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## **Girls Empowerment Network to Create Programming to Support Incarcerated Girls in McLennan County**

*The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Texas Bar Foundation Provide Funding to Bring Evidence-based, Self-efficacy Curriculum to At-risk Girls*

AUSTIN — May 23, 2023 – Girls Empowerment Network today announced it is adapting, piloting and evaluating its Girl Connect program for juvenile justice-involved adolescent girls housed in the McLennan County State Juvenile Correctional Facility in Mart, Texas. A multi-year grant from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention along with a \$5,000 grant from the Texas Bar Foundation will make this program expansion possible.

Using its research-based, trauma-informed Girl Connect program, Girls Empowerment Network will adapt its self-efficacy-building program used in schools across Texas for the unique needs of girls who are involved with the Texas juvenile justice system. Some of the topics girls will learn include risky behavior avoidance, goal setting, healthy relationship skills, growth mindset and positive communication.

“Girls of color are most impacted by the juvenile justice system. Often, there is a history of trauma, substance use, intersectionality, oppression, and systemic barriers involved in their experience,” explained Angela Montijo, LMSW, Girls Empowerment Network’s Juvenile Justice Program Facilitator. “The programming that Girls Empowerment Network offers has a proven track record of igniting the power in girls and increasing their self-efficacy within schools. Extending this program to girls involved in the juvenile justice system in ways that are culturally relevant will give all girls essential tools for their long-term well-being and resilience.”

The leadership committee charged with the creation and piloting of the new program is made up of three collaborative entities, including Girls Empowerment Network, Excellence & Advancement Foundation (EAF), and Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD). Girls Empowerment Network invited EAF to contribute their expertise in racial equity programming and managing wraparound services for Texas youth of color entangled in the school-to-prison pipeline, so all programming is culturally relevant.

Initially, these newly adapted Girl Connect groups will meet at the McLennan County State Juvenile Correctional Facility in Mart, Texas. We anticipate the first groups to begin in summer 2023. “Our goal is to offer these groups in-person or virtually to additional Texas juvenile correctional facilities in the second year in Spring 2024,” said Montijo.

“Girls Empowerment Network had been discussing partnering with both the Ron Jackson Juvenile Correctional Complex and McLennan County State Juvenile Correctional Facility to deliver more support systems for the girls in their care. While the pandemic derailed planning, it gave us time to test and refine delivering our programs virtually,” said Julia Cuba Lewis, CEO of Girls Empowerment Network. “This gift of time prepared us to apply for and win our first federal grant to implement programming with the potential to change the trajectory of each girl’s life.”

“I’ve been a fan of the Girls Empowerment Network since attending an event of theirs several years ago and I am thrilled to bring this program to the girls at our campuses,” said TJJD Executive Director Shandra Carter. “It will serve as an important adjunct to our programming, helping our young women build the resilience and emotional agency they need for a safer, healthier and happier future.”

Rigorous evaluation has shown that Girls Empowerment Network's Girl Connect program is associated with lower disciplinary issues, higher self-efficacy, bonding, prosocial behaviors, academic achievement, and school attendance so that girls can build happy, healthy futures. The program currently takes place at schools across the state of Texas.

With funding from the Texas Bar Foundation and a whole community of supporters, Girls Empowerment Network has had success in establishing Girl Connect in Travis, Williamson, Hays, Caldwell, Harris, Bexar and Dallas counties.

Girls Empowerment Network's school-based programs serve girls across 84 program sites across Texas and prioritize low-income campuses. In the 2020-2021 school year, 95% of Girls Empowerment Network's school-based programs were at Title 1 schools. Across a data set containing four years of programming, girls ages 8-18 show significant increases in overall self-efficacy, and an increase in self-efficacy in 7 domains: collaboration, communication, confidence, coping skills, creativity, critical thinking, and bonding.

**About Girls Empowerment Network:**

Through school-based programs, camps, and conferences, Girls Empowerment Network's mission is to ignite the power in Texas girls by teaching them the skills to thrive and believe in their ability to be unstoppable. Founded in 1996, Girls Empowerment Network envisions a world where all girls believe in their power.

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

**About the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD):**

TJJD is charged with the rehabilitation and care of youth who are between the ages of 10 and 17 and have been adjudicated and committed to state facilities by juvenile court judges. TJJD provides rehabilitative and educational services to these youth, maintaining five secure facilities and four halfway houses. TJJD also advises, monitors, and provides state financing to county juvenile departments across Texas. <https://www.tjtd.texas.gov/>

**About the Texas Bar Foundation:**

Since its inception in 1965, the Texas Bar Foundation has awarded more than \$25 million in grants to law-related programs. Supported by members of the State Bar of Texas, the Texas Bar Foundation is the nation's largest charitably-funded bar foundation. [www.txbf.org](http://www.txbf.org)

**About Excellence & Advancement Foundation (EAF):**

Excellence & Advancement Foundation is dedicated to transforming how communities combat the school-to-prison pipeline. They support children at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system through prevention, intervention, and advocacy programs. [www.breakthepipeline.org](http://www.breakthepipeline.org)

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