

# Focusing on Girls' Futures

RESULTS FROM  
THE EVALUATION  
OF PACE CENTER  
FOR GIRLS

*Executive Summary*



**pace**  
believing in girls

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January 2019

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE  
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY



## **Executive Summary**

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**Megan Millenky  
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# Overview

PACE Center for Girls is a Florida-based organization that provides academic and social services to girls of middle school and high school age. Girls who attend PACE have a specific set of characteristics that put them at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system and other negative outcomes. PACE seeks to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes tied to this profile and instead foster academic engagement, positive youth development, and healthy relationships. Such factors can help improve girls' academic outcomes, prevent their future involvement with the justice system, and lead to long-term well-being and success.

PACE operates daily, year-round; on a typical day, girls attend academic classes and receive additional support such as individual counseling, academic advising, and referrals to other services. Throughout its delivery of these services, PACE uses principles of gender-responsive programming — that is, treatment approaches designed for girls and women.

The current report focuses mainly on the impact and cost analyses for the PACE evaluation. (Implementation research findings, released in an earlier report, found that PACE consistently implemented its program model and incorporated gender-responsive programming across its centers.) The impact analysis employed a random assignment design: Girls who applied to and were deemed eligible for PACE (using the program's existing screening processes) 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 appropriate referrals to other services in the community. From August 2013 to November 2015, 1,125 girls enrolled in the study across 14 PACE centers. Using survey and administrative data, the research team measured differences between the program and control groups on short-term outcomes. Differences that emerge between the two groups on these outcomes can be attributed to the PACE program.

## Key Findings

- The program group received more academic and social services — and received them more often from a professional source — than the control group.
- Over a one-year period, PACE increased school enrollment and attendance for the girls it served, compared with the control group. Girls in the program group were also more likely to be “on track” academically than those in the control group.
- Girls in both the program and control groups appeared goal-oriented and hopeful about their futures and reported relatively low levels of risky behavior one year after study enrollment. Rates of formal involvement in the juvenile justice system during the 18 months after study enrollment were similar for the program and control groups.
- The cost of PACE's holistic package of services is, on average, \$10,400 more than the cost of the services received by control group members through academic and social services provided in the community. The additional cost is largely driven by PACE's extensive social services; the cost of academic services is similar to those of Florida public schools.

The findings on academic outcomes are promising. Further follow-up research would be necessary to see whether PACE affects longer-term academic and delinquency outcomes and to complete a full benefit-cost analysis.



## Preface

Practitioners and policymakers constantly look for ways to better support young people who are at risk of involvement with the justice system. Young women who fit this profile often face challenges and have histories distinct from those of their male counterparts. Yet most programs and services targeting at-risk young people are not designed to address issues uniquely experienced by girls. Gender-responsive programming was developed in recognition of this fact. There is interest at the local, state, and national levels in understanding how these types of programs are implemented and obtaining more robust evidence on their effectiveness. Preventing future justice system involvement and engaging girls in their academic future, or other positive outcomes, can have meaningful benefits for an individual girl's future, her family, and her community.

MDRC's evaluation of the PACE Center for Girls offers an opportunity to understand the effectiveness of a well-known gender-responsive program. PACE serves girls ages 11 to 18 at 21 locations across the state of Florida. Girls attend PACE during school hours, year-round, and receive academic and social services. Through its program model, PACE aims to increase the presence of protective factors for the girls it serves — that is, characteristics or conditions that may moderate risk for negative outcomes. Its gender-responsive programming specifically seeks to cultivate girls' strengths, positive interpersonal relationships, and relevant life skills and to encourage other protective factors, such as being connected to and engaged in school.

An earlier report, focused on the evaluation's implementation study, detailed PACE's gender-responsive program model and found that PACE implemented the model consistently across its many locations. The current report presents short-term impact findings and a cost analysis. The impact study, which employed a random assignment design with two research groups, found that PACE positively affected girls' academic engagement and progress. In other domains — youth development, risky behavior, and delinquency — girls in both the program and control groups had similar outcomes. The cost analysis found that the additional cost of attending PACE, compared with the academic and social services the control group received, is principally driven by the extensive social services PACE provides.

The short-term findings are positive and encouraging and will contribute to the growing literature on the effectiveness of gender-responsive programming. A longer period of research could reveal whether the impacts on short-term academic outcomes lead to long-term outcomes such as on-time grade promotion, high school graduation, and preventing justice system involvement — results that could make PACE truly cost effective.

Gordon L. Berlin  
President, MDRC



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

We are grateful to the leadership and staff members of the PACE centers that participated 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, as well as making time in their busy schedules to participate in interviews. We also worked closely with staff members at PACE headquarters and greatly appreciated their openness and dedication to the research process. They spoke with us about the history and structure of PACE and provided us with essential data about the programs. In particular, we are grateful to Mary Marx, Shana Brodnax, Lymari Benitez, Thresa Giles, Yessica Cancel, Janie Smalley, James Kindelsperger, Debbie Moroney, and Jill Guffey. We also thank Vicki Burke, the founder of PACE, for meeting with us to share information about PACE's early years.

This research would not have been possible without the work of many individuals at MDRC. Rob Ivry, Dan Bloom, and Jean Grossman were key to getting the project off the ground and continued to provide counsel throughout the process. Alison Black also provided project leadership in the initial stages. Carolyn Hill and John Hutchins provided valuable feedback on report drafts. Johanna Walter advised on the cost analysis. Galina Farberova and her team managed the random assignment system. Melissa Cummings coordinated the production of the report, and Jennifer Hausler assisted with fact-checking. Jennie Kaufman edited the report, and Carolyn Thomas prepared it for publication. We also thank the other current and past staff members at MDRC not already mentioned who contributed greatly to the research effort, including Ada Tso, Emily Terwelp, Melanie Skemer, Sara Muller-Ravett, Julianna Alson, Hannah Siegelberg, Hannah Wagner, Brit Henderson, Noemi Altman, Nicole Alexander, Lauren Cates, and Janae Bonsu.

We are also grateful to Charlotte Bright from the University of Maryland School of Social Work, who provided her expertise on gender-responsive services and the juvenile justice system throughout the project. In addition, Jessica Walker-Beaumont worked closely with MDRC and PACE to provide technical assistance and strategic planning on recruitment and other program efforts.

We also thank Keisha Miles, David Tucker, and Dionna Jones from the Temple University Institute for Survey Research for overseeing the follow-up survey fielding. At the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, we are grateful to Mark Greenwald, Sherry Jackson, Nathan Epps, and John Haggerty for providing us with juvenile justice records and ongoing assistance in understanding these data. At the Florida Department of Education, Eric Christesen and Ed Croft helped us immensely through the department's data request process.

Finally, we are deeply appreciative of all the girls and their parents and guardians who agreed to participate in the research. An extra thanks to those who answered our questions about their lives one year after study enrollment. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

The Authors

## Executive Summary

PACE Center for Girls is a Florida-based nonprofit organization that serves girls of middle school and high school age who are at risk of involvement with the justice system. These girls are often struggling academically, and some have been involved with the juvenile justice system already. They may have mental health issues, often stemming from experiences of trauma, or may engage in behavior that negatively affects their physical health. Using a “gender-responsive” framework for its academic and social services, PACE aims to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes tied to this set of risk factors and instead foster academic engagement, positive youth development, and healthy relationships. Increasing these protective factors can improve girls’ academic outcomes, prevent their future involvement with the justice system, and lead to long-term well-being and success. This report presents findings from a rigorous evaluation of PACE.

Improving academic outcomes in the short term may help girls get back on track and graduate on time. Preventing involvement in the juvenile justice system is also crucial, for several reasons. Juvenile justice involvement can 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>

Investing in the well-being of girls promises economic benefits as well. Compared with dropouts, high school graduates have been shown to make larger economic contributions to society through lower unemployment rates, higher earnings, more taxes paid, and less reliance on public assistance. One estimate found that high school graduates make nearly \$300,000 more than those who do not complete high school over the course of their lifetimes.<sup>2</sup> And from a societal perspective, the court and detainment costs associated with juvenile justice involvement are high. Therefore, effective prevention or early intervention programs can offer a significant return on investment.<sup>3</sup>

PACE uses principles of gender-responsive programming throughout its services for girls. The term “gender-responsive” describes treatment approaches designed for girls and women, specifically those involved with or at risk of involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Historically, services for those involved with the justice system were designed for boys and men.<sup>4</sup> Gender-responsive services bring an awareness of girls’ distinctive development patterns and gender-specific issues into the program. While there has been national interest

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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>Christopher R. Tamborini, ChangHwan Kim, and Arthur Sakamoto, “Education and Lifetime Earnings in the United States,” *Demography* 52, no. 4 (2015): 1383-1407. This calculation compares lifetime earnings for high school dropouts with earnings for high school graduates with no further education.

<sup>3</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>4</sup>Stephanie Covington and Barbara Bloom, “Center for Gender and Justice” (2017), <http://centerforgenderandjustice.org>; Margaret A. Zahn, Stephanie R. Hawkins, Janet Chiancone, and Ariel Whitworth, *The Girls Study*

in understanding gender-responsive programs more broadly,<sup>5</sup> the current literature is more robust in its description of concepts and principles than in its evaluation of program performance.<sup>6</sup> Until recently, it was largely unknown how such services are implemented, how similar they are to one another, or how effective they are.<sup>7</sup>

The evaluation of PACE Center for Girls — among the largest and most well-established programs of its kind — provides an opportunity to answer questions about the implementation and effectiveness of a gender-responsive program. The research aims to help practitioners, including PACE, and policymakers better understand, improve, and possibly replicate services for at-risk girls. The implementation research findings, released in an earlier report, found that PACE consistently implemented its program model and incorporated gender-responsive programming across its statewide network of centers.<sup>8</sup> The model was defined through both general program principles and a detailed program manual.

The current report shows that PACE helped girls stay more engaged in school and on track toward high school graduation during a one-year follow-up period. Across the study sample, girls seemed relatively stable one year after enrollment, and hopeful for the future. PACE did not affect formal involvement in the justice system over the 18 months following random assignment.

The evaluation was conducted by MDRC and has been funded mainly through the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation’s Social Innovation Fund, a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, 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 21 nonresidential, year-round centers across the state of Florida. PACE serves girls between the ages of 11 and 18 who exhibit risk factors across multiple domains that are correlated with delinquency in girls. Girls in this voluntary program attend PACE daily during normal school hours and receive academic and social services: comprehensive assessment and care planning, academic instruction and advising, a life skills curriculum,

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*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>5</sup>Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, 42 U.S.C. 5633 § 242 (1992).

<sup>6</sup>Dana Jones Hubbard and Betsy Matthews, “Reconciling the Differences Between the ‘Gender-Responsive’ and ‘What Works’ Literatures to Improve Services for Girls,” *Crime and Delinquency* 54, no. 2 (2008): 225-258.

<sup>7</sup>Meda Chesney-Lind, Merry Morash, and Tia Stevens, “Girls’ Troubles, Girls’ Delinquency, and Gender Responsive Programming: A Review,” *Australian and 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, no. 3 (2013): 244-282.

<sup>8</sup>Louisa Treskon, Megan Millenky, and Lily Freedman, *Helping Girls Get Back on Track* (New York: MDRC, 2017).

individual and group counseling, volunteer service and work readiness opportunities, and transition and follow-up services. Girls typically plan to attend PACE for about one year and often return to other schools in their communities to complete their education.<sup>9</sup>

As a gender-responsive program, PACE centers strive to create inclusive environments in which the 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. 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. Staff members hold regular reviews to discuss each girl’s care plan and progress and emphasize parental engagement, contacting a parent or guardian monthly.

During a typical day at PACE, girls attend classes, usually language arts, math, social studies, life skills, and science. Every other week, girls attend counseling sessions that focus on fostering positive behavioral change and separate academic advising sessions where staff members monitor their progress. Counselors are available more frequently, if needed, and can provide referrals for additional supportive or therapeutic services. Once a girl makes the transition to a different school, PACE staff members follow up periodically and can continue to connect her to services.

Figure ES.1 illustrates the basics of the PACE program model and the expected short-term outcomes. Participation in PACE’s holistic program is intended to increase a girl’s academic engagement and progress and bolster her confidence and interpersonal skills, reducing risky behavior and providing the means for a more positive future outlook.

## **The PACE Evaluation**

The evaluation of PACE’s program model presents an opportunity to test the effectiveness of a gender-responsive program and provide rigorous evidence on services for girls at risk of negative outcomes. The evaluation has three main components: an impact study, an implementation study, and a cost analysis. This report focuses mainly on the impact and cost analyses.

The impact study employs a random assignment design. With this design, girls eligible for PACE were enrolled in the study and assigned at random either to a program group, whose members were offered PACE services, or to a control group, whose members were referred to other academic and social services in the community. Because random assignment resulted in two groups with similar observed and unobserved characteristics, any differences in outcomes between the two groups can be attributed to the PACE program.

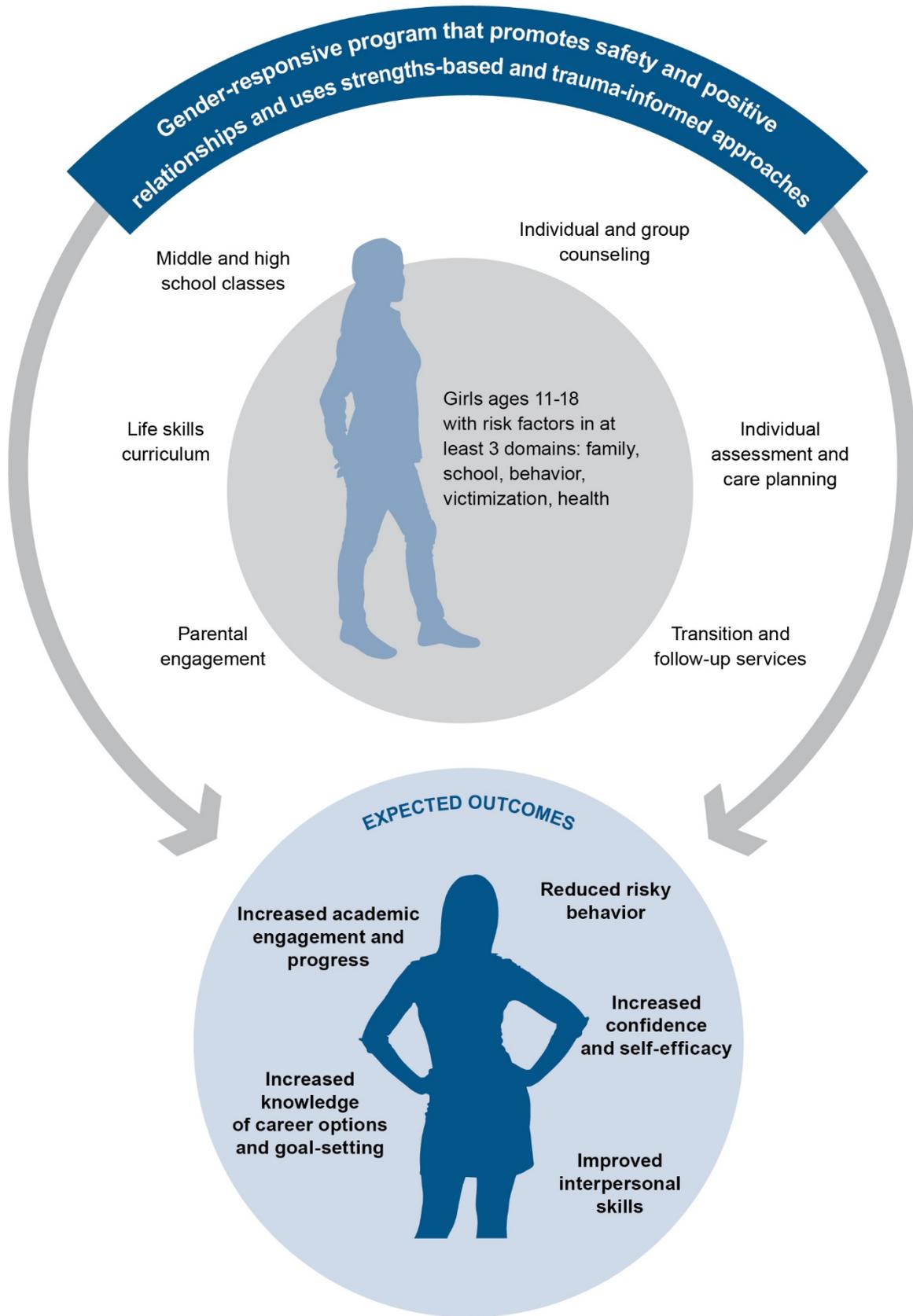
Fourteen PACE centers participated in the evaluation. Between August 2013 and November 2015, 1,125 girls were enrolled in the study (673 in the program group and 452 in the control

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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 some cases, PACE centers provide a high school diploma through the local school district.

Figure ES.1

PACE Program Model



group). Most girls were low-income, most were ages 13 to 16 at the time of study enrollment, and just over half the sample came from single-parent households. Many sample members struggled with school before coming to PACE. At the time of study enrollment, 40 percent had been recently expelled or suspended from school, and just over half had been held back at least once. Approximately 30 percent of girls had been arrested at some point, and two-thirds of the study sample had a family member with a criminal history. Nearly 40 percent of girls in the study reported having been abused or neglected. Many of the risk factors the study participants exhibited are among those cited in the literature on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Research links these experiences to future risky behavior, health problems, and early death, as well as other negative outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

After examining the difference between the services both groups participated in during this follow-up period, the impact analysis measures effects on short-term outcomes, including academic engagement and progress, juvenile justice involvement, risky behaviors, and interpersonal relationships.

While the evaluation uses a rigorous design and draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources, it has some limitations.<sup>11</sup> The evaluation’s funding allowed for data collection for only 12 to 18 months following the girls’ application to PACE and enrollment in the study. While this time period provides information on PACE’s short-term outcomes, it was not enough time for most girls in the study sample to reach key milestones such as high school graduation. Therefore, the evaluation does not include a full benefit-cost analysis at this time. Additionally, the follow-up survey asked sample members questions that assess risky behavior and interpersonal relationships, but these are difficult constructs to measure, especially in a short survey usually administered by phone. Among other things, girls may be hesitant to provide honest or complete answers to a survey interview about ongoing issues or risky behaviors. Finally, this study also benefited from access to Florida’s Department of Education records, but the study team had access only to deidentified data, which limited the analyses that could be performed.

## Key Findings

- **The program group received more academic and social services — and received them more often from a professional source — than the control group.**

With PACE’s comprehensive model, girls in the program group received more services than girls in the control group in the year following study enrollment. As Figure ES.2 indicates, the program group was slightly more likely (98 percent versus 93 percent) than the control group to have been enrolled in an educational program. Almost two-thirds of girls in the program group

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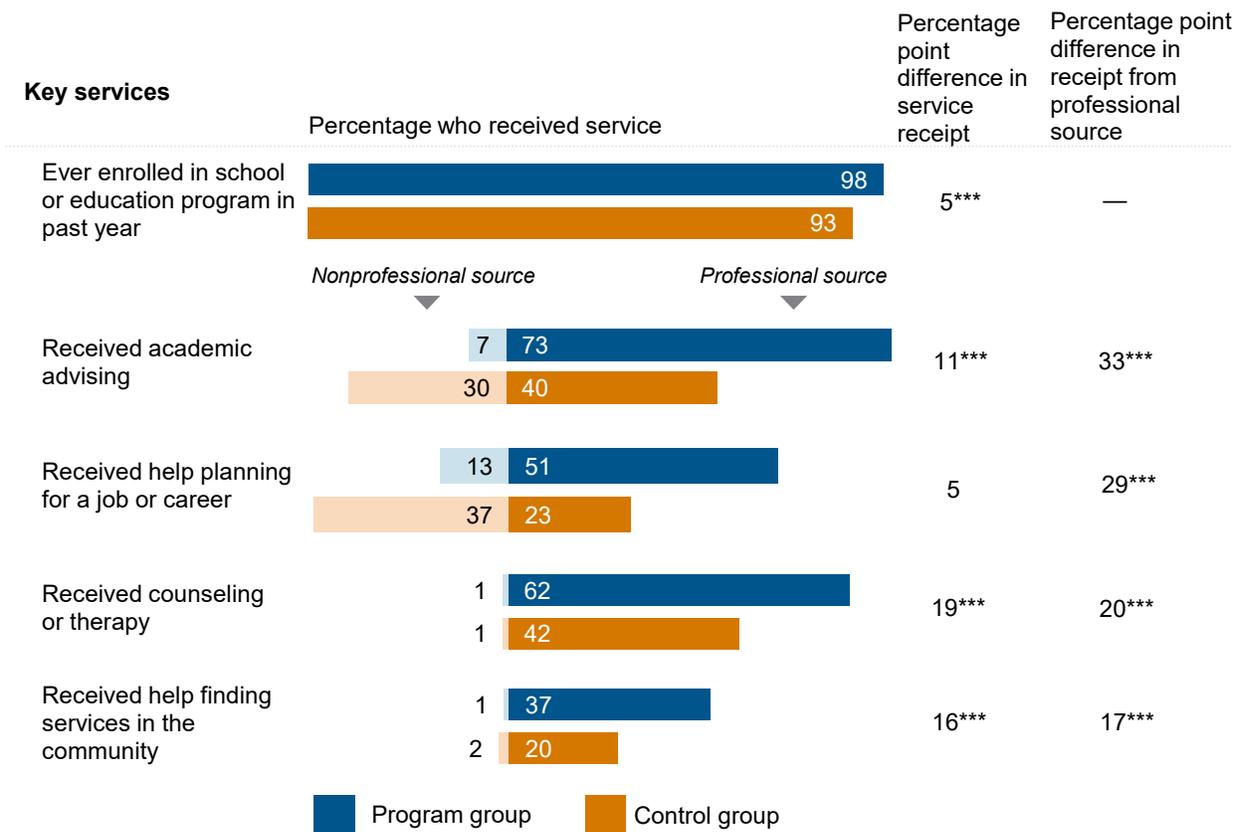
<sup>10</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “About Adverse Childhood Experiences” (2016), [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about\\_ace.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html).

<sup>11</sup>Quantitative data sources include PACE’s management information system, administrative records from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and the Florida Department of Education, and a follow-up survey fielded to the full study sample 12 months after study enrollment. Qualitative data include in-depth, follow-up phone interviews with a nonrandom subset of study participants and parents. The cost analysis draws on information from PACE’s central management office about revenue and expenditures at both the center and organization levels.

reported received counseling or therapy, compared with 43 percent of those in the control group, and they received the service more frequently (not shown).

Figure ES.2 also shows that the program group was more likely than the control group to have received these services from a professional source (usually PACE). In the absence of PACE, the control group may have had to piece together academic and social services from different sources. A service provided by a staff member at an organization or school is probably closer in content to the services received by girls at PACE than a service that is provided by a parent, family member, or friend.

**Figure ES.2**  
**One-Year Differences in Receipt of Key Services, Since Random Assignment**



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

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

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Girls in the control group were usually enrolled in school and moderately engaged in receiving other academic and social services.<sup>12</sup> Overall, however, a smaller portion of the control group received services that included key aspects of PACE’s model, such as family engagement and supportive relationships between staff members and girls.

- **Over a one-year period, PACE increased school enrollment and attendance for the girls it served, compared with the control group. Girls in the program group were also more likely to be “on track” academically than those in the control group.**

As shown in Table ES.1, program group members were, on average, present in school for about 10 more days than control group members over the full calendar year following study enrollment — two full weeks of additional academic instruction.<sup>13</sup> The impact appears to be due to girls in the program group being enrolled for more days and less likely to be absent throughout the year — particularly in the summer term, where there was a substantial impact (27 percentage points), which reflects PACE’s year-round program structure. Some research suggests that being out of school during the summer results in learning loss. This loss is usually larger for lower-income students, like many girls at PACE, than for higher-income students, who may have access to additional learning resources over the summer.<sup>14</sup>

Table ES.1 also presents information on academic progress. Many girls who applied to PACE needed help getting back on track academically. These findings indicate that PACE’s suite of services helped them do just that: High school girls in the program group were more likely (by 13 percentage points) than the control group to be on track academically, as measured by a composite that considers a student on track if she has a high attendance rate, has not been expelled or suspended, and has not failed a core course.<sup>15</sup> These components reflect what researchers consider to be predictors of high school graduation — attendance, behavior, and course performance — often referred to in the field as the “ABCs.”<sup>16</sup> Girls across the two groups earned a similar number of credits during the academic year.

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<sup>12</sup>Florida law requires all children under the age of 16 to be enrolled in school.

<sup>13</sup>The full calendar year includes both the academic year and the summer term. The academic year refers to the traditional school term in Florida, which runs from about mid-August through the end of May.

<sup>14</sup>David M. Quinn and Morgan Polikoff, “Summer Learning Loss: What Is It, and What Can We Do About It?” (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/summer-learning-loss-what-is-it-and-what-can-we-do-about-it/>.

<sup>15</sup>Core courses include English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Being absent for less than 10 percent of days enrolled is considered high attendance. The composite measure and credits earned are available for high school students only.

<sup>16</sup>Elaine M. Allensworth, Jenny Nagaoka, and David W. Johnson, *High School Graduation and College Readiness Indicator Systems: What We Know, What We Need to Know* (Chicago: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, 2018). There is no single set of thresholds across these predictors that the field widely uses to measure the likelihood of high school graduation.

**Table ES.1**  
**Impacts on Key Outcomes**  
**During the 12- to 18-Month Follow-Up Period**

Outcome	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)	P-Value
<b><u>Academic engagement and progress<sup>a</sup></u></b>				
Number of days present	119.6	109.8	9.8 **	0.013
Ever enrolled in summer term (%)	39.4	12.6	26.8 ***	0.000
On track, based on composite measure <sup>b,c</sup> (%)	27.6	14.2	13.4 ***	0.000
Credits earned in academic year <sup>c</sup>	3.8	3.7	0.1	0.696
<b><u>Youth development and risky behavior<sup>d</sup></u></b>				
Has supportive adult in her life <sup>e</sup> (%)	60.9	61.1	-0.2	0.945
Sexually active and did not use pregnancy protection method during last sexual encounter <sup>f</sup>	8.8	8.6	0.3	0.889
Incurred a charge since random assignment <sup>g</sup>	22.0	21.2	0.8	0.739
Thinks she will meet or exceed education goals	74.9	72.8	2.0	0.510
Sample size	673	452		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from the Florida Department of Education (FL DOE), responses to the PACE evaluation 12-month follow-up survey, and data from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FL DJJ).

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.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

<sup>a</sup>Outcomes draw on data from FL DOE and refer only to involvement in the Florida school system. The measures cover the full calendar year, which includes the academic and summer term, except where noted.

<sup>b</sup>The composite includes the following criteria: absent less than 10 percent of days; never failed a core course; never expelled or suspended. Core classes include English language arts, math, science, and social studies.

<sup>c</sup>Sample includes high school students only.

<sup>d</sup>Outcomes are from self-reported survey data, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>e</sup>Other than parent or guardian.

<sup>f</sup>Measure includes only voluntary sexual encounters.

<sup>g</sup>In the juvenile justice system, people are not technically "arrested"; the terminology used is either "incurred a charge" or "referred." This measure uses the FL DJJ data and covers involvement in the 18-month period following random assignment.

The differences in academic outcomes are promising. Engagement in school is a protective factor against involvement in the justice system. Longer-term follow-up on the study sample would provide answers about whether these short-term differences lead to higher high school graduation rates or more students graduating on time.

- **Sample members across both the program and control groups appeared to be goal-oriented and hopeful about their futures and reported relatively low levels of risky behavior one year after study enrollment. Rates of formal involvement in the juvenile justice system were similar for the program and control groups.**

There were a few differences between groups on self-reported measures of youth development and risky behavior, but no clear pattern or trend. The positive outlook expressed by sample members across both groups stands in contrast to the crisis state or tipping point that many sample members were experiencing at the time they applied to PACE. One hypothesis is that the girls' lives stabilized somewhat as the crisis passed or as girls found resources to address their needs. Levels were relatively low for risky behaviors involving substance use, similar to those of the broader population of girls in Florida and nationwide.<sup>17</sup>

Sample members' involvement in the juvenile justice system was measured across several outcomes, including whether they ever incurred a charge and the type of adjudication finding after a charge was incurred. Incurring a charge is comparable to an arrest in the adult criminal justice system, and being "adjudicated delinquent" is similar to a conviction. As shown in Table ES.1, program and control group girls incurred one or more charges at nearly identical rates (22 percent of the program group and 21 percent of the control group) during an 18-month follow-up period.

The rates of justice system involvement for both groups are higher than that of the broader population,<sup>18</sup> reflecting the segment of girls PACE aims to serve. Yet sample members were just reaching the age where criminal behavior starts to emerge,<sup>19</sup> so it may be too early to expect impacts on these measures. Further follow-up with the study sample would be necessary to see whether differences emerge between the two groups.

Notably, practices in the juvenile justice system are shifting. Recently, there has been a nationwide movement to confine fewer delinquent youth.<sup>20</sup> In Florida, arrests of young people overall have fallen dramatically in the last few years, and females are making up a smaller

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<sup>17</sup>Laura Kann, Tim McManus, William A. Harris, Shari L. Shanklin, Katherine H. Flint, Joseph Hawkins, Barbara Queen, Richard Lowry, Emily O'Malley Olsen, David Chyen, Lisa Whittle, Jemekia Thornton, Connie Lim, Yoshimi Yamakawa, Nancy Brener, and Stephanie Zaza, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2015," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Surveillance Summaries* 65, no. 6 (2016): 1-174.

<sup>18</sup>Across the state of Florida, approximately 1 percent of girls were arrested in 2014.

<sup>19</sup>National Institute of Justice, "From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending" (2014), <https://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/Pages/delinquency-to-adult-offending.aspx>.

<sup>20</sup>Child Trends Data Bank, *Juvenile Detention: Indicators on Children and Youth* (2015), [https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/88\\_Juvenile\\_Detention.pdf](https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/88_Juvenile_Detention.pdf). 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.

percentage of juvenile arrests.<sup>21</sup> PACE works closely with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, the state legislature, and other entities to advocate for these types of policy shifts.

- **The cost of PACE’s holistic package of services is, on average, \$10,400 more than the cost of the services received by the control group. The analysis finds that the cost of providing academic services at PACE is comparable to the cost of public school; PACE’s wrap-around services account for the difference in costs.**

During the years the program group members were receiving PACE services, the PACE program cost about \$23,500 per girl served. (All costs are expressed in 2017 dollars.) This figure is based on the average length of stay for girls in the study (eight months). When compared with the estimated cost of services used by the control group during the same period, the net cost of the program group services is about \$10,400. Though academic costs were similar overall for the two groups, social services (provided mainly by PACE) accounted for most of the differences in costs. Such intensive social service support is rare in the public schools. PACE serves a population that, on average, needs more services than traditional schools provide, so its costs are unsurprisingly higher.

While there are few similar programs for at-risk children, it is useful to consider PACE’s costs in the spectrum of services for young people: PACE is less costly than a residential program, similar in cost to other comprehensive youth programs, and more expensive than public schools. The small size of PACE centers (serving about 50 girls, on average) and a staffing ratio much lower than that typically found in traditional schools contribute to its costs.

Ultimately, the aim of PACE is to change the long-term trajectory of its participants by getting them back on track academically and promoting more prosocial behavior. If this occurs, the benefits PACE produces would accrue over a much longer time horizon than the eight-month period when society is making its investment in the girls at PACE. For example, if PACE were able to improve girls’ graduation rates by at least 8 percentage points, the program would pay for itself in the long term.

## **PACE’s Ongoing Improvements**

This evaluation and the promising academic outcomes reflect the services girls received during the evaluation period, from 2013 to 2015. PACE, which has a strong central office to support program implementation, has opened more centers across the state since the evaluation began, and PACE’s leaders continue to assess their services and how they are implemented. Over the course of the evaluation period, PACE instituted a new management structure at its central office, revised policies on program eligibility, and began revamping the life skills curriculum, among other changes made.

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<sup>21</sup>Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, “Delinquency Profile 2017: Statewide Intake — Arrests” (2017), <http://www.djj.state.fl.us>. In fiscal year 2015-2016, 38,267 young people (ages 10 to 17) were arrested in Florida, down from 57,597 arrests in fiscal year 2011-2012.

The leadership team at PACE also worked actively with the study team to understand and address specific findings from the implementation research. For example, the study team found that there was no standard set of approaches recommended for counselors to use in sessions with girls; as a result, PACE developed a more defined toolbox for counseling. PACE has also strengthened teacher training on instructional methods and shifted away from independent work in the classroom. In addition, PACE rolled out new in-person staff training on its key pillars as a gender-responsive, strengths-based, and trauma-informed program — terminology that staff members did not necessarily recognize, even as they uniformly implemented such practices.

Other initiatives are under way as well. As one executive director noted recently, there is an increase in support for service delivery and a move to standardize delivery while allowing for local, center-level differences. In addition, PACE is focusing on enhancing its use of the data it collects, including implementing a new management information system.

## **Implications of the Evaluation**

The evaluation concludes that PACE employs a unique, well-implemented, theory-based model, as discussed at length in the previous report.<sup>22</sup> While girls in the control group did receive other services, the model's gender-responsive approach and combination of academic and social services are not commonly found.

Based on the random assignment study design, the evaluation also concludes that the PACE program had a positive effect on girls at risk of juvenile justice involvement in the short term, leading them to be more engaged and on track academically. Girls in both research groups seemed to have stabilized a year after applying to PACE, and effects on other outcomes, including risky behavior and youth development, were not seen in the short term, 12 to 18 months after enrollment. Overall, the girls in the study sample had positive relationships with friends, family, and adults outside their families, and rates of substance use were no higher than those of the broader population of girls.

These encouraging outcomes may in part be due to PACE's eligibility requirements: Girls had to have a parent or guardian present during the intake assessment and to show a willingness to change things in their lives. This combination applied equally to all girls in the study. The girls in the control group, who were referred to other services by PACE, also may have been motivated and supported in finding services they needed in the absence of access to PACE.

The services PACE offers girls are more expensive than the less holistic alternatives available in the girls' communities. The study's short follow-up period does not permit a full cost-benefit analysis that would indicate how this investment pays off in the long run. It is plausible that increased engagement and being on track academically would lead to both higher graduation rates and lower justice system involvement; a substantial increase in the graduation rate alone would make the program cost effective. It will be four to five years, however, before the vast

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<sup>22</sup>Treskon, Millenky, and Freedman, *Helping Girls Get Back on Track*.

majority of the study sample reaches the timing for high school graduation. Possible differences on juvenile justice outcomes may emerge before then.

The evaluation of the PACE Center for Girls adds to the growing literature regarding programs serving girls at risk of justice system involvement and other unfavorable outcomes. It also sheds new light on the implementation of gender-responsive services tailored to girls' common experiences and individual strengths. The evaluation finds that PACE reengages girls in academics in a way that could make a lasting difference, especially if it leads to higher rates of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education.

## **Earlier MDRC Publications on the PACE Center for Girls Evaluation**

*Helping Girls Get Back on Track*  
*An Implementation Study of the PACE Center for Girls*  
2017. Louisa Treskon, Megan Millenky, Lily Freedman

*Bring Gender-Responsive Principles into Practice*  
*Evidence from the Evaluation of the PACE Center for Girls*  
2017. Louisa Treskon, Charlotte Lyn Bright

*Preventing Juvenile Justice Involvement for Young Women*  
*An Introduction to an Evaluation of the PACE Center for Girls*  
2016. Megan Millenky, Caroline Mage

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NOTE: A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its website ([www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org)), from which copies of reports can also be downloaded.

## 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; Oakland, California; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles, 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 members 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 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-prisoners, 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.