



Pace Center for Girls: Serving Girls and Families with Intensive Needs

The Pace Center for Girls has served middle-school and high-school girls in Florida for 35 years with a focus on girls whose histories of trauma and adverse childhood experiences puts them at risk of school failure or involvement in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. In 2009, Pace expanded beyond its model of all-day academic and counseling at its centers by creating Pace Reach, which places Pace counselors in public schools to provide the same counseling and wrap around services that Pace girls receive at the centers.

After quarantines began in March, Pace maintained its counseling services through HIPAA-complaint video (Doxy). Pace's counseling is characterized by a strong engagement with each girl as well as regular contacts with parents to help them improve their relationship with their daughter and better harmonize their own interactions with Pace's approach. Pace's counseling and social services program includes case management to ensure that girls or their families are referred for, and receive, additional services needed.

South Carolina's "Missing" Students

Pace Reach seeks to decrease or avoid girls' risky behaviors by providing free counseling and case management services designed to increase their resiliency and protective factors through improved relationships with families, peers and their communities. Pace Reach aims to increase girls' self-efficacy and self-advocacy to make decisions that will lead to productive, fulfilling and healthy lives. The Reach Program consists of five primary components: 1) Holistic Assessment, Goal Setting and Plan Development; 2) Family/Teacher/Natural Supports; 3) Ongoing Behavioral Health Services including Care Management, Counseling and Therapy; 4) Girl-Centered Social-Emotional and Life Skills Development; and 5) Transition Planning focused on completion of the Pace program.

Expected outcomes from Pace's intervention include improved peer and family relationships; improved behavioral health; maintained or improved school attendance; and increased pro-social skills. Girls build confidence and resilience and a pathway toward identified goals.

A Pace focus on South Carolina students who have been identified as "lost" or missing from school programs since the quarantine began would be based on its traditional program of counselors in public schools. Every girl referred to Pace is given a thorough assessment, including consultation with her family. Pace is trauma-informed and strength-based, so the focus of the resulting case plan is on a girl's strengths and her needs across all domains of well-being. Unlike girls in Pace's all-day school program, girls in Pace Reach usually do not have intensive needs for academic support, but through its case management service, the Pace counselor can identify and help fulfill that need.

Family Strengthening and Youth Transitions

The Reach program has evolved to serve specific populations of girls and families outside of the school setting. The **Family Strengthening program** serves girls in vulnerable families with a history or risk of involvement in the child-welfare system. The **Healthy Youth Transitions**

program supports girls aging out of juvenile justice and child welfare to prepare them for the responsibilities of adulthood and independent living. Pace is also licensed by DCF in Florida for substance abuse counseling and has made prevention of sex trafficking an important component of its work. These programs can help families with more intensive needs, such as those also involved with SAMH and economic entitlement programs such as TANF and SNAP.

Pace can provide those programs remotely as part of its emergency services in South Carolina.

Family Strengthening helps girls and their families before they reach a crisis that requires the removal of a child or state-monitored safety plans and case plans. The program also supports foster families in improving placement stabilization when an adolescent girl's behavior and/or disputes with foster parents are threatening to disrupt placement. Family Strengthening focuses on adolescent girls and their families presenting certain risk factors, and helps the family develop and maintain stable and nurturing caregiver-child relationships, learn effective parenting skills to support adolescent development and improve behavior, improve family communication and improve conflict resolution to reduce the number of children and families involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The average length of involvement in the Family Strengthening program is 3-5 months.

Healthy Youth Transitions prepares young women aging out of foster care for sustainable self-sufficiency and informed decision-making about important life choices to prevent homelessness, incarceration and break the cycle of dependency. Girls in HYT face challenges such as a limited support system, low income, health issues, housing and transportation, and are high-risk, high-needs girls with multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Participation in HYT is one to three years, depending on the age of the girl and the need for continuum of care.