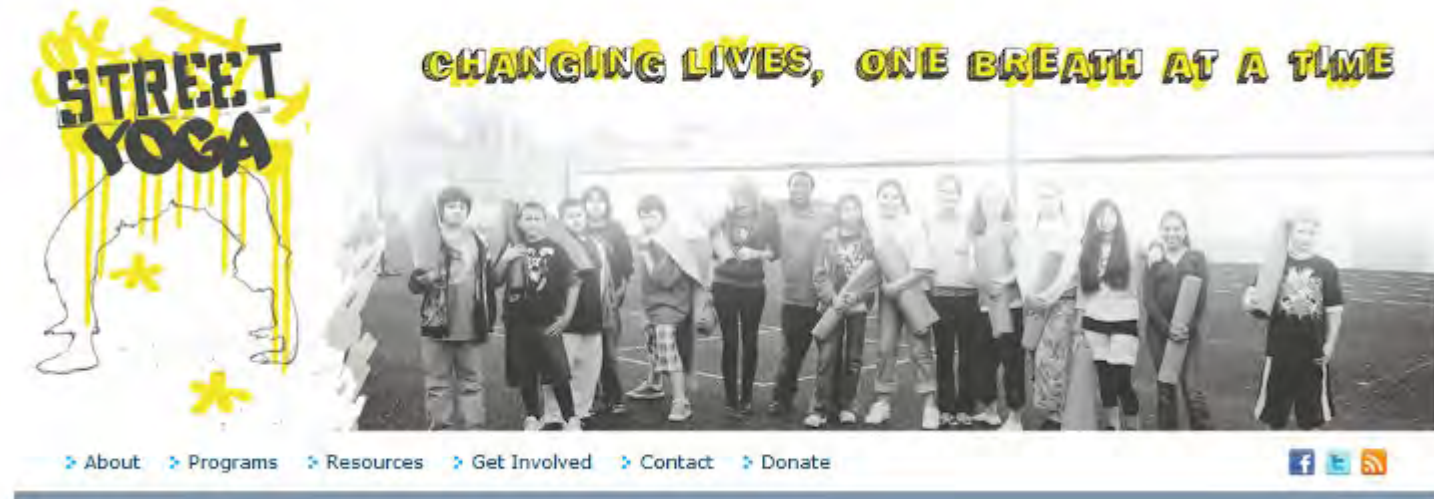
the  
**elisa**PROJECT



STEP UP  
SPEAK OUT  
STOP FAT TALK

## **6. STRENGTHS / ASSET-BASED**

# Street Yoga (USA)



- Street Yoga builds capacity in youth to overcome trauma and to create meaningful, healthy lives through yoga and mindfulness.
- “Trauma-informed” - Street Yoga partners with social service agencies that provide basic needs, treatment and education for the young people facing adversity



# Street Soccer Canada (local/national/international)

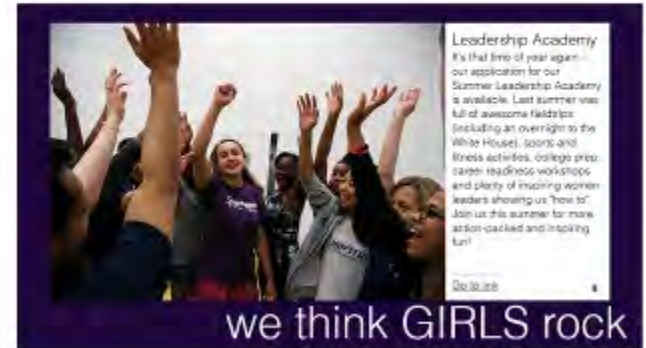
- Through international tournaments and city leagues, Street Soccer Canada has been working on including those, who may otherwise be excluded, through physical activity and sport.
- Some of the players in these local programs have gone on to the Homeless World Cup.
- To date, 41 countries engage with women and 27 provide women-only football sessions.
- During the Homeless World Cup annual tournament, teams are mixed so women can take part too or they can compete in the women-only competition: the [Women's Homeless World Cup](#). Programs are different and the women they help through football can be in very different situations or come from different backgrounds.



[www.streetsoccercanada.org](http://www.streetsoccercanada.org)

# PowerPlay NYC

- PowerPlay began offering its first **STARS (Sports Training and Role models for Success) programming** in 2001
- STARS Series after-school program for elementary and middle school girls
- SuperSTARS Leadership Academy provides the tools for our high school girls to actively pursue their fitness and academic goals
- PowerPlay NYC is distinguished by being the only girl-focused organization in NYC which:
  - offers girls the opportunity to learn a variety of sports,
  - is open to all girls regardless of ability level, and
  - **has a health, wellness and life skills curriculum which accompanies all sports learning.**

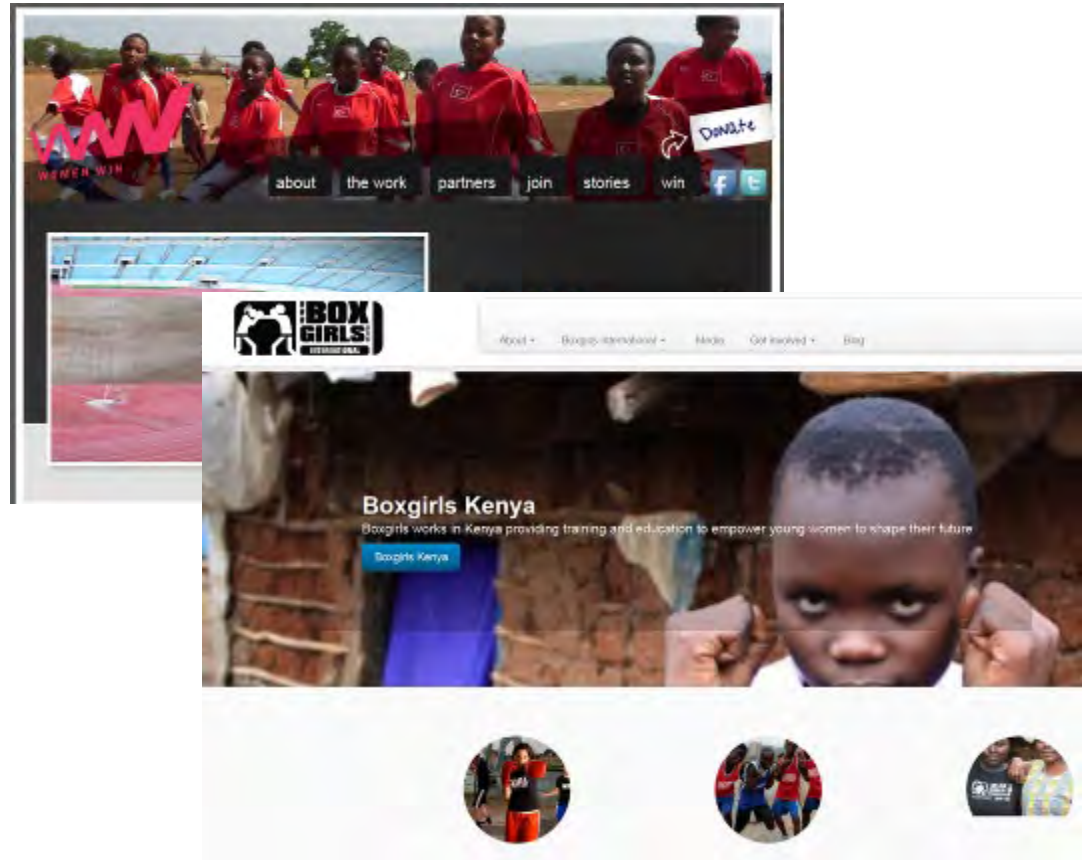


[www.powerplaynyc.org](http://www.powerplaynyc.org)

## **7. EMPOWERMENT-ORIENTED**

# Women Win (International)

- Women Win uses **sport as a strategy to advance girls' rights** with a focus on three areas:
  1. Addressing gender-based violence
  2. Accessing sexual and reproductive health and rights
  3. Gaining economic empowerment
- Since 2007, have supported over 48 programme partners and fellows in 29 countries



<http://womenwin.org>

# Endangered Bodies (Global)

- International movement to challenge the limited physical representation of women and girls (and increasingly men and boys) in contemporary society
- [London](#) (organization [AnyBody](#)), [New York](#) (via [The Women's Therapy Center Institute](#)), [Buenos Aires](#) (AnyBody Argentina), [Ireland](#), [Sao Paulo](#), [Sydney](#) (run by [Body Matters Australasia](#)), Germany ([AnyBody Deutschland](#)) and most recently, [México](#).
- March 2015 – led campaign to have “I feel fat” removed as a Facebook “How do you feel today?” category



<http://www.endangeredbodies.org>

**GIRLS, HARM REDUCTION,  
SUPPORT AND TREATMENT**

# What do we know about need for treatment and harm reduction for girls?

## Alcohol example

- Girls age 10-19 in Canada have higher rates for hospitalizations caused by alcohol than boys
- Intoxication can make young women and girls more vulnerable to date rape, sexual assault, unprotected sex and sexually transmitted infections
- Substance use is associated with high rates of unplanned pregnancy among adolescents



# CULTURE OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

WITH ANN DOWSETT JOHNSTON



## What do we know about Access, Retention, Readiness and Outcomes by Girls?

Young women aged 15 to 24 are more likely to report an unmet service need related to their mental health or substance use than young men (27.6% vs. 17.5%)

Gender inequality, stigma, and poverty may be barriers to accessing health care, education and employment opportunities for young women with alcohol or substance use issues

Girls who are of immigrant background or ethnic minority background may encounter additional barriers when accessing substance use treatment services, such as language barriers, or treatment that is incompatible with religious or spiritual practices

Treatment is most effective for girls when they take an active part in their treatment planning, when goals are achievable and made clear, and when they receive constructive feedback on their progress in treatment

Girls entering treatment for substance use disorders often have multiple psychological, health, and social issues. Girls entering substance use treatment report more psychosocial problems than boys, including more mental health issues, homelessness, self-injury and suicide attempts. The complexity of problems girls typically bring to treatment for substance use disorders underscores the need for approaches and treatments that address a broad range of mental health and psychosocial problems beyond the treatment of the substance use disorder

## Implications for Treatment, Prevention & Harm Reduction

The most effective or promising substance use prevention approaches for girls address: family relationships and communication, stress, depression, social interactions and body image

Girls in their reproductive years, may need family planning and maternal health care as a part of treatment for substance use disorders. Girls may also need support in defining what healthy relationships are and how to minimize the likelihood of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse

Interventions to delay the onset of drinking alcohol and prevent binge drinking among girls are important, In a study conducted with adolescent girls on Facebook, problem solving skills, refusal skills, coping skills, and positive self-esteem and body image were identified as factors protective against substance use (alcohol, cigarette and other substance use)

Girls' participation in the development of prevention programs has been associated with greater engagement, perceived relevance and satisfaction

[https://bccwh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NewTerrain\\_FinalOnlinePDF.pdf](https://bccwh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NewTerrain_FinalOnlinePDF.pdf)



# Voices: A Program of Self-Discovery and Empowerment for Girls: Second Edition

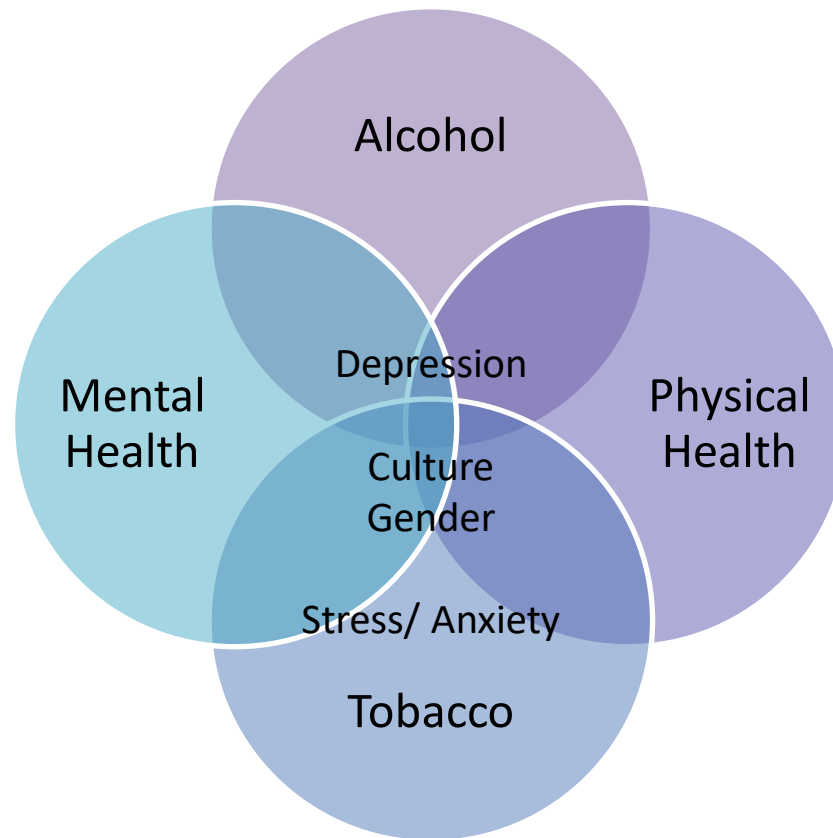
## Facilitator's Guide and Participant's Journal

[Covington, S., Covington K. and Covington, M. (2004, rev. 2017). Carson City, NV: Change Companies]

*Voices* was created to address the unique needs of adolescent girls and young women. It encourages them to seek and celebrate their “true selves” by providing a safe space, encouragement, structure, and the support they need to embrace their journeys of self-discovery. The program includes modules on self, connecting with others, healthy living, and the journey ahead. Today we are hearing more about girls and bullying, the pressures of social media, early puberty, gender exploration, human sex trafficking, and binge drinking. Texting, social media, and online or “in real life” (IRL) friends are part of the changes in girls’ social lives. These are some of the topics added to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. It is used in many settings (e.g., outpatient and residential substance abuse treatment, schools, juvenile justice, and private practice).



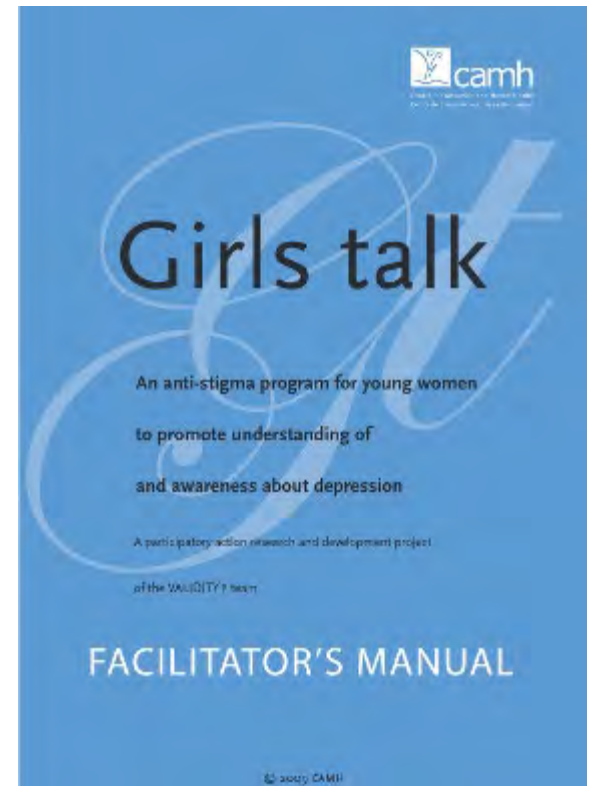
# Linking treatment approaches with health promotion and gender transformative concepts



# Girls Talk Program (Canada)

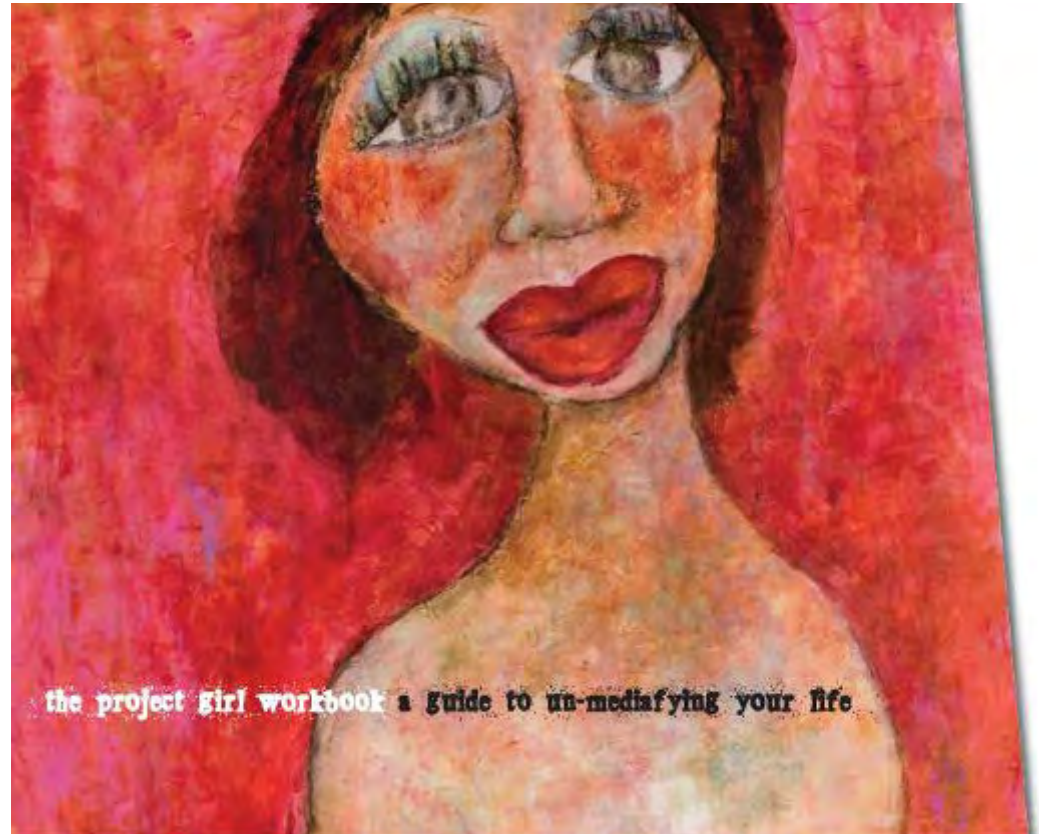
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Toronto)
- Girls Talk is an eight-session anti-stigma depression prevention program for girls, generally between the ages of 13 and 16.
- The program is not intended for those who have been diagnosed with or are in treatment for depression.
- The Girls Talk program was created in response to an overwhelming need for adolescent girls to have a safe space to connect and share with one another.

[https://knowledgex.camh.net/amhspecialists/resources\\_families/Documents/Girls\\_Talk.pdf](https://knowledgex.camh.net/amhspecialists/resources_families/Documents/Girls_Talk.pdf)



# The Project Girl Workbook: A Guide to Un-Mediafying Your Life

- Interactive workbook to help adolescent girls consider the effects of media on their lives



<http://www.projectgirl.org/flash/PGWBforweb.html>

# Websites, apps etc

## Mind Your Mind (Canada)

- **mindyourmind** is a space for youth and young adults (14-24) to find support when going through tough times
- Encourages youth to reach out, get help and give help
- Resources are designed using current evidence and research to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and increase access and use of community support, both professional and peer-based



<http://mindyourmind.ca>



**SEEKING  
SUPPORT  
IS A SIGN OF  
STRENGTH**

# Discussion

