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## **Resources for the health and well-being of Illinois' girls lack funding despite increasing needs**

*First state-wide report looks at economic well-being, violence, incarceration,  
substance abuse, health, education and physical fitness for girls*

Sept. 10, 2009 – A new report released today calls for more support and funding for programs specific to Illinois girls, who are falling behind in access to available programs and services. The first comprehensive report of its kind, the *Status of Girls in Illinois* utilizes existing data and research to present a full picture of girls' health and well-being statewide.

The *Status of Girls in Illinois* addresses a wide spectrum of areas affecting Illinois girls' lives, including sexuality, violence, incarceration, substance abuse, health, education and physical fitness. In addition to the data presented, the report includes recommendations on what is needed in terms of funding, research, and programs for girls.

"If we can better understand the multiple needs of girls, and develop strategies to meet those needs, we can inspire change that supports girls' healthy development," said Mariame Kaba, director of Project NIA, Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team.

### **Who are Illinois' girls?**

According to the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health, there are over 1.5 million girls (ages 0-17) in the state of Illinois. Of these, 33.2% are age 5 or younger, 32.5% are between 6 and 11 years old, and 34.3% are between 12 and 17 years old. 53.5% of these girls are White, 19.3% are Latinas, 18.9% are Black, and 4.0% are multi-racial. 4.2% of girls are immigrants.

Over a quarter of a million Illinois girls (16.1% of girls) live in homes that are below the federal poverty level. 10.2% of girls in Illinois live in "working poor" households. 11.8% of girls in Illinois have special health care needs.

For more information, go to  
[www.womenandgirlscan.org/statusofgirls](http://www.womenandgirlscan.org/statusofgirls)

Leaders within Chicago's most established organizations serving girls joined forces to commission the report, which creates a centralized data resource on girls in Illinois. Now accessible to the public, it will be an important resource for educators, policy makers, funders, healthcare providers, and others who are interested in and understand the challenges girls face.

"Currently, organizations that help girls thrive are often left without resources for their crucial work, and this report sheds light on how essential their work is," said Melissa Spatz, executive director, Women & Girls Collective Action Network. "It's important that we take action on these findings."

For example, The Association of Women in Development (AWID) reveals in its 2006 "Where is the Money for Women's Rights?" report that

- in 2003, only 0.6% of aid dollars had gender equality as a principal objective
- only 7.3% of US foundation giving in 2003 went to "women and girls" programs or initiatives

Due to this dearth of capital, the *Status of Girls in Illinois* calls for both private and public funders to invest in girls in a manner that specifically targets their healthy development. Funding for girls' programs is often included in initiatives for girls and women; however, while women are strong advocates for girls, it's important that girls get their own separate focus so they don't get lost in the bigger picture.

"Girls are strong and capable. They deserve dedicated resources to develop their full potential," said Amy Skeen, executive director of Girls in the Game. "When we invest in the health of girls, we also invest in the health of families and communities - everyone benefits."

Moving forward, the steering committee and 40-person advisory board for the *Status of Girls in Illinois* hope others effectively utilize the information to better Illinois girls' lives. Additionally, they plan to use the report to stimulate discussion and solution-oriented actions, which may include creating a taskforce to protect and advocate the best interest of girls as well as advocating for a line item in the Illinois Health and Human Services state budget dedicated to programs and services specifically for girls.

Funded by the Steans Family Foundation, the Chicago Foundation for Women, and The Field Foundation of Illinois, the *Status of Girls in Illinois* report follows the national focus set by the White House Council on Women and Girls, established by President Obama in March 2009 to ensure that women's and girls' issues are addressed in public policy.

For more information on future events and outreach and to see the full report visit [www.womenandgirlscan.org/statusofgirls](http://www.womenandgirlscan.org/statusofgirls).

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