

Canal Teen Girl Focus Group
Tuesday, March 11th, 2008

Executive Summary:

- Ms. Eres Moreno hosted our meeting at the Canal Alliance in San Rafael. This was an established group that meets every Tuesday. There were a total of 11 young women, mostly in middle school with 2 from high school. It's clear that in middle school they're working stuff out, like how to talk to teachers, how to build friendships, how to work things out with parents, etc. The high school girls had experience they shared with the others and were ready with solutions to most of what the middle school girls were facing.
- A great group of teenage girls that quarreled with each like sisters making it feel like an extended family for most. This group really has worked on cohesion and it shows. These truly were their sisters in most cases, since single-parent households, living with relatives was very common so this group and the mentors at Canal Alliance are their families.
- All the middle school girls go to the Canal Alliance directly from school and must check in before 3pm. They do homework for 1 ½ hours, then have project planned until 7:30pm. Many had parents there to pick them up when our session was done.
- All the girls showed interest and concern for their performance in school and many cited their major frustrations were not getting the grades they wanted, not knowing how to approach the teacher or get help with tutoring. They seem genuinely concerned about doing well in school.
- Be a good friend was something all the girls showed interest in doing, yet when conflicts surfaced, many didn't know how to deal. They also talked about not having enough face time with parents and many had parents that were not equipped to listen to them so they are not talking.

Discussion Format:

Discussion format was very casual, we sat on the floor as Eres served all the girls pizza dinner. We talked about their answers to the questions discussed possible support and suggestions regarding their girls concerns.

The Questions were:

1. "my life is perfect except for...."

-I don't have straight A's

- for some friends that I have that get mad easily for everything
- my life is perfect except for my bad grades
- for the relationship with my parents and sister and the person I like
- I like my life except when I get in fights with my friend
- my life is perfect except I don't live with my dad and I feel like if nobody cares about me sometimes.
- sisters
- math
- my body
- not being shy
- my school grades

2. Name something you LOVE about yourself, something you are proud of, something that you feel good about when thinking about.

- My Talents, my personality
- I am good in Soccer
- I'm funny
- I'm friendly and can meet people
- I admire my talent to draw, I'm a good artist
- I make really good friends
- I'm friendly
- I like being myself and how I act and how I'm with my friends. I make very good friends most of the time.
- I like how I dress
- I like doing gymnastics and I'm great at it
- I love shopping

BIG TOPICS

1. These young girls have dynamic lives with stimulation from all angles. Mostly home lives are pretty complex with people, working parents, etc.. Navigating their relationships was a big theme: parent communication, sister/sibling/cousin interaction, the street life, boys, etc. Fortunately, the Canal Alliance provides a safe haven and mentors who have time to be with them.
2. Self Awareness and Advocacy were huge opportunities with this group. Getting them to believe and hope in themselves, support to develop their own life vision and promise for the future.
3. The group is primarily 6th and 7th graders and feel very much like family to many of the girls. They pride themselves on being good friends yet were interested in how to be better friends, how to solve conflicts and how to bring more communication about their own needs into the dialogue with friends.

The following is a list in order of importance that each of the 4 girls noted as priorities for them: The 'X' note where there was important interest.

Summit Topics

XXXX	Body Image: How do I feel great about JUST the way I am
XXX	Being Yourself: Speaking 'your' Truth
XXXXX	Dating: What's it ALL about
XXXXXXXX	Boys: How do I get the attention I want and still be ME
XXXXX	Emotions: How to deal when I'm feeling bad
X	Defending your Space: How to protect yourself physically and emotionally
XXXXX	Friends Network: Building Trust
XXXXXXXX	Family Role: Communicating with your Parents
X	The Internet: AIM, MySpace, WWW: Understanding the good and the bad of all that
XXXXXXXX	Fashion and Style: Creating your sense of style, and understanding what your style says about you
X	Fitness and Health

XXXXX	Drugs and Alcohol
XX	Careers and Community Service
X	Cultural Diversity and Immigration

End

Marin City Teen Girl Focus Group
Wednesday, March 5th, 2008

Executive Summary:

- Ms. Sharon Turner of Marin City Network hosted our meeting at the Marin City Seniors Club in Marin City. This network is focused on providing youth academic, leadership and career development opportunities for middle school kids and Ms. Turner is the Project Director, plus mentors the Girls Group.
- There were 4 young girls in this group, 3 Black, 1 of Hispanic background. We were expecting 3 more that opted for the mall instead of our meeting. We spent the first ½ hour-45 minutes rounding every one up via cell phone.
- We talked at length about life in Marin City, how they felt trapped, isolated, forgotten by society in this cultural bowl surrounded by lack of diversity and strong essence of not ‘fitting-in.’ in Marin County. I felt as though they were looking outside for someone to bring them a solution. They don’t feel supported by the existing after-school programs at the Rec Center.
- There is very little to keep them entertained at this age, since they are at an awkward age of too young to drive and too old to have neighborhood playdates. For entertainment, they admittedly resort to fighting, either watching or partaking in fighting themselves. If they can get out of Marin City, they go to either Richmond or Oakland, where they can feel more part of a Black community.
- I was struck by the girl’s lack of focus, direction and general lack of hope or vision for the future. There was little structure to our meeting, they were often distracted by each other’s jokes, laughter and cell phones.
- When discussing school and education, many of them seemed not excited and showed little emotion for attending school. They mentioned that at Tam High there are about 20 Black students out of the total 1100 that go there. I think there may be a little more than this, but they feel like the small numbers do not bring social opportunities they crave right now. I suggested that their ticket OUT of Marin City could possibly be their education and that Tam High, although not culturally diverse, does have opportunities for them to excel.

Discussion Format:

In order to surface information I kept things pretty loose, talking of my inner-city upbringing and stories about daughter who is their age. They were interested in coming to the summit and liked the idea if there were Black women in the panel or key-note speaker since the relevance of someone white would not draw this demographic.

I usually pose a couple of questions to the group to get them talking about issues. Here were their responses to the 2 questions:

The Questions were:

1. “my life is perfect except for....”

- Living in Marin City
- Going to school
- life's not perfect

2. Name something you LOVE about yourself, something you are proud of, something that you feel good about when thinking about.

The girls really had trouble with this one. It was hard for them to think of something and most of them were not used to thinking in this direction. When prompted, we got that they were happy with their sense of style, how they walked, how athletic they are, and one didn't have a response.

BIG TOPICS

1. Getting them to embrace their cultural diversity, live comfortably in it, plus be able to negotiate with others that don't share their background. How to assimilate, when to be 'ethnic' and when to play it down.
2. Keeping friends, building trust with girlfriends, learning how to do the right thing by their girlfriends. Care and keeping of friends.
3. Developing visions for the future. These girls need to try on careers and lifestyles in the comfort of their community. Many don't want to dream, think about life outside where they are, yet hate being where they are. Jobs and career mentoring/counseling would be very helpful to this demographic.
4. Since most of these girls were attracted to style and fashion, this could be a great hook to get their interest going in the entire program.

The following is a list in order of importance that each of the 4 girls noted as priorities for them: The 'X' note where there was important interest.

Summit Topics

X	Body Image: How do I feel great about JUST the way I am
XX	Being Yourself: Speaking 'your' Truth
XXX	Dating: What's it ALL about
XXXX	Boys: How do I get the attention I want and still be ME
XXX	Emotions: How to deal when I'm feeling bad
	Defending your Space: How to protect yourself physically and emotionally
XXX	Friends Network: Building Trust
X	Family Role: Communicating with your Parents
	The Internet: AIM, MySpace, WWW: Understanding the good and the bad of all that
X	Fashion and Style: Creating your sense of style, and understanding what your style says about you
	Fitness and Health
XXXX	Drugs and Alcohol

XXX	Careers and Community Service
XXX	Cultural Diversity and Immigration

Mill Valley Teen Girl Summit

Executive Summary:

- Girls were very enthusiastic about being involved in the Summit and having time/opportunity to address the topics pertaining to them. High interest in current topic points.
- All girls mentioned that getting information from parents was not where they want info to come from. School Counselors are seen more as administrators and not people that are approachable about topic issues. Concerns about confidentiality and source were concern. Most girls getting information from their peers.
- With information primarily coming from peers, the opportunity for us to get the 'right' information in front of them, sharing it with their friends and creating a forum where discussion can happen amongst their peers. Teen Girl Summit and related Teen Girl Go programs can be a resource for on-going information.

Discussion Format:

In order to surface information re: our current topic points and to get the conversation started, I asked each of the girls to answer the following 2 questions, then put their answers in a hat and we picked out the random and anonymous responses (most of them copied to whose were whose)

The Questions were:

“my life is perfect except for....”

I need help with the following in my life right now....” This is what they are dealing with now, or could be nervous about anticipation. (my group was all 8th grade, going into high school)

Answers were:

“my life is perfect except for....”

- how my mom always gets gossip/info through other people
- my mom is nosy
- I can't go shopping as much, mother stressing about jobs, I can't buy some clothes that I would like, shopping money consists of \$20 unless special occasions
- for my boobs
- my dad not knowing what it's like to be a girl
- my dad is oblivious

-I don't have as big of boobs that I would like, and I am not as tall as I would like and I will probably grow, and I am growing slowly.

-relationships

I need help with the following in my life right now....” This is what they are dealing with now, or could be nervous about anticipation. (my group was all 8th grade, going into high school)

-help with how boys think with the wrong parts of their body (dick) and don't care about who their with and what their girls think. How do you deal with that?

New friends at tam high and handling relationships with peers, Making more friends at Tam and being able to stay great friends with those I have now.

Help with how to choose friends, ones that are just friends and ones that are more than friends, closer ones.

Help with being different from my sister, finding my own interests, not comparing myself to her.

What do you say when someone doesn't like what you wear or your genetic defects like my feet?

How do you get boys to notice you without changing who you really are?

How do you deal with people calling you fat if/and you become anorexic?

What do you do if someone gets drunk and wants to do it with you? What do you do at parties? And still stay safe.

Organization

Parental Paranoia

How do you get boys to notice you without changing who you really are?

In high school, how do you control/manage your time with all the homework

Finding a job for the summer and in high school

Help with keeping friends through DRAMA

BIG TOPICS

1. Knowing how to communicate with parents, getting them off their backs, giving them what they want and having freedom. Dad’s came up as separate topic. Dad’s not knowing how to communicate yet, they definitely want closeness with them. Moms are not seen as cool and often as the ones that are portrayed as ‘nosy’ and in the way of the girls getting what they want.
2. How to get boys attention without losing themselves
3. Keeping friends, building trust with girlfriends, learning how to do the right thing by their girlfriends. Care and keeping of friends
4. Developing their own sense of “who am I” came up on several account. Developing their sense of value (inside) and building their personal relationship with themselves. They need tools, permission and understanding as they begin to form this very important relationship as this will help them with so many decisions they face and what they having coming ahead.
5. Jobs and Career Counseling was at the forefront of interest for the girls, looking for ideas, mentors, job-shadowing opptys, and/or paying jobs. These girls were 14 and not yet ready for the job market, frustrated at how to make money...besides babysitting.

The following is a list in order of importance that each of the girls noted as priorities for them: The ‘X’ note where there was important interest.

Summit Topics

X	Body Image: How do I feel great about JUST the way I am
XXX	Being Yourself: Speaking ‘your’ Truth
XX	Dating: What’s it ALL about
XXXXX	Boys: How do I get the attention I want and still be ME
XX	Emotions: How to deal when I’m feeling bad
X	Defending your Space: How to protect yourself physically and emotionally

	Friends Network: Building Trust
XXXXX	Family Role: Communicating with your Parents
	The Internet: AIM, MySpace, WWW: Understanding the good and the bad of all that
X	Fashion and Style: Creating your sense of style, and understanding what your style says about you
XX	Fitness and Health
XXX	Drugs and Alcohol
XXXX	Careers and Community Service
	Cultural Diversity and Immigration

Novato Teen Girl Focus Group

Executive Summary:

- Girls were very enthusiastic and interested in coming together to share their 'truths' about current happenings in their lives. When given an opportunity to share most opened up about what is up for them, others that were quiet were supported by the opportunity to be a part of a sharing group.
- All girls mentioned that getting information from parents was not where they want info to come from. School Counselors are seen more as administrators and not people that are approachable about topic issues. Concerns about confidentiality and source were a concern. Most girls get information from their peers.
- With information primarily coming from peers, the opportunity for us to get the 'right' information in front of them, mostly information needed surround how to navigate relationships, primarily with their peers, then their parents.

Discussion Format:

In order to surface information re: our current topic points and to get the conversation started, I asked each of the girls to answer the following question, then put their answers in a hat and we picked out the random and anonymous responses

The Questions was:

“my life is perfect except for....”

Answers were:

- Being called a slut
- girls at my school
- not having my own car, always being nagged and told what to do
- my schoolwork, my friends and family
- me and my parents need to communicate
- nosy parents
- trying to fit in
- being called a dumb blond
- I'm scared about the future after high school
- not yelling back at someone when they make a rude comment
- drama w/ the girls
- communicating with my parents

BIG TOPICS

1. All the girls expressed confusion about how to deal with ‘one-upping’ and name-calling that is going on within their groups. They want to know how to handle when someone has crossed their ‘personal’ boundary of what is ok and not ok. They need skills on what constitutes behavior that brings people together, builds trust and friendships and what kinds of behavior is destructive to friendships and having a good network of support amongst their peers.
2. They want support on how to respond when not-so-good behavior comes up in their networks. How do they support their friends and not alienate themselves or damage the relationship.
3. Another theme along the lines of relationships...was the one with themselves. It was clear that many girls in this group have good self-esteem, yet come across challenges to their sense of self. They expressed that differences are not embraced and they all admitted doing things outside of what is authentic to themselves in order to ‘fit in’. They are rested in appreciated themselves for how they are, yet need on-going support in developing along these lines. As the develop their sense of individuality that this will be celebrated, not a source for people to tease them on.
4. This group talked at length about how to handle their relationships with their parents. They talked about nosy mothers, nagging, and general responsibility and accountability to their families. Support in the way of ‘taking their own power’ with their parents, talking about what works and doesn’t work for them, and owning up to their roles within the household and as the kid. Communication with parents is a big need. This also calls for a track for parents that informs them of the responsibility/accountability themes that we will convey and what their roles can be in this learning.
5. The other topic that we didn’t get much time to talk about were BOYS, but much interest was shown on the written response. They want to learn more about how they can get boy’s attention an still be authentic to who they are.
6. Life Balancing Skills, organization, fitting in all the things they want to do, social life, homework and academics, balanced with spending time with family.

The following is a list in order of importance that each of the girls noted as priorities for them: The ‘X’ note where there was important interest.

Summit Topics

X	Body Image: How do I feel great about JUST they

	way I am
	Being Yourself: Speaking 'your' Truth
	Dating: What's it ALL about
XXXX	Boys: How do I get the attention I want and still be ME
XXX	Emotions: How to deal when I'm feeling bad
XX	Defending your Space: How to protect yourself physically and emotionally
X	Friends Network: Building Trust
XX	Family Role: Communicating with your Parents
	The Internet: AIM, MySpace, WWW: Understanding the good and the bad of all that
	Fashion and Style: Creating your sense of style, and understanding what your style says about you
	Fitness and Health
XX	Drugs and Alcohol
	Careers and Community Service
	Cultural Diversity and Immigration

West Marin Teen Input

A number of girl's groups that regularly meet on various West Marin school campuses held focused conversations to prepare for the West Marin Women & Girls Town Hall Meeting. They focused on their current challenges and opportunities. Due to severe weather conditions, many could not attend the meeting, but sent their input in writing. This is a summary of their input.

- Issues with alcohol, drugs, racism, reproductive information and health care (i.e. birth control), the double standard between boys and girls regarding sexuality and "freedom", boredom and isolation head the list of issues facing girls in West Marin. These issues cross age and racial lines.
- Among the Latina girls, issues of peer pressure, racism, family expectations and filial obligations, dealing with conflict, self-care, self-love/respect, and the double standard between boys and girls were often discussed.
- A number of Latinas expressed the inspiration they feel when they see their moms and other Latina women getting good jobs in West Marin. It makes them feel hopeful for themselves. They are also inspired by efforts to enfranchise Latina women. They see school as an opportunity, and have disdain for Anglo kids who think of school as a waste of time. They wonder how to stay true to themselves and balance peer, family and school needs.
- While they are not "supposed" to be concerned with issues like birth control and reproductive health, they most certainly are. It is of grave concern to them that

they sometimes take actions that they know would make their parents unhappy.

- Girls in the Anglo community spoke of boredom, isolation, alcohol, drugs, body image, TV, eating disorders, stereotyping, cutting, self-esteem/love, and anti-Semitism were mentioned. They too are concerned with their parents' expectations, but are not treated with the same level of double standard, as are the Latina girls. They too need birth control, and good information about sex and sexuality.
- There are a lot of kids who are using marijuana and alcohol. Some of this comes from family influence, difficulty within the family, and trauma, but largely the issue is one of boredom - they don't have enough to do or anywhere to go.
- One girl said, "We need a place to dance and hang out without being drunk or high. We need a dance club."
- The girls express a need for an on-campus 2x/semester birth control clinic at the High Schools. It would give the girls the kind of health information and safety that they need.
- Many agreed that there is subterranean racism on their campuses. It is fairly entrenched, and on both sides of the problem there is a sense of defeat - "this will never change." It was suggested that a dialogue about racism be opened up in a way that would promote student participation.