



What Girls Need Now

AUSTIN
EAST GARFIELD PARK
HUMBOLDT PARK
NORTH LAWNSDALE
WEST GARFIELD PARK





INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2021 Girls in the Game staff and leadership asked themselves: “how can we better serve girls on the West Side?” This led to a series of conversations with residents, stakeholders, and girls on Chicago’s West Side about what resources and gaps currently exist in their communities. The result was the “What Girls Need Now Report”.

The summary of key findings in this report provides a snapshot of how residents of Austin, East Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, and West Garfield Park view their communities, including improvements they wish to see, assets that already exist in their neighborhoods and the most pressing needs for girls. Girls in the Game will use this research to help close the equity gap for girls on the West Side and build on assets in the community that help fulfill our mission to enable every girl to find her voice, discover her strength, and lead with confidence.

Our team created a set of recommendations that are informed by the thoughts and ideas of current residents of Chicago’s West Side. Our goal was to make sure that the recommendations were intersectional, collaborative, and guided by community voice. We were able to collect an array of suggestions from homeowners, students, parents, and business owners from our target communities.

The core team of the project consisted of a Community Implementation Manager, seven community and youth researchers from within the five studied communities, a Project Operations Manager, the Programs Director, and Director of Innovation and Training. For nine months the team embarked on a series of community focus groups and team planning sessions, conducted a community needs assessment, created an asset map, and attended community events where the project’s survey was administered to hundreds of residents on the West Side.

While COVID-19 could not have been predicted by anyone, its impact on Chicago’s West Side should not be a surprise. The demographic most impacted by this public health and economic crisis are the groups that were already the most vulnerable among us. Those groups largely consist of women, children, people of color, immigrants, and those with pre-existing health conditions.¹ The findings of this report will confirm that the residents of Chicago’s West Side are not only keenly aware of the lack of resources in their communities, particularly for girls, but they have felt those disparities amplified in the pandemic. Participants made it very clear they want to actively work toward improving the quality of life in their community and improve the quality of life for girls on Chicago’s West Side.

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LETTER FROM MEGHAN MORGAN

Girls in the Game is 27 years old. We've grown from a small, start-up organization serving girls mostly on the North Side of Chicago to a citywide organization focused on providing quality programs to girls who need our programs the most. We've grown beyond Chicago into other cities, and we have expanded our programs to serve girls from the age of 7 until they graduate high school and beyond.

In 2016 the organization was at a kind of crossroads. We knew we wanted to grow. We knew there were still so many girls who could benefit from Girls in the Game that we weren't reaching. But what we weren't sure about was the best way to target that growth. Should we try to spread out nationally and reach as many girls as we could in whatever way we could? That path offered clear advantages - reaching more girls and increasing our exposure.

But it didn't feel quite right. One of the things that makes Girls in the Game special, what makes us Girls in the Game, is our commitment to serving girls over the long-term. We want girls to grow up with Girls in the Game. We know that the longer girls stay with our programs, the more likely they are to grow into the strong, confident leaders they were meant to be. We also know that the girls who need us the most are the girls who don't have access to other sports and leadership opportunities, girls who are overflowing with potential and need a program like Girls in the Game to unleash it.

This desire helped drive our strategic planning in 2016. That plan focused on four key priorities:

- Increase opportunities and deepen impact so more girls can grow up with Girls in the Game.
- Listen and respond to the evolving needs of the girls and communities we serve.
- Build greater awareness of Girls in the Game's contributions to influence more lives.
- Pursue Excellence.

Since 2016 we've updated our plan and set new goals, but these priorities continue to drive our work. During the pandemic, communities that have been historically disenfranchised struggled more than most. Five years earlier we had drafted a priority focused on responding to the needs of the communities where we work, and it was the perfect time to hone in on that priority. Our mission is to help girls grow into leaders in their communities and an important part of this is listening and truly understanding what those communities need. Only by working in direct partnership with community members and leaders can we empower girls to be the leaders who can affect change in the world around them.

Through our What Girls Need Now project, we're doing this work intentionally and thoughtfully. We're working with and in the vibrant and diverse communities on Chicago's West Side.

Through listening and engaging with community members we hope to set a clear direction for Girls in the Game's work on the West Side going forward. Even the pandemic has had its bright spots and for Girls in the Game, one of those bright spots was allowing us the time and space to engage in this work. We're grateful for the many community members and organizations who have engaged in this process with us, and we're excited to share this work with all of you.

Best Wishes,
Meghan Morgan, Executive Director





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GIRLS IN THE GAME

HISTORY

Girls in the Game was founded in 1995 as The Sporting Chance Foundation with the goal of providing more sport opportunities to underserved girls in Chicago through an After School program and a Summer Camp. As the organization grew, we changed our name to better reflect our mission and added on vital health and leadership components to empower the whole girl.

While sports remain a key component of our programs, we also use sport as a launching pad to introduce concepts around physical, mental, and emotional health, practice real leadership skills, and provide a safe space for girls to connect with peers and caring coaches so that **girls can grow up happy, healthy and strong.**

MISSION & PILLARS

At Girls in the Game, every girl finds her voice, discovers her strength and leads with confidence through fun and active sports, health and leadership programs



Sports



Health



Leadership



Life

PROGRAMS

Girls in the Game offers a variety of year-round programs for girls ages 7-18, including both one-time and long-term opportunities to participate.



After School

Girls stay active and practice leadership over a 10-week season



Teen Club

Teens get in the game through a 10-week site-based program



Game Days

Girls participate in a one-time event to introduce them to the program

Summer Camp

Girls from across the city participate in a 4-week summer camp



Teen Squad

Teens take the lead in a citywide program where they gain leadership skills



Clinics

Clinics provide a safe, fun space for girls on days of school non-attendance





DEFINING THE TERMS & LIMITATIONS OF DATA

- Adultification** A social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children in the absence of knowledge of children’s behavior and verbalizations.²
- Asset Map** Asset mapping provides information about the strengths and resources of a community and can help uncover solutions. Once community strengths and resources are inventoried and depicted in a map, you can more easily think about how to build on these assets to address community needs and improve health. Finally, asset mapping promotes community involvement, ownership, and empowerment.³
- Community Needs Assessment** A community needs assessment identifies the strengths and resources available in the community to meet the needs of children, youth, and families. The assessment focuses on the capabilities of the community, including its citizens, agencies, and organizations. It provides a framework for developing and identifying services and solutions and building communities that support and nurture children and families.⁴
- Community Violence** Community violence is defined as deliberate acts intended to cause physical harm against a person or persons in the community.⁵
- West Side** Austin, East Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, and West Garfield Park
- WGNN** What Girls Need Now project

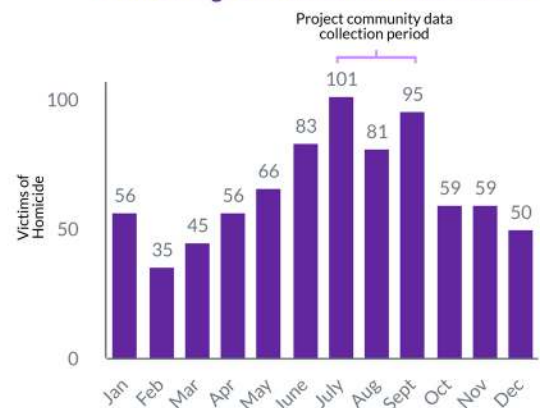
Although there are broad stroke studies concerning girls residing in the city of Chicago, all of it built into larger community-wide assessments, data are minimal about girls ages 7-18 specifically from the West Side. There is a need for further development in this area of study.

In the course of the nine month project the collection of data mostly occurred in the summer months of 2021, which is not a full year of data collection, and we know that life in Chicago can change drastically from season to season. Furthermore, the neighborhoods we studied are some of the most impacted by everyday gun violence, and our team of community researchers collected data during one of the most violent and deadly summers in Chicago since 1996.⁶

During the collection of community surveys in West Garfield Park two of our researchers were present at a shooting where the victim was murdered. This incident threatened the safety of our researchers and altered the ability for them to continue to collect data within the community. In East Garfield Park, Carol Washington, Project Implementation Manager, experienced gun violence and the lingering effects it continues to have as well.

These events were traumatic and are concrete examples of the reality of residents who live on the West Side and have their lives constantly disrupted by the impact of intra-communal violence. The Education Fund to Stop Gun Violence, points out in their research that, “as a result, community gun violence further perpetuates the cycles of concentrated poverty, structural disadvantage, and health inequity that already exist within these communities.”⁷

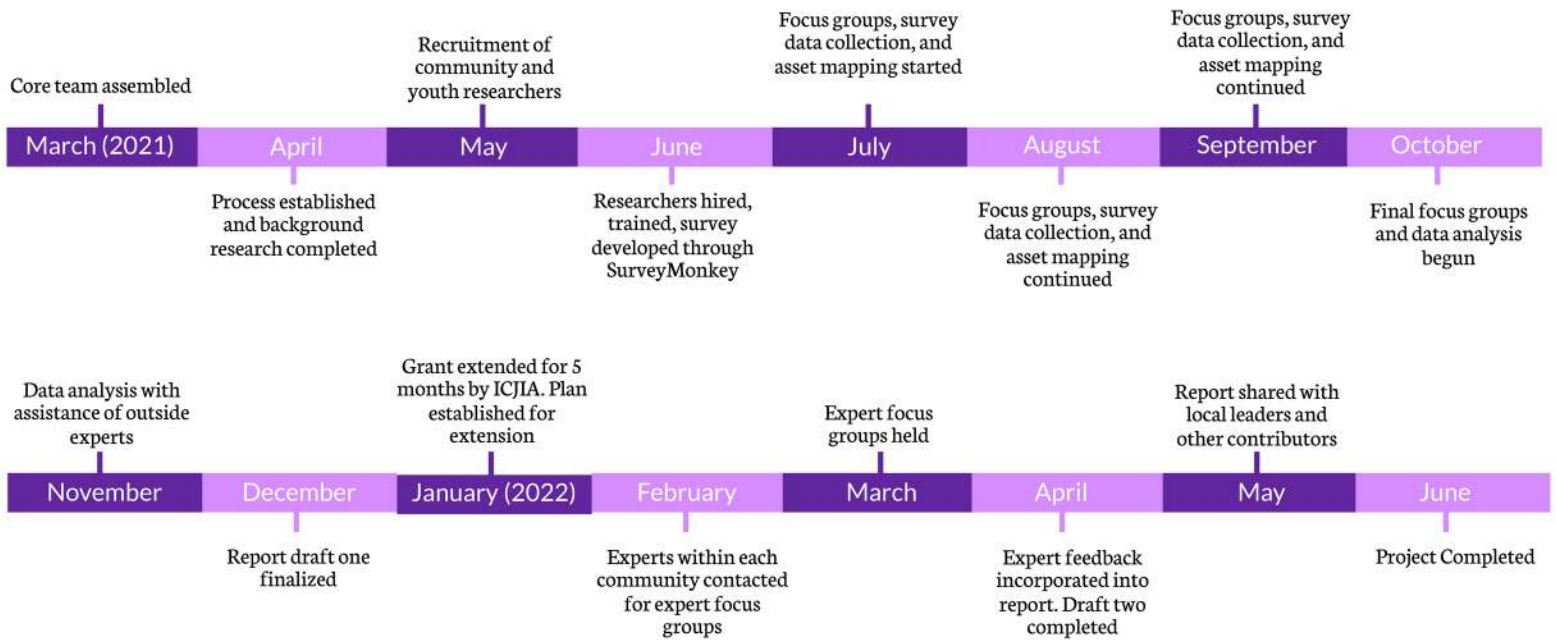
Chicago 2021 Citywide Homicides by Month from Chicago Sun-Times Homicide Tracker⁸



Finally, in the team’s work to map West Side assets, we looked for entities that had a brick and mortar presence there, or an explicitly stated focus on the West Side or one of the five neighborhoods we studied. As such, our asset map may exclude citywide organizations and entities that work to provide programs through schools, parks, etc. but do not have a brick and mortar presence on the West Side.



METHODOLOGY & TIMELINE



COMMUNITY SURVEY

- 7** Community and Youth Researchers
- 466** Survey Respondents

The core team developed the survey questions in order to understand both big-picture information about the West Side and specifically what resources are available for girls. We offered two versions of the survey, one for residents of the West Side, current or former, and one for individuals who worked on the West Side. Community Researchers attended community events, health fairs, expositions and more to engage attendees to take the survey.

FOCUS GROUPS

- 10** Community Focus Groups
- 1** Girls' Focus Group

Focus groups were hosted largely virtually on Zoom due to COVID restrictions. We hosted two focus groups in each of the studied communities. Participants were residents of the community and received an incentive for their participation. Focus group participants discussed both larger community-wide issues and specific issues that affected girls on the West Side.

GRANT EXTENSION

- 5** Expert Focus Groups
- 3** Community and Teen Researchers

At the end of December 2021, the team learned that we had received a five-month extension for the current grant. We utilized this time to present our first draft of our report and action plan to community experts for their feedback and comment through a series of Expert Focus Groups. This extension helped strengthen the report, as well as introduce our findings to key future partners on the West Side.

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOTS

AUSTIN



Population: 96,557
Age 5-19: 18,270 (19.5%)

Households: 35,864

Median Household Income: \$33,515

Race and Ethnicity:
White (Non-Hispanic): 5.6%
Hispanic or Latino (of Any Race): 15.1%
Black (Non-Hispanic): 77.8%
Asian (Non-Hispanic): 0.5%
Other/Multiple Races(Non-Hispanic): 1.1%

Did you know? Austin was founded in the 1800s by Henry Austin as a suburb of Cicero Township before residents voted to become a part of the city of Chicago in the late 1800s.

EAST GARFIELD PARK



Population: 19,992
Age 5-19: 4,676 (24.7%)

Households: 7,828

Median Household Income: \$24,617

Race and Ethnicity:
White (Non-Hispanic): 6.0%
Hispanic or Latino (of Any Race): 2.8%
Black (Non-Hispanic): 88.3%
Asian (Non-Hispanic): 0.6%
Other/Multiple Races(Non-Hispanic): 2.2%

Did you know? The early residents of East Garfield Park were mostly Irish and German who were later joined by Italians and Russian Jews in the early 1900s.

HUMBOLDT PARK



Population: 54,165
Age 5-19: 12,362 (22.3%)

Households: 19,072

Median Household Income: \$39,492

Race and Ethnicity:
White (Non-Hispanic): 7.7%
Hispanic or Latino (of Any Race): 58.4%
Black (Non-Hispanic): 32.0%
Asian (Non-Hispanic): 0.6%
Other/Multiple Races(Non-Hispanic): 1.3%

Did you know? Two 59 ft. tall Puerto Rican flags made of steel were installed in 1995 to mark the Paseo Boricua, the center of Puerto Rican culture in Chicago.

NORTH LAWDALE



Population: 34,794
Age 5-19: 7,565 (23.6%)

Households: 12,838

Median Household Income: \$28,327

Race and Ethnicity:
White (Non-Hispanic): 3.6%
Hispanic or Latino (of Any Race): 9.2%
Black (Non-Hispanic): 85.8%
Asian (Non-Hispanic): 0.2%
Other/Multiple Races(Non-Hispanic): 1.2%

Did you know? North Lawndale served as the home of the headquarters of Sears, Roebuck and Company in 1903. In 1966, North Lawndale was visited by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

WEST GARFIELD PARK



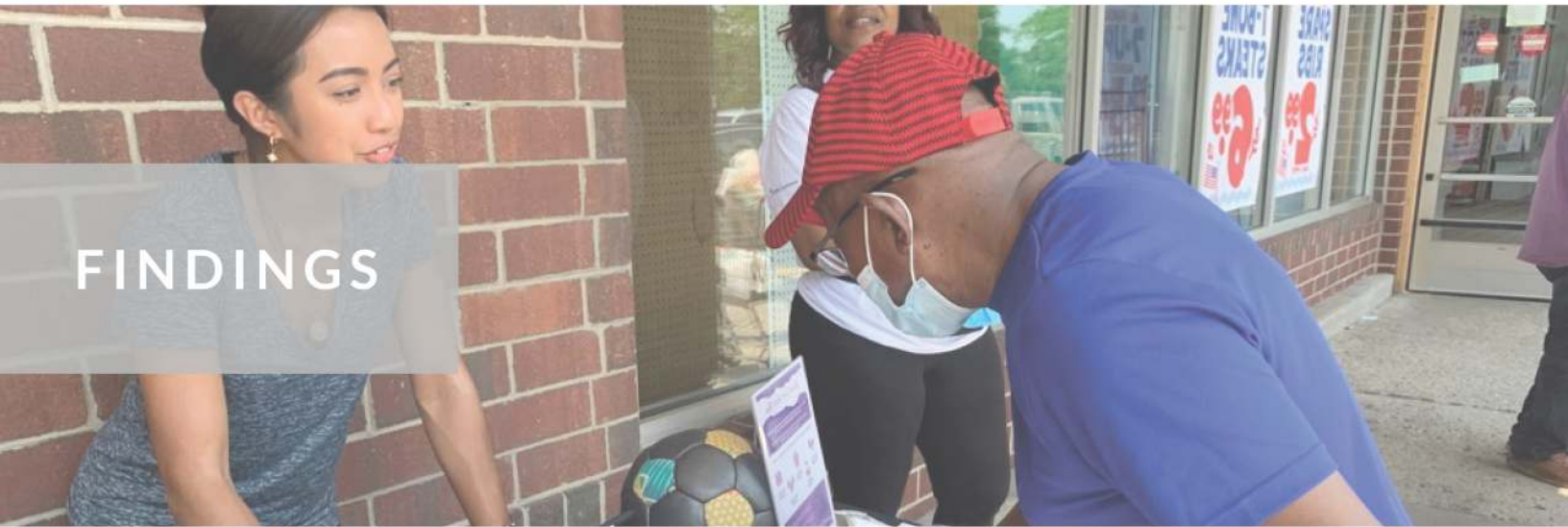
Population: 17,433
Age 5-19: 4,165 (25.4%)

Households: 6,573

Median Household Income: \$24,169

Race and Ethnicity:
White (Non-Hispanic): 2.5%
Hispanic or Latino (of Any Race): 3.0%
Black (Non-Hispanic): 93.1%
Asian (Non-Hispanic): 0.0%
Other/Multiple Races(Non-Hispanic): 1.5%

Did you know? Although many organizations fled the West Garfield Park community, Bethel New Life, Inc. remained and is one of the main service providers to that community.



FINDINGS

As noted in the methodology, a portion of the project’s time was spent conducting community focus groups and administering the community survey which was used to help with the community needs assessment and creation of the asset map. The “What Girls Need Now” research provides data that can be used by community leaders, stakeholders, and change agents to improve the quality of life for girls on Chicago’s West Side.

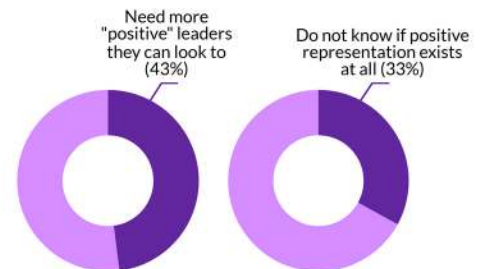
Although the precise answer of what girls need lies beyond the scope of this report, this section outlines potential implications of our findings. We believe further research is needed to delve deeper and more expansively into the status of girls on Chicago’s West Side.

GIRLHOOD: CAN YOU HEAR US?

Amplifying the voices of girls ages 7-18 from the targeted West Side communities lies as the premier premise for WGNN. Each girl wanted to know someone was listening to them. As one focus group participant stated, “Today is not the same as it was back then”. “Our priorities today are not the same as yours when you (older women) were growing up.” The girl respondents within this age group (17 & under) not only identified themselves as girls, but they were also mothers, aunts, sisters, nieces, and cousins.

This targeted group of community residents helped tell the story of how programming, funding, and resources should be reimagined in their neighborhoods. In order to understand their points of view, it required listening with an open mind and a willingness to not interfere with their thinking.

Respondents 17 and under, both male and female, acknowledged the lack of positive representation of girls within their respective communities. More than 48% indicated the need for more “positive” leaders they can look to. Even more troubling within this group, 33% did not know if positive representation existed at all. This may raise alarm in two aspects: first, there may be a need for more exposure outside of their communities. Secondly, exposure may currently exist within the wrong context (i.e. negative home environment, neighborhood exposure to violence, etc.). Nevertheless, this indicates potential long-term issues with positive representation. In light of few resources, need for exposure to more positive experiences, and underrepresentation of positive role models, safety continues to be an issue for young people in the 17 and under age group.



From our survey, 75% of respondents 17 and under both male and female noted a need for programs and resources for girls. Similarly, respondents 17 and under identified these three areas as top three challenges that girls face in their community:



ADULTIFICATION

The West Side of Chicago serves as the second largest enclave of Black Chicagoans. For example, over 92% of residents in the South Austin neighborhood identify as Black.¹⁰ The same stands true for East and West Garfield Park with more than 88% of the residents identifying as Black.¹⁰ Likewise, the Hispanic population in Humboldt Park is nearly 59%. To put the research and recommendations into perspective our team could not gloss over the large population of Black and Brown girls that reside on Chicago's West Side and the intersections that they experience.

Recent research has confirmed that differential treatment of Black and Afro-Latina girls based on race continues today, including adultification, where adults in the lives of Black and Afro-Latino girls perceive them as much older than they actually are and liken them more to adults than to children. As a result of being seen as more adult-like, Black and Afro-Latina girls are punished more harshly, policed more and over-sexualized (Girlhood Interrupted, 2017).¹¹

I think it's almost as if we've gotten robbed of the privilege to have a childhood. Like we don't get to see little girls doing little girl things, and you don't have that 'luxury'. It's almost like, all right, I got to hurry up and get grown so I could fend for myself and take care of myself.... So you start becoming so detached, and you're like, all right let me remove myself, remove myself. You don't trust anybody, and you just end up doing the best that you can, but a lot of times the best that they can is just so bad.
- Austin Focus Group Participant

Participants in the community focus groups throughout the project provided a myriad of examples of adultification of girls in their communities. One concrete example of this was the question posed to community members about family structure. When describing family structures and dynamics in all of the target communities, except for Humboldt Park, participants said the breakdown or the deterioration of the family structure has started with “babies having babies”, referring to young girls who become mothers as teenagers and are not adequately prepared for motherhood. According to the Healthy Chicago's Chicago Teen Birth Rate report, although teen pregnancy rates have been declining, Chicago remains higher than the national average. Specifically, the five communities subject to this research have all experienced a decline in teen birth rates. Humboldt Park, Austin, West Garfield, East Garfield, and North Lawndale ranked numbers 23, 25, 26, 27, and 29 on the teen birth rates list for Chicago from 2010-

2014. In addition they concluded, “Racial/ethnic disparities exist in Chicago when it comes to teen birth rate. Non-Hispanic Black teens are over six times more likely to experience a birth than Non-Hispanic White teens.”¹²

What was particularly interesting about these statements were the immediate follow up examples of young, Black, school-aged girls having to be the primary caregiver for their siblings in place of an absent guardian. The burden of being a caregiver to their siblings led these girls into “adult-like” decision making postures at extremely young ages.

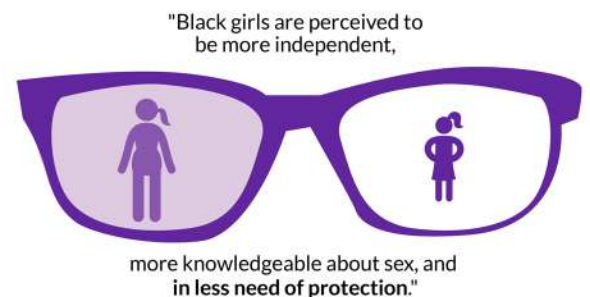
One participant in a Garfield Park community focus group described seeing what she believed to be a “seven-year-old” walking to the grocery store to get items for the home. Another participant talked extensively about the stripping of “femininity” from little Black girls because they are taught they have to act “tough” at all times to protect themselves.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released an article stating, “Black girls are perceived to be more independent, more knowledgeable about sex, and in less need of protection.”¹³

Throughout the course of the research, participants and community members struggled with centering the conversation on girls, often shifting the discussion to young men or the community as a whole. Facilitators and researchers did their best to guide conversations back to the focus on girls. This seemed to be compatible with the overall narrative of not centering the visibility of Black and Brown girls in larger conversations that happen in our media or decision making processes.

This helped the research team and facilitators see that many participants either were not knowledgeable about what disparities girls on the West Side were facing or they were not certain about what resources actually existed for girls on the West Side. With the completion of the community needs assessment and asset map we confirmed that there are not many resources that exist exclusively for girls on the West Side. This makes it difficult for parents, students, and community members as a whole to point to concrete examples of ways the community can or has shown up for girls.

This invisibility of Black and Brown girls also persists in media coverage and public safety. Recently, WTTW reported, “In the Chicago area, an alarming number of Black women have been killed and their murders have gone unsolved. And as even more Black women and girls have gone missing, community organizations say local law enforcement, government and the news media are not doing enough.” This has prompted Cook County Sheriff Thomas Dart to create the “Missing Persons Project”.¹⁴



Project participants also described examples of the invisibility of Black and Brown girls. One participant described their fear and the normalization of human trafficking that occurs on the West Side. Many participants in this study talked about seeing sex work that occurs in their community openly without any evidence of law enforcement slowing down the activity that has held steady for decades. They also expressed concern that the media does not cover the cases of missing Black women and girls as often or they never see those stories being told, as showcased in a documentary called the “Unforgotten 51”, which tells the story of the of 51 mostly African-American women murdered in Chicago since 2001.¹⁵

SAFETY

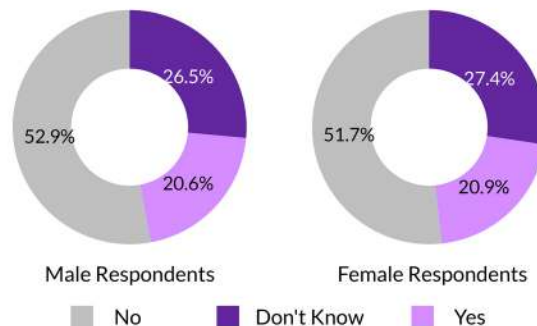
The respondents from each of the neighborhoods viewed safety as a top priority. This could be attributed to how safety was defined relative to what neighborhood meant. In some cases, the neighborhood was defined as “my block” or on “my street” while others viewed the entire area as “my neighborhood” or “my community”. For example, one resident stated, “We don’t have violence on the block where I live, so I feel very safe.” Another person stated, “I simply go to work and come home.” “Nobody bothers me and I don’t bother nobody.” These individuals felt very safe within the confines of what they have defined as “their neighborhood”. The interesting dynamic of understanding what “neighborhood” versus “community” represented from the participants’ points of view, perhaps, may also present a need to clarify or provide education and awareness on what these terms mean. The thought of safety during the day and night amongst male and female participants varied only slightly. Both males and females felt the need for girls to be protected. More than 50 percent of those who responded did not believe girls experienced a feeling of safety.

The contrast of day safety and night safety shed some light on the phenomenon. During the day, 55% of all respondents felt moderately to very safe. Only 20% felt moderately unsafe to very unsafe. During the night, only 31% felt moderately safe to very safe while 44% reported moderately safe to very unsafe. More than 40% remained neutral on the issue of safety. Although the survey used to collect data was anonymous, one respondent viewed answering a question on safety as “snitching”.

The statistical implications on safety somewhat complement the latest report on three of What Girls Need Now communities - East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, and North Lawndale. Each has been identified as some of the most unsafe places to live in Chicago.

West Garfield Park has been cited as the most dangerous community area in the city of Chicago. According to the Chicago Sun-Times, West Garfield Park has experienced more than 62 shootings in a small block radius and is dubbed as the most violent beat in the city.¹⁶ It is followed by East Garfield and North Lawndale, which are third and fifth, respectively, on the list found on the Cove website¹⁷. These communities have crime rates higher than the national average and the rates in which this violence affects women and girls is steadily rising. In 2019, the Chicago Tribune reported about the decline in shootings across the city between 2015-2019. The article stated that “while overall shootings [had] dropped sharply in Chicago since an especially violent 2016, the percentage of female victims has steadily risen each year to about 13.5% through June 25, up sharply from the comparable period in 2015.”¹⁸

Do girls feel safe in their communities?



Do you feel safe in your community?

Community	Felt safe during the day	Felt safe at night	Did not feel safe during the day	Did not feel safe at night
Austin	50%	32%	26%	39%
East Garfield Park	69%	30%	31%	69%
Humboldt Park	63%	24%	11%	50%
North Lawndale	41%	10%	35%	68%
West Garfield Park	36%	26%	38%	57%

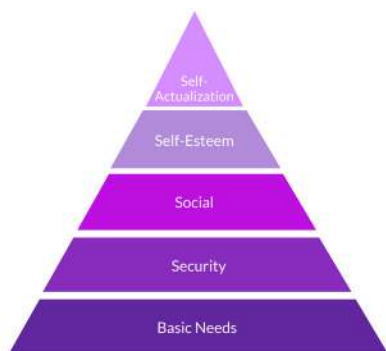
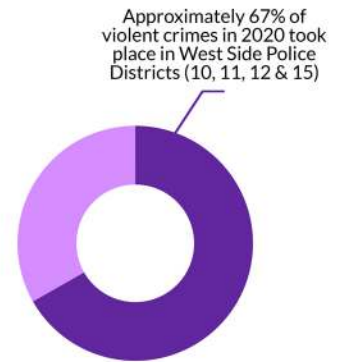


Figure 1

Participants 17 and under felt safer during the day (48%) than at night (23%). They believed that girls were even less safe in their own neighborhoods (44%). This group of participants identified “safety/violence against women” as the number one challenge faced by girls in the targeted West Side communities.

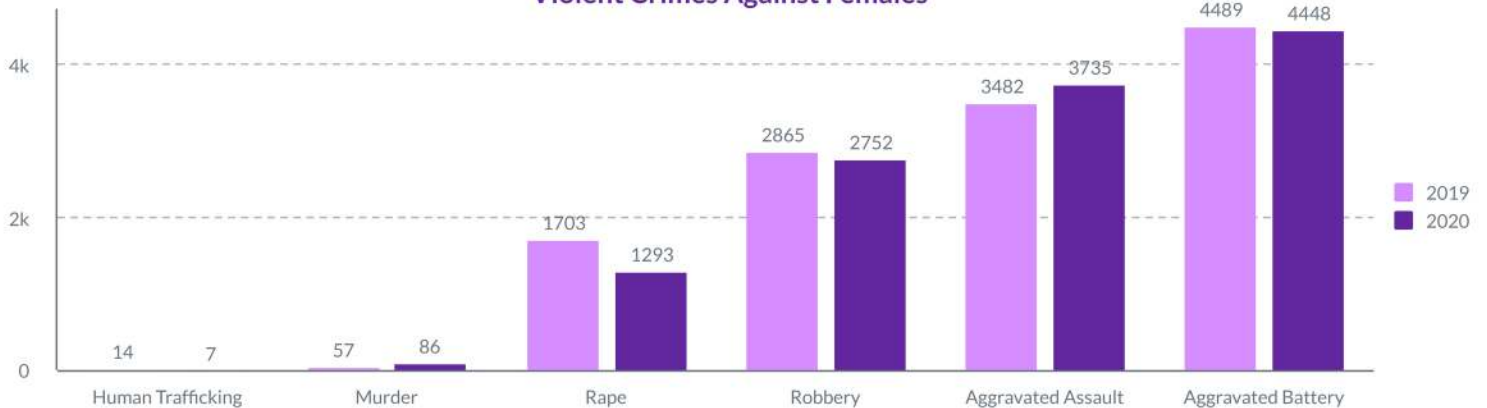
Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs is broken into two major categories, which includes “deficiency needs” and “being needs”. Within the deficiency needs category is safety. To ensure girls grow up happy, healthy and strong, according to Maslow’s theory, girls must feel protected. Every girl deserves the opportunity to be the very best version of herself regardless of where she resides. Safety needs are important for girls to be able to reach their next level of motivation.¹⁹ Maslow acknowledged “behavior tends to be determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them”, indicating that most behavior is not singly motivated.²⁰ In figure 1, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs shows that once security is satisfied girls can matriculate to the next level on the developmental pyramid.

The Chicago Police Department (CPD), in 2020,²¹ reported more than 26,000 violent crimes occurred in the City of Chicago. Austin, East Garfield Park, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, and West Garfield Park are in the heart of the police districts in which the majority of the crimes were committed. Districts #10 (3,723), #11 (5,175), #12 (5,047), and #15 (3,441) accounted for 17,386 of the 26,038 cases reported by CPD.²² This indicates approximately 67% of all criminal activity happened within these communities. Although the report does not compartmentalize the data by age and gender categories, there were, collectively (males and females), 162 persons between the ages of 0-21 years old who were victims of murder. This was important to highlight because it encompassed the target age and population of the WGNN project.



This side-by-side comparison of data obtained from the 2020 Annual Report of the Chicago Police Department showed a decrease in rape, robbery, and aggravated battery. However, there was a significant increase in females murdered in 2020. Twenty-nine additional females fell prey to criminal violence homicide in 2020 than 2019. The number of cases for aggravated assault increased by 253 which represents a 7% increase. This data supports what we heard from participants in the focus groups and surveys.

Violent Crimes Against Females



Safety is an overwhelming issue not just in the five communities included in the project, but also for women and girls citywide. But violence is a complicated issue and we saw this reflected in the data we collected. Many of the participants in our research pointed to poverty as a root cause of community violence and lack of resources.

The one thing that I heard the girls talk about all the time [when working in a school] was the physical violence. I would have girls come in and say, oh she won't be here... she got raped last night, and so she's at the doctor. She'll be out for a week. That was a common thing to hear... They still don't have therapeutic... clinics for girls to go to and talk about it. They get raped, they're back in school two days later, three days later, and nothing's done about it. If it's reported, it's just paperwork with the police department and some of those rapes are happening right in the house they lived in... I'd never seen so much in my life. I mean unbelievable. So again, the physical and mental violence against women who were absolutely helpless because there were no therapy sessions or therapy clinics where women could go to and no protection from anyone. You file a case about a rape, it sits in a file somewhere in the police department, end of the story.
 - North Lawndale Focus Group Participant

HEALTH

At the start of our research the COVID-19 pandemic had been with us for a full year, and continues today. Our way of life has been altered forever and those changes have not been minor. Many families have tragically lost loved ones, our healthcare system is stressed, and millions struggle with anxiety and burnout. While no one could have predicted COVID-19, we should not be surprised about how it has deepened the divide of inequity in healthcare for the working class, minority communities and the girls who live there.

The communities we focused on in our research were not just battling a global health pandemic in 2020, but also an epidemic of gun violence. In November of 2021 Governor J.B. Pritzker declared gun violence a public health crisis, signing into law an executive order to fund violence prevention programming and study root causes of gun violence. Governor Pritzker made the announcement in East Garfield Park. Cases of gun violence homicides rose in 2020 during the height of the pandemic, and unfortunately, young children made up a portion of the victims.

Additionally, we saw a swell of direct viral infection, increase in stress-related disorders, and loss of health insurance for many families

across the country. During the summer months of 2020 social unrest broke out as the tape of George Floyd's murder went viral. This disrupted the safety of many communities, and because of massive riots, destabilized areas that were already considered "food and medical deserts" prior to the pandemic. During this period many working class families and especially girls have slipped through the cracks of our healthcare and social safety net system. Focus group participants highlighted long wait lists for mental health services for their daughters, lack of sexual education or access to healthcare professionals and concerns about social isolation for adolescent girls in their communities.

As highlighted in the methodology of our research, our team conducted 10 community focus groups and asked participants a series of questions about the healthcare in their community. The questions ranged from healthcare accessibility, healthcare concerns, and overall feeling of healthcare options in their neighborhoods. The consensus between participants in the five communities was virtually the same. Many participants felt that chronic illnesses (diabetes, obesity, hypertension, asthma, etc.) that impact their neighborhoods stem from a lack of primary care and resources needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Many participants felt that there were not enough fresh food options or enough safety in their neighborhoods to enjoy recreational activities like daily walks in their local park districts or farmers markets. The participants also felt that this impacts the overall development and health of girls in their community.

Others felt that the healthcare clinics that exist in their neighborhoods lack basic customer service or cleanliness and they felt forced to travel to other healthcare providers outside of their neighborhoods, often farther away from their homes. The desire to seek better healthcare options outside of participants' neighborhoods highlighted another gap in the healthcare system for West Siders: transportation.

According to a report conducted by the American Hospital Association, "Each year, 3.6 million people in the United States do not obtain medical care due to transportation issues. Transportation issues include lack of vehicle access, inadequate infrastructure, long distances and lengthy times to reach needed services, transportation costs and adverse policies that affect travel".²³ Many parents in the focus group and community members expressed fear around their daughters or girls in their community navigating public transportation to access healthcare or programs that would improve their overall health.

It's cheaper to go around to the corner store get a snack cake maybe a nacho, and you obese because, you know, you can't... really provide or get the food because it's expensive.

- Austin Focus Group Participant

One thing I do notice is that in the corner stores that... are deserted in the Austin area there are no... pads, tampons, feminine hygiene.... It's mainly for junk food and you quick things to fix for dinner. But still at the same time Walgreens is kind of a walk away, and if I really need a pad or a tampon, why can't it just be... easy to get access? Because... I feel like a condom is easier to get access to rather than a pad or a tampon.

- Austin Focus Group Participant

Another gap that has stubbornly plagued the West Side for decades is the food deserts that exist across these five neighborhoods. The USDA's Economic Research Service defines food deserts as "a low-income tract where a substantial number or substantial share of residents does not have easy access to a supermarket or large grocery store".²⁴ As a replacement to actual grocery stores that have fresh produce many community members described only having access to "corner stores" which sell sugary drinks and processed snacks or food options.

This lack of access to fresh food can be extremely disruptive and harmful to the development of young girls. It also impacts the relationship they have with food as they mature. One of the focus groups consisted solely of girls who are participants in the Girls in the Game program. When describing their favorite part of their community the girls described the food options that are available in their neighborhood, fast food chains like, McDonald's and Taco Bell. Participants, especially parents, in the research showed concern for the long-term developmental impacts it would have on girls on the West Side because they did not have access to fresh produce or fresh foods. Case studies have shown that Black children are at higher risk for consuming unhealthy diets including fast food, and have higher prevalence of obesity and other chronic diseases.

Aside from the lack of fresh produce and food options, community members described the lack of "fresh air and fresh water" in their communities as well. A need for "green spaces" and removal of lead in pipes were also top health concerns for community members. This concern is not an anecdotal one either. WTTW journalist Paul Caine reports that "Illinois has more lead service water pipes than any other state in the nation, and Chicago more than any other city. In fact, Illinois may have as much as a quarter of all lead service pipes in the country".²⁵

These particular health concerns point to the reality of environmental injustice that impact and are felt by many frontline communities of color. Our team met with community members and groups dedicated to closing the gap of environmental racism and injustice, including the group Earth Remedies whose goal is to provide assistance for small businesses and connect community members to resources and direct services, while emphasizing beautification and environmentally friendly alternatives for the West Side. Some of their recommendations included educating the community about how to fully utilize facilities like the Garfield Park Conservatory and "reclaiming space" such as vacant lots and turning them into community gardens to promote urban farming.

While this report has highlighted gun violence as both a public health and safety issue, during community focus groups the participants acknowledged the impact addiction and gun violence have had on the overall health of the community. ProPublica published an article titled, *Opioid Overdoses Keep Surging in Chicago, Killing Black People on the West Side*. Dr. Ponn Arunkumar, the county's chief medical examiner, said "the majority of victims are on Chicago's West Side, including in the Austin, East Garfield Park and West Garfield Park neighborhoods".²⁶ Many participants pointed to the lack of mental health services available for community members. Long wait periods, distance to the nearest mental health facility, and cost were leading obstacles and barriers to mental health care access. According to a May 2015 report by the National Alliance on

Mental Illness, between 2009 and 2012, Illinois slashed \$113.7 million from its budget for mental health services, causing at least two state-operated inpatient facilities and six Chicago clinics to close. Currently, Chicago's Cook County Jail is one of the biggest mental health care

There are no hospitals that I feel comfortable going to in the Austin area.... My daughter's been on the waitlist to see a therapist since last year. And I mean, I'm a well-educated person... so... I know the mental health is high right now and the list is long. But, I mean, I've been calling them, no one's been calling me.

- Austin Focus Group Participant

providers in the country.²⁷ In 2020 the Block Club Chicago interviewed Eric Lenzo, head of behavioral health at Sinai Health System. Lenzo confirmed that, “as much as 45 percent of Sinai patients have a mental or substance-use issue that co-occurs with the medical issues for which they seek treatment”. Many participants expressed they would like to see more of an investment in access to mental health services, trauma-informed care, and expansion of social safety net programs for themselves and the community as a whole.²⁸

We have to teach [girls] how to listen to their body and create a space where they can kind of ask some of those weird questions that's... a little scary, especially if their moms... aren't really, or dads, aren't really... wanting to do that.
- Garfield Park Focus Group Participant

Participants also expressed the need to expand mental health services for girls in their community that focused on confidence building, hygiene, sexual education and better accessibility to healthcare options within their own community.

EDUCATION

The topic of education was also a priority for many participants and parents in our research. Main concerns about education included lack of resources for teachers and students, safety of girls in school, educational curriculum and extracurricular activities for girls.

In 2013 the City of Chicago, under the leadership of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, conducted one of the largest public school shutdowns in the history of the country.²⁹ Since 2001 more than 100 schools have been closed down by the city, mostly impacting Black and Hispanic neighborhoods. These school closures had a monumental impact on the West Side, especially for girls. Global research indicates that girls' education plays a pivotal role in their ability to succeed, as well as lift up entire communities. Therefore school closures will always have an unequal impact on girls.

In a study conducted five years after the school closures took place researchers found that “kids both from the shuttered schools and nearby 'welcoming' schools, which took on many of the displaced students, saw negative effects on test scores over the short- and long-term.”³⁰

The conversation of education evoked strong opinions in our focus groups with some parents who have completely taken their children out of the Chicago Public School system and enrolled them in private or charter schools in other neighborhoods. Many participants were deeply disappointed with the lack of investments from the city into Chicago Public Schools. Only one participant in our 10 community focus groups spoke positively about her experience with neighborhood schools.

One participant from the Austin focus group, who has been a crossing guard for CPS and the City of Chicago for over 25 years, explained why she decided not to send her children to a neighborhood school in Austin. The participant explained she would observe students walking home from neighborhood schools with “printed paper from books... because [the school] doesn't have enough books for the students to take home to learn”.

This comment led to a conversation about curriculum and how that could potentially impact the growth and development of a student. Most of the participants in the focus groups did not believe that the curriculum was up to par or adequate for girls, did not prepare them for secondary school, or give them relevant coursework compared to “Northside schools”. Another participant from the same focus group stated that she was sending her daughters to their neighborhood school and they were receiving “straight A's” and passing all of their courses. The participant went on to say that once she transferred her daughters to another school district they began failing their classes. She continued, “I had them tested to see what was going on”. She came to the conclusion that her daughters were behind because the neighborhood school did not have a proficient curriculum.

We let our kids down if we don't educate them. The best way to get out of poverty is to be educated. So if you cannot get a basic education, you're going to be stuck there, and it becomes a cycle. So looking at different programs, if we can even start with a base school and start to change that with one school and show people that, hey, with the correct, proper curriculum, proper programming our kids can do much better. And they can have a better outcome and a better future for themselves
-North Lawndale Focus Group Participant

The focus groups in all five neighborhoods overwhelmingly agreed that other elements such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of books, and over-policing of girls of color in schools all contribute to disruption in their education.

Other issues that focus group members thought existed within the neighborhood schools were a lack of extracurricular activities for girls. Participants in our North Lawndale and Humboldt Park focus groups said they would like to see after school activities for girls on the West Side like ballet, robotics, arts, music and more sports.

Participants from each of the focus groups also spoke about a need to include “in-school” health clinics in each of the schools. A few participants said these clinics need to be staffed properly, have adequate sex education and health resources and a reporting system if the girls need to speak with a professional about sexual or physical abuse.

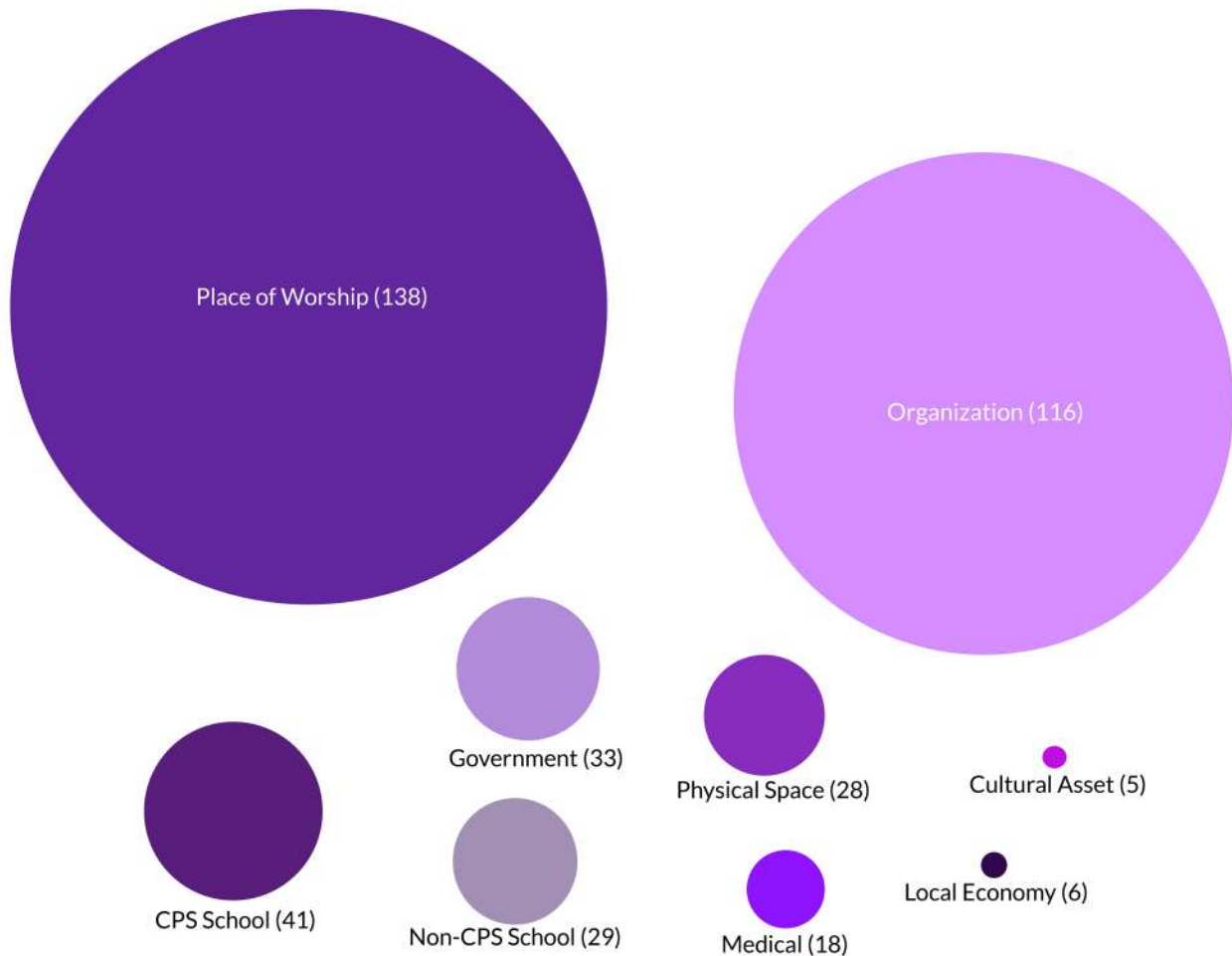
When it comes to girls, schools serve as a resource center beyond just their education. The success of girls on the West Side depends on how well-resourced their neighborhood schools are. From nutrition to sexual health and safety, most of their time is spent in these schools and when they lack resources girls on the West Side slip through the cracks.



ASSET MAP

Our community researchers, all of whom were current or former residents of the community that they surveyed, compiled relevant assets. We grouped them in the following categories: Cultural Assets, Local Economy, Government, Medical, Physical Space, Non-CPS School, CPS School, Organization and Place of Worship.

As demonstrated by the graph below, Organizations and Places of Worship comprised over 65% of the assets on the West Side. Of the schools located on the West Side, 60% were CPS schools, while 40% were non-CPS schools, which include charter, magnet, private and post-secondary. Overall, the focus group participants gave very positive feedback about the Chicago Park District.



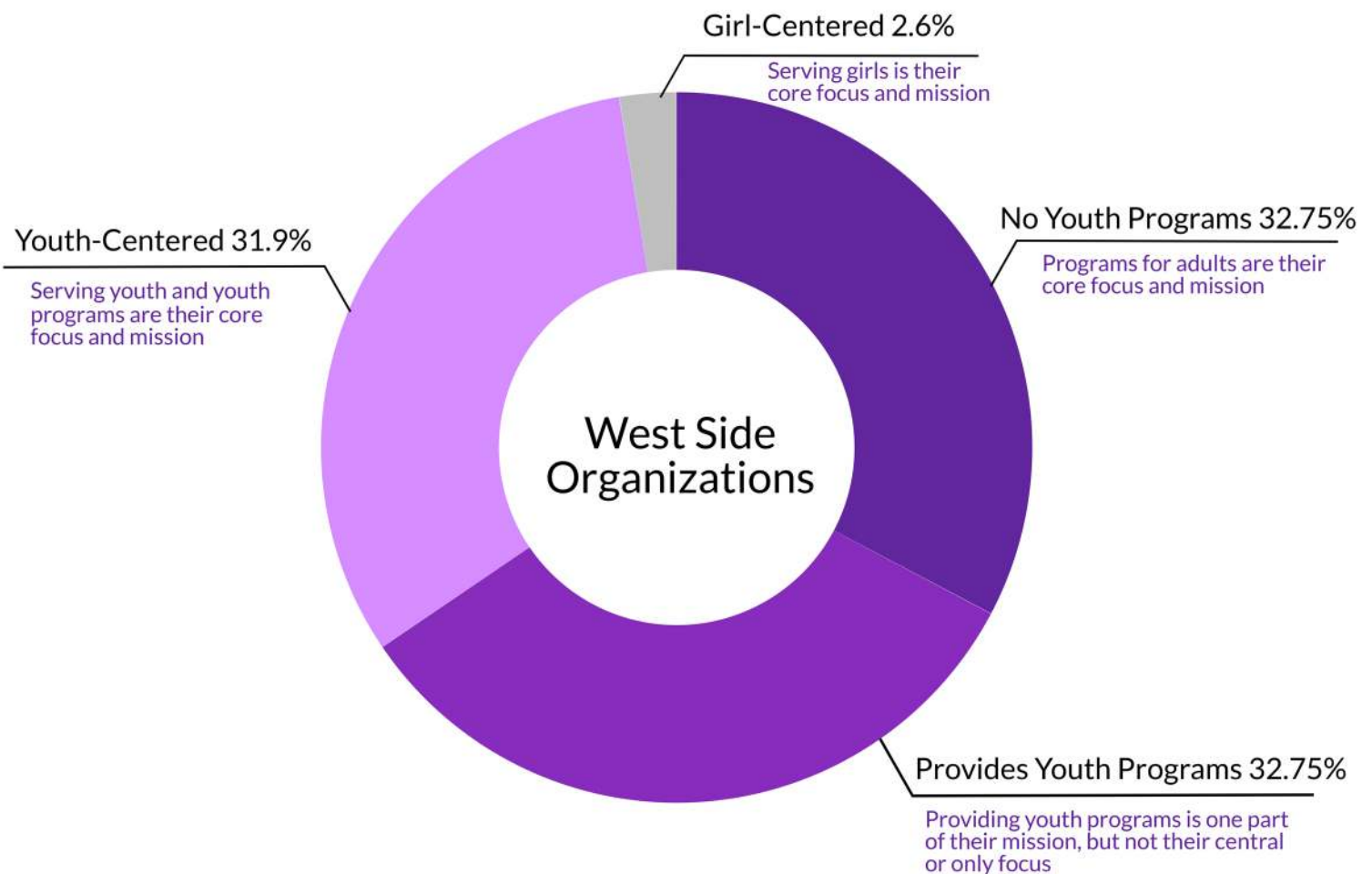
You can find our fully interactive Asset Maps at www.girlsinthegame.org/maps. Find resources in your neighborhood, see which resources are concentrated where, and more. And if you have an asset to add to our map, please reach out!

ASSET MAP: FOCUS ON GIRLS

In a closer look at the organizations that serve the West Side, there is a large gap when it comes to girl-focused organizations. According to our survey, West Side organizations are split almost evenly between organizations whose mission centers on adults, organizations that serve both adults and youth and organizations that center on youth and youth programs. However, of 116 organizations found on the West Side, only 2.6% addressed girls in their mission statements and programs, one of those being Girls in the Game and our offices in North Lawndale.

This gap is particularly troubling in light of the multiple studies that show that girl-only programs and environments are beneficial to girls in a multitude of areas. A study that compared middle school co-ed and single-gender PE classes found that when girls participated in a single-gender PE class, they had “significantly more game involvement than females in a co-educational class”.³¹ Similarly, another study on the impact of girls-only groups found this type of environment helped boost self-esteem, fostered increased peer connections and peer mentoring, and helped girls to “experience a sense of empowerment with being a girl”. Furthermore, “In programs that include sensitive topics and gender-related issues such as sexual harassment or pressures, research suggests that a small girls-only format provides a safe, trusting and non-judgmental space for girls to participate”.³² Girls on the West Side need safe, supportive spaces designed around their needs where they can ask questions, connect with peers, and practice leadership skills.

Our data does not include citywide organizations that offer programs within local schools, parks, etc. We know organizations like Girl Scouts and Girls on the Run do provide vital in-school programs for girls on the West Side, however as they are not based on the West Side and do not have a brick-and-mortar location on the West Side, they were not included on our asset map. Additionally, there may be other options for girl-centered programs that our asset map team did not discover; however the lack of information about programs for girls or lack of easy access is a huge barrier to their participation.





RECOMMENDATION 1

Increase emphasis on safety

Harassment and fear of violence can impede free movement of girls and stop them from reaching their full potential, both socially and economically. When girls feel afraid or unsafe in their communities it undermines their ability to go to work and school and prevents them from reaching their full potential. While we know that sexual and physical violence against girls is a complex systemic issue, a number of measures can be taken to make streets feel safer and to keep girls more secure when moving around the community. Here are some recommendations we developed through the project's research.

DELIVERABLES

1

Develop curriculum to include self-defense programs and activities that are age appropriate, along with curriculum on safety and self-awareness in public spaces and family safety plans.

2

Develop curriculum around finding a mentor, recognizing “safe adults”, and self-advocacy. Partner with mentoring organizations to provide girls resources to find a mentor.

3

Partner with external organizations to train Girls in the Game's coaches and staff to recognize potential abuse.

4

Update organizational policy on reporting behaviors compromising the safety of girls in effort to create intentional safe spaces.

5

Partner with external organizations to provide “safe space” training for all coaches.

6

Implement on-going gender-responsive training for staff and coaches in partnership with external experts.

7

Curriculum update: including the voices of experts, especially in the area of sexual education. Inform participants that we can help provide and source menstruation supplies.

A nice way to kind of fuel more self-confidence would be community self-defense classes, just resources. I think... adding more police control or cameras is more of a band-aid to a symptom instead of helping women become empowered with who they are and the strength and power that we can hold ourselves.

- Humboldt Park Focus Group Participant



RECOMMENDATION 2

Increase social emotional learning

Developing your leadership and your voice is not something that happens overnight; it takes time and many opportunities to get it right. Girls in the Game wants to prepare the girls in our program to be leaders and to speak up at every table that they sit at. This set of recommendations focuses on opportunities for the girls in our program to develop positive conflict resolution, promote pro social behaviors, and learn restorative justice practices. Women and girls are natural collaborators, teaching our girls how to tap into those natural abilities will help them with their leadership development earlier in life.

DELIVERABLES

- 1 Connect curriculum revisions with CASEL Competencies.

- 2 Train coaches on SEL.

- 3 Align program curriculum and evaluation tools with SEL standards.

- 4 Use the Quality Assessment tool to assess coach fidelity to SEL standards, ensuring that coaches are integrating standards into program implementation.

- 5 Implement training opportunities for trauma-informed care for staff and coaches, including suicide prevention.

- 6 Develop trauma-informed competencies for staff and coaches with the assistance of external providers.

- 7 Peace Circle Training for both coaches and program participants.

- 8 Educate Girls in the Game stakeholders on adultification; evaluate Girls in the Game’s internal policies to ensure the organization is not perpetuating adultification unintentionally.

I always had that confidence level of:

‘It doesn’t matter to me what you think or what you say. It matters what I think and what I say.’

And just children all as a whole, and especially girls, need to have that and that will change a lot.

- Garfield Park Focus Group Participant



RECOMMENDATION 3

Strategic organizational development

Organizational Development is a comprehensive strategy that aims to increase a nonprofit's performance, sustainability, and relevance. The factors that make up successful organizational development are communication, leadership, and planning. Professional coaching can help Girls in the Game develop these key components of a successful strategy. Including the voices of our partners and experts will not only help us survive as an organization but thrive! Throughout this project here were improvements we thought we could make.

DELIVERABLES

- 1 Expand programming outside of schools to offer more community options for girls. Options include parks, community centers, churches and other neighborhood locations where girls have the opportunity for drop-in programs that are not school-based. If drop-in programming is not an option, transportation must be available.

- 2 Hire a marketing professional to help advertise and promote Girls in the Game programs within the community.

- 3 Special focus on hiring young women ages 18-21 as coaches to expand career and mentorship opportunities for this demographic.

- 4 Bring in an external program evaluator to conduct an independent review of all Girls in the Game programming.

- 5 Strategically build community connections that focus on girl-serving organizations on the West Side - Growing Into Responsible Leaders Safely (GIRLS).



You see how they get these programs out here to keep the boys off the streets and to prevent them from getting in trouble. We need more of them programs for girls. It's a lot of girls that's on the streets too that you won't even think [are] out here like boys, but they are because... they look at us as if it's easy for us to get a job, but it's not easy for a lot of females to get a job out here.
- North Lawndale Focus Group Participant



RECOMMENDATION 4

Including parents and guardians

One of the greatest strengths that Girls in the Game has is the strong relationship between the parents and guardians and the organization. The greatest potential of growth is the continued desire to include the voices and ideas of those parents and guardians. Throughout the project Girls in the Game held two West Side parent and guardian focus groups to hear their suggestions and insights into their girls' needs.

DELIVERABLES

1

Create a Parent Resource Center where parents can access resources around food, housing, clothing, safety, medical, mental health and other community resources.

2

Develop Parent Advisory Committee.

3

Update Friends & Family Night practices to make it more accessible to parents and guardians.

4

Initiate a “family meal” event where parents and guardians, Girls in the Game coaches and staff, school partners and expert parent organization partners can gather to connect and hear updates from Girls in the Game.



Keep up the good work! My kids love [Girls in the Game], I love it, so just keep up what you guys are doing.... If you do... have other resources... just try to get it out there... because you never know who knows what.

- Parent Focus Group Participant on connecting girls and families to additional resources





RECOMMENDATION 5

Develop community partnerships

The success of your project depends on how well you engage your community. Having a strong and engaged community can help shape the type of development that fits within their needs and expectations. With all of our stakeholders, our goals are to build trust, credibility, and support for our project and organization. It is also important that the needs and desires of our community are taken into account when making decisions. Here are some ways we hope to engage the community.

DELIVERABLES

- 1 Quarterly Meetings with Community Stakeholders.

- 2 Develop long-term relationships with West Side entities: faith-based organizations, West Side organizations, Alderman’s offices, community leaders, etc. to better serve girls as a coalition.

- 3 Develop and host a West Side girls’ summit that showcases programs and resources for girls on the West Side to increase awareness around girls and their needs.

Recommendations for community partners

- 1 Provide a resource room or closet for girls in schools and other brick & mortar locations that include menstruation and hygiene products free of charge, including an emergency kit that girls can carry with them that includes period and hygiene products and a change of clothes.

I don't see gymnastic programs or... any other stuff. When I go to sign my kids up, I get so frustrated just... trying to find something. It's... ridiculous. I don't want to drive 30 minutes up North or Downtown to the South Loop just for my child to have quality [programs]. And you do find that a lot of the times, it's just such so low quality.

- Garfield Park Focus Group Participant

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WEST SIDE VISION

While this report may focus heavily on needs and major issues facing West Side communities and the girls who reside there, many survey respondents and focus group participants also emphasized the pride, sense of community, potential and hope they have for their neighborhoods. We would be remiss not to highlight the love that residents have for the West Side and their vision for its future.



“ The Park District in the summer is the best place to be. Sign up for it. Utilize it. Get in it. Go early. Get with the older people and enjoy the Park.
-Austin Focus Group Participant ”

“ Whenever I take the train from Laramie, and I'm going down Lake... I always tend to look at the abandoned buildings and the abandoned like warehouses and whatnot and always kind of makes me think like what could be made with it. So I looked at a warehouse one time and I was like hey, you know, that could be a very crafty gallery.... It's just I feel like whenever I ride down Lake Street I always look at the potential that could be.
-Austin Focus Group Participant ”

“ One thing that I do like about North Lawndale is we do have community. I know it's really hard to see, and people don't always see the aspect of the the love and support that we have as a community.
-North Lawndale Focus Group Participant ”

“ I think that seeing a lot of the love and celebration that you often see... are beneficial too. When I walk in the park... it feels very celebratory, it feels very supportive, and filled with love. And I think those are really good feelings and support systems for for girls to see, and witness, and observe.
-Humboldt Park Focus Group Participant ”



“ I feel like [Garfield Park is] in a weird... revival type of space where we're like, wait a minute these last... decades... we don't like what it looks like. We see downtown... we're so close to downtown, we're so close to Oak Park, we're so close to up North. We know what really nice communities look like, and we know we deserve the same thing. We have the same... buildings, the same beautiful Madison. So I think that's where we are. We're just... lost, and we're just trying to restructure ourselves and get rid of the bad and build up the good.
-Garfield Park Focus Group Participant ”

“ I think when if you live [in North Lawndale] you know it's rich and it's full of community that loves each other and they care for each other... and they built this.... maybe it could be a small circle of folks that really care about the community and really care about the people who are really doing other things in the community.
-North Lawndale Focus Group Participant ”

“ How would I describe [Austin] in a couple of words? Probably I would say vibrant, lively... beautiful, absolutely beautiful... opportunity, you know. And one of the words that I like to say is that Austin has vision, you know, if moved forward by the right people.
-Austin Focus Group Participant ”





GET INVOLVED

We would love to collaborate with you to better serve girls on the West Side! Please reach out for more information or to get involved.

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