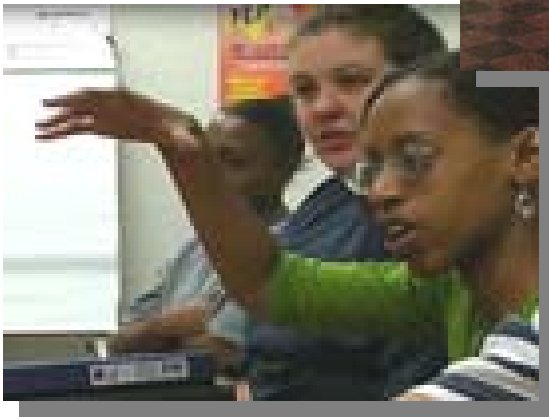


# GIRL Trouble

GIRLS TELL THEIR TRUTH ABOUT THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

A documentary by Lexi Leban and Lidia Szajko



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

for Youth Audiences

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The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign is funded by a generous grant  
from The Annie E. Casey Foundation.



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## **THE FILM: GIRL TROUBLE**

This groundbreaking documentary chronicles four years in the lives of three teenage girls entangled in San Francisco's juvenile justice system. Stephanie is pregnant and has an outstanding warrant for running away from a group home. Shangra is torn between taking care of her mother, a homeless recovering heroin addict, and taking care of herself. Sheila, whose father and siblings have been in and out of jail, risks arrest and jail time by selling and using drugs.

These girls, and many like them, aren't just at-risk -- they are in deep trouble. Trying to change their lives, the girls work part-time at the innovative Center for Young Women's Development, an organization run by young women who have faced similar challenges. As the girls confront seemingly impossible problems and pivotal decisions, the Center's 22-year-old executive director, Lateefah Simon, is often their only support and mentor. Bay Area filmmakers Lexi Leban and Lidia Szajko document the girls' remarkable successes and heartbreaking setbacks.

In GIRL TROUBLE, the girls tell their own stories. In entering their worlds, we begin to see through their eyes, and come to understand their solutions to the seemingly insurmountable challenges they face. The film traces their struggles to transform their lives, within the context of a system that fails to meet the needs of girls in trouble.

GIRL TROUBLE is a production of Critical Images Inc. produced in association with Independent Television Service and KQED Public Television, San Francisco, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional support is provided by The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

## FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

GIRL TROUBLE is a film that evolved over time, and grew up with its subjects. We set out to make a film following six young women for a year, to document their travails in the failing juvenile justice system. The deeper we went into the filmmaking, the more the film changed.

One year of filming became four years. The film ended up focusing on three young women and their amazing peer mentor; the failing juvenile justice system revealed some remarkable advocates. Perhaps most surprising, these young women's stories are more hopeful than the harsh statistics would reveal.

GIRL TROUBLE is the result of years of collaboration among the filmmakers, the young women in the film, and the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD). Six months before the first shoot, we embarked on a process of meeting with the young women and the CYWD to discuss what it would mean to make a documentary together. As a result of this process, the young women and their families gave us permission to film them. So that the film would in no way jeopardize any legal proceedings, we agreed to allow the young women to review the film with their lawyers. We committed to removing material from the film that would have an impact on any open cases. Then we began to film.

The trust relationship was constantly challenged and revisited over the years. We worked hard to explain our intentions along the way to the young women and their families, while they taught us about what it is like to have intimate personal issues made public. Although at times it was hard to keep filming, one of the reasons the young women continued was because of their hope that the film could make a difference for other young women in similar situations.

We have been asked the question, "How did the presence of your cameras affect the girls and their court cases?"

While we don't believe the film is responsible for the actual legal outcomes, we found that the system is stretched thin, and youth offenders who have no support are more likely to fall through the cracks. The mere presence of the camera in the courtroom made officials see our subjects as more special than many of the girls who are often entering the juvenile system alone, with no adult advocate, no family, and no friends on their side. We believe the young women's successes can be attributed to their own perseverance and intelligence, and the labor and support of their advocates

It took us six months to obtain permission to film in the juvenile courts, and another year to gain access to juvenile hall. We were fortunate enough to tap into a group of feminist judges and lawyers in the juvenile courts who were interested in bringing the issues of girls in the system to the general public. They paved the

way for us to collaborate with the courts and probation department. This film would not have been made without their help.

A film like GIRL TROUBLE is made to a large extent in the editing room. We shot approximately 300 hours of footage that eventually became a 74 -minute film. When we started filming, we really had no idea what would happen in the young women's lives. We believed that the stories would reveal themselves over time. With the help of Laurie Schmidt and Josh Peterson, two gifted Bay Area editors, we were able to structure the film as a four-year journey of personal transformation with Lateefah Simon, CYWD's executive director, as a guide.

Premiered at the San Francisco International Film Festival, the film received the Golden Gate Award for Best Bay Area Documentary. It will air on PBS in 2005. In addition to festivals and the television broadcast, we are launching a three-year media campaign, using the film to generate dialogue about policy and program changes that can benefit girls in the system. If you are interested in having the young women of GIRL TROUBLE and/or the filmmakers accompany a public screening of our film, you can contact Lexi and Lidia at [info@girltrouble.org](mailto:info@girltrouble.org). For more information about public screenings in your area, visit [www.girltrouble.org](http://www.girltrouble.org). If you are interested in purchasing a copy of our film, you may do so at [orders@newday.com](mailto:orders@newday.com) or visit our distributor's Web site at [www.newday.com](http://www.newday.com).

*Lexi Leban and Lidia Szajko, 2004*

# INTRODUCTION

Filmed over four years, GIRL TROUBLE documents the struggles and triumphs of three very different young women who have worked at the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) in San Francisco.

CYWD uses a groundbreaking approach to provide *peer-run* services for girls who have been locked up or who are on the street, with an aim towards training them to build healthier lives and rebuild their communities. As CYWD Director, Lateefah Simon says, *"I think there is a misconception all over our country about 'bad girls' -- that they should be in jail, that they are unable to offer stuff."* CYWD starts with the assumption that these girls have a lot to offer.

In GIRL TROUBLE, filmmakers Lexi Leban and Lidia Szajko show viewers just how much there is to learn from these young women. Everyone has made choices in life that end up being bad for them. We don't have to have been in the criminal justice system ourselves to learn from the lives of people who made choices that ultimately led to incarceration. Seeing those mistakes in the context of a program that provides information, support, and the inspiration to transform self and community provides an excellent springboard for discussion and reflection.

See the GIRL TROUBLE segment on the Reentry Web site ([www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/gt.htm](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/gt.htm)) or the film's site ([www.girltrouble.org](http://www.girltrouble.org)) for more information on the film.

## Discussion Topics

Topics you might address using GIRL TROUBLE include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Substance Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Conflict Resolution
- Teen Pregnancy
- Healthy Relationships
- Parenting
- Gender Roles
- Healthy Decision Making
- Gender-specific programming in the juvenile justice system
- Law, policy, and legislation that affect girls

# BACKGROUND

## The People We Meet

### *Shangra*



Sangra is 16 years old when the film begins. Her mother is homeless and a recovering drug addict. Arrested for selling drugs, Shangra is sentenced to Walden House for rehabilitation, where she does very well. When she is transferred to the adult unit, she meets a man, leaves the program with him, and returns to the street, pregnant at age 20.

### *Stephanie*



Stephanie is 16 and pregnant when the film begins. Her father was addicted to drugs and she lives with her grandmother. She has an abusive relationship with her boyfriend (the father of her baby). She eventually clears warrants for running away from a court-ordered placement, separates from her boyfriend, completes her GED, obtains a job, and attends City College with a 3.25 grade point average.

### *Sheila*



Sheila is 17 years old when the film begins, the third of eight children. She lives with her family in the Sunnyside Projects. Her father is an alcoholic and violent to the family when he is not in jail. Some siblings are also in and out of jail. No one in the family has held a regular job. After shooting her brother while she was high, Sheila is sentenced to rehabilitation at Walden House, where she is currently in the reentry phase of the program. She is in a building trades training program, and is preparing to take her GED exam.

### *Lateefah*



Lateefah Simon, executive director of the Center for Young Women's Development, has spent the past nine years of her life advocating for health, safety, and economic justice for young women from the streets of San Francisco. Simon began working at CYWD as a community health outreach worker at age 17. Her immense passion and commitment led her to move up through the organization into her current role at the age of 19. As the organization's leader, she has helped CYWD to grow and develop its approach. She was awarded a 2003 MacArthur Fellowship for her innovative work in developing the Center as a peer-run social service provider.

## The Center for Young Women's Development

Founded in 1993 in San Francisco, CYWD is one of the nation's first youth-run social service organizations. The young women served by the organization assume responsibility for its direction. Adults no longer make decisions affecting young women of color without their input. The success of this model means that young women of color who were formerly incarcerated, working in the street economies, who may or may not be in school, can be leaders, policymakers, researchers, employers, and activists – people who turn their ideas into new solutions to old problems.

The staff, all women 26 and under, many of whom moved up through the program into leadership roles, provide services in four areas:

*"The Center has taught me that my voice is important. I truly feel like I can go out and change the world. The Center has taught me not to hate myself for what I've been through, but to use that experience to create new possibilities for girls like me."*

Jessica Nowlan,  
Youth Works  
Program Director,  
YWCA Marin  
Center  
and  
Former Associate  
Director, Center  
for Young  
Women's  
Development

**Health** – Physical, mental, and spiritual health services help women who have experienced domestic violence, assault, rape, emotional abuse, addiction, and other traumatic life events and health challenges. Services range from traditional counseling to alternative medicine, to self-defense classes.

**Critical Thinking** – Young women develop the skills they need to come to terms with their own experiences, understand them in the larger context of our society, and take responsibility for how they choose to respond. Education methods include social biography, civic engagement activities, attending city commission and board meetings, political education, policy work, and other activities.

**Community Building** – Rather than encouraging young women to escape their circumstances, CYWD helps them re-invest in their own communities by being involved and working for social justice. Activities include street outreach, organizing campaigns, conferences, trainings, social activities, and service projects.

**Skills Development** – Training in literacy, math skills, job etiquette, personal economic strategies, resumes, interview skills, self-expression, assertiveness, and conflict resolution helps women become self-sufficient.

All of the CYWD's services are based on women using their own experiences as the basis of their learning, on integrating all four of the areas listed above, and on bringing each of the four elements to young women in a manner appropriate to their particular situations.

CYWD works with young women in juvenile hall, on the streets, and on-site. They provide referrals and "street law" training, while also engaging in conversations with young women about the circumstances that led them to the streets. Peers share their own stories, offering a credibility that others do not possess. CYWD provides a place to heal and to experience a strong sense of sisterhood while providing the support, information, and skill-building that help young women get through difficult times and become positive change agents in their communities.

Over the course of the next two years, CYWD will publish articles as well as release a study about the impact of its work over the past decade. Please check its Web site ([www.cywd.org](http://www.cywd.org)) for information and read its most current newsletter.

## Statistics

- Girls are 28 percent of the juvenile detention population, but receive only two percent of delinquency services. (CWYD)
- 40 percent of adult prisoners were once in the juvenile justice system. (CWYD)
- Seven percent of all prison inmates are female, about 40 percent of them for violating drug laws and about 25 percent for committing a violent crime. (Amnesty International)
- 41.3 percent of the correctional population in America has attained only “some high school or less” compared to 18.4 percent of the general population. (Harlow, Caroline Wolf. “Education and Correctional Populations, BJS Special Report, January 2003. (NCJ 195670))

## Audiences / Potential Partners

GIRL TROUBLE is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Young people in juvenile detention or on probation
- High schools
- Community-based youth programs
- Counselors and counseling training programs
- Youth groups at churches, synagogues, mosques
- People involved with the justice system (e.g., guards and staff of youth detention facilities, judges, attorneys, police officers, probation supervisors, social service providers, educators)
- Colleges, universities, and community colleges, especially in conjunction with departments of women’s studies, sociology, law, criminal justice / law enforcement, social work, counseling, psychology
- Substance abuse prevention and recovery programs serving youth
- Shelter staff and residents
- Elected officials, policymakers, and their staffs
- Staff, parents, and youth involved in the foster care system
- Legal Aid service providers
- Groups working on prison reform issues

## USING GIRL TROUBLE

This guide is designed to help you use GIRL TROUBLE to engage youth who are facing challenges related to incarceration. It contains suggestions for ways to help young people think more deeply about the issues raised in the film, and to use the film to help young people think more deeply about their own lives.

You may enhance viewing of this film through several strategies:

1. General Discussion.
2. Ask participants to fill in the worksheet (pages 13 – 14) as they view the film.
3. After viewing, focus on a specific topic (e.g., the role of substance abuse). The questions in this section are grouped according to the areas that the Center for Young Women's Development addresses.
4. After viewing, focus on the experience of one girl.

The suggestions in "Exploring the Film" are designed for use in a variety of settings, so not every suggestion will apply to your situation. Rather than attempt to address everything, choose one or two questions that best meet the needs, abilities, comfort level, and interests of your group. Each suggested issue or point could be used to begin a discussion or as a writing prompt. As you make choices about how best to work with your group, consider the strengths and limitations of the various methods of engagement:

**Discussion** – Engaging in conversation is an easy way for many people to share with one another. It is especially useful as a starting point for deeper reflection or action.

**Writing** – Writing provides more time to reflect than does discussion. Because it is done individually and allows for editing, it can also provide a safe way to explore emotional topics. In this context, writing is not an exercise in grammar. People should be free to write what and how they want. Be clear about whether writers will be asked to share what they wrote and with whom. Also be clear about what kinds of feedback writers can expect.

**Activity** – Many of the prompts are designed to be stepping-stones to taking action in the real world. Taking action provides hope and helps people know that they can do something to make change.

## Things to Consider as You Plan

*Who Should Facilitate?* – Because the film raises tough issues, and because young people can find themselves in uniquely vulnerable positions, it is important to have a facilitator who is experienced and who has (or who can easily develop) a trusting relationship with and among group members.

*Goals* – Be realistic about what you hope to accomplish. If you are looking for major change, you may want to consider convening a series of meetings rather than a single event.

*Involving Stakeholders* – It is important to let members of groups speak for themselves. For example, as the core philosophy of the CYWD suggests, it is important to involve young people in the conversations about youth.

*Effective Sharing* – Choose a method of sharing that will meet the needs of your group and help you reach your goal(s). Discussion? Writing? Action? Some combination of those things? As you choose, take into account the language levels and abilities of group members. For example, discussion can be difficult if group members are not all comfortable conversing in the same language. Writing might be an intimidating choice for people who have low-level literacy skills. You should also consider the comfort level of the group. Do you already have a close relationship with group members or are you meeting them for the first time? The less pre-existing trust, the less appropriate it is to use particularly intimate or intense methods of sharing.

*Support* – The experiences of the girls featured in GIRL TROUBLE raise difficult issues. Seeing their stories can evoke intense emotions in some viewers. Know who your local support agencies and/or professionals are and how to contact them in case referrals are appropriate. Pay close attention to how prepared participants are to tackle certain kinds of issues. Take special care not to push individuals too far. If a question or activity seems too personal, skip it. If you are dealing with young people who are not ready to talk about their own situations, try altering questions so that participants can consider them as if they were talking about someone else.

*Be Prepared to Facilitate* – Check the background information and resources so you have enough factual knowledge to keep people on track. Most importantly, review the film and other materials prior to your event and deal with your own emotions before you walk through the door. You will be much more effective if you are not trying to sort through your own emotions at the same time that you are trying to guide others in dealing with their emotions.

## **Preparing the Group**

For people to share openly and honestly, they need to feel comfortable and safe. As a facilitator, you can help set that kind of atmosphere by doing the following:

*Do introductions.* If group members do not already know one another, take some time for everyone to introduce himself or herself.

*Set ground rules for discussion.* Involve the group in setting some basic rules that will help them feel safe. Those ground rules will generally cover three areas:

1. Confidentiality – Do people want to ask others not to repeat what they have said outside the group?
2. Language – To ensure respect, everyone should agree that certain kinds of language, e.g., put downs or yelling, are off limits. Also, to ensure clarity, ask people to speak in the first person (“I think...”) rather than generalizing for others (“Everyone knows that...”).
3. Taking Turns – Use techniques to make sure that everyone who wishes to speak can do so, that one person does not dominate, that no one is attacked, and that

no one is forced to reveal things they do not want to talk about. Be sure to be clear about what your role is.

*Remind people of the value of listening.* You might want to ask people to practice formal “active listening,” in which participants listen without interrupting the speaker, then rephrase to see if they have heard correctly. Or you may just want to remind them that engaging in dialogue is different from participating in a debate. In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening to one another actively.

*Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his/her own experience.* Because who we are influences how we interpret what we see, everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film, and all of them may be accurate. If disagreements occur, ask people to be clear about the evidence they are using to reach their conclusions.

*Establish a time-out mechanism.* Have a pre-planned strategy for what to do if the intensity level rises. A key word or a non-verbal cue (like putting a hand over your heart to signal that you really empathize with what was just said) can help a lot. Agree on a signal that anyone can use to pause the discussion. Let everyone take a deep breath before moving on to deal with the situation.

# EXPLORING THE FILM

## General Discussion Prompts

- What new thing(s) did you learn from this film? How do you think the new insight might change you?
- Did anything in the film surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?
- If you could ask any girl in the film a question, what would you ask and why?
- Which things in the film were most like your own experience? Which things in the film were most different from your own experience?
- Before viewing the film, talk about your perceptions of juvenile offenders or street kids. Where do your ideas come from? What kinds of images do media usually present? Do you think media images of young people, juvenile offenders, and/or street kids are accurate?
- After viewing the film, talk about whether or not any of your ideas about juvenile offenders or street kids have changed and what sparked you to reconsider.
- What, if anything, do you think might have been different in the film if these teens had been boys rather than girls?

## Thinking about GIRL TROUBLE (Worksheet)

As you view the film, use this worksheet to note what role each of the things on the left played in each girl's life.

The questions under each item are only suggestions for questions you might try to answer. The film won't provide answers to every question for every girl.

As a follow-up, you might add a column and think about how each of these things plays out in your own life and how your experiences and choices compare to those of the girls in the film.

	<b>SHANGRA</b>	<b>STEPHANIE</b>	<b>SHEILA</b>
<p><b>FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES</b>            Who was present? Who was absent? Were children functioning as parents? Was home a safe and stable place? Were drugs present? Was the home violent? Was the family a source of support or part of the problem or both?</p>			
<p><b>SOCIAL SERVICES</b>            (The issues surrounding dependency)            What services were needed? What was available? What was provided? What helped? What didn't help? What made things better? What made things worse?</p>			
<p><b>JUSTICE SYSTEM</b>            (The issues surrounding delinquency)            What behaviors are criminalized? What are the penalties for those crimes? Which penalties foster rehabilitation? Which penalties inhibit rehabilitation?</p>			

	<b>SHANGRA</b>	<b>STEPHANIE</b>	<b>SHEILA</b>
<p><b>PEERS</b>            What kinds of people were the girls' friends or boyfriends? What kinds of things did friends do? What were the "norms" of the peer group? For example, did most peers use drugs? Have jobs? Graduate from high school? Get pregnant?</p>			
<p><b>COMMUNITY</b>            What was the neighborhood like where each girl lived? What things were present that were positive or that made life easier? What things were present that were negative or that made life harder? What role, if any, did community institutions like youth clubs, schools, and religious institutions play?</p>			
<p><b>INDIVIDUAL CHOICES</b>            What choices did each girl make about things like drug use, relationships, pregnancy, and education? What was the impact of her choices?</p>			

## Discussion Questions by Topic

The Center for Young Women’s Development divides its services into four areas. This section follows that model to categorize the discussion prompts.

### Health

The questions under this heading can be used to help participants explore health-related issues like pregnancy and substance abuse, as well as making healthy decisions and nurturing healthy relationships.

- Lateefah Simon, executive director of the CYWD says, *“These girls were pretty much their own parents.”* What does it mean to have to fend for yourself? What kinds of things did you do for yourself at age 10 or 13 or 16 or 19? What kinds of things did your family help with? What kinds of things do children do when they don’t enjoy basics like love, food, protection, or supervision from their families?
- Why does Lateefah Simon, who got pregnant at age 18, say, *“Now when I see younger girls pregnant, it hurts my heart.”* *“Why are you doing this right now?”*
- Stephanie believes that smoking marijuana helps her cope with stress. Shangra sells drugs because she thinks it is an effective way to support herself and her mother. As an outsider looking at their lives, did drugs really help these girls? What was the impact of drug use or drug sales on the lives of the girls, their families, and their communities?
- At Walden House, Sheila recognizes how easily she could slip back into abusing drugs: *“People be like, ‘you need to change,’ like it is easy. It’s not easy to change those old behaviors. ‘Cause you didn’t learn them in one day and you are not going to change them in one day.”* Can you think of a habit that you tried to change? Was it hard or easy? Were you successful or not? What kinds of things helped you change and what kinds of things made change more difficult?
- Stephanie says, *“You got to be like a tortoise in life and have some protection...and if my protection is my temper or my attitude, then so be it.”* What do you do to protect yourself? Are there downsides to your strategies? Which strategies work best for you?

### Critical Thinking

The questions under this heading can help people think more deeply about issues and ideas that may be influencing their choices and the choices of their peers, family members, and community.

- At the beginning of the film, Lateefah Simon talks about the labels “bad girl” and “good girl.” Brainstorm a list of the characteristics of a “good girl” and a “bad girl.” Are there things that would put girls in the “bad” category that would not qualify boys for that category?
- Do you agree that the things in the “bad girl” category actually make someone bad and that the things in the “good girl” category actually make someone good? Do you

know anyone who is all bad or all good? In your experience, what kinds of things help a person to express her good side, i.e., when are people most likely to be good? What kinds of things make it more likely that a person will act badly?

- Lateefah Simon says, *“I’ve seen it time and time again, when the women start coming up in their lives, feeling more confident, they get broken down quickly.”* Why do you think a boyfriend might escalate his violence as a girl gains confidence? Why does Stephanie initially dismiss the violence or justify it by saying she started it?
- What is the difference between an explanation and an excuse? Of the things that happened to each girl, which were beyond her control and which things could she control?
- Sheila talks about the economics of dealing drugs. In 4-5 hours working at the Center she makes about \$40, but that same time selling drugs could bring in \$1,000. Do a cost/benefit analysis. Obviously, the income of one is much greater than the other. But what other kinds of costs and benefits does each have in terms of things like safety, satisfaction, and risk of arrest.
- In the ideal, justice is applied to everyone equally. But historically, that has not always been the case. In your view, what role does race, ethnic background, citizenship status, language, and gender play in how easy or hard it is for these girls to build healthy lives for themselves?

### **Community Building**

The questions under this heading can help people explore what kinds of services, policies, and institutions exist in their own communities. In cases where no one in the group knows an answer to the question, you might have the group conduct some research and report back.

- The Center for Young Women’s Development is based on the belief that everyone has something positive to offer and can, with help, find ways to contribute to her community. As you watch this film, think about what kinds of things you have to offer. After the film, make a plan for how you might take action on one of those things.
- Jean Amabile, Stephanie’s public defender says, *“There are kids in San Francisco who have never seen the ocean.”* How might this connect to Lateefah Simon’s comment that people in this country “are throwing away children”? How do things that happen in your community either confirm or contradict Simon’s statement?
- Shangra, who, at the beginning of the film, has never been to court, wonders what it will be like. What do you think of when you think of court? Where do your ideas come from? Do you think courts do a good job of administering justice on behalf of the community? If, not, what would you want to see change?
- From what you see in the film, list some of the differences between what boys and girls need from the juvenile justice system.

- CYWD ally, Julie Posadas Guzman, girls services coordinator at San Francisco Juvenile Hall, notes that, *“When we ignore kids who are abandoned, they are left committing crimes in order to survive.”* What do you think she means? Can you give specific examples? (One example: Shangra shoplifting and selling drugs to support her family.) If you could design an ideal support system for troubled girls in your community, what would it look like? What services would it provide?
- GIRL TROUBLE offers several instances in which the services designed to help the girls actually make life more difficult or lead them to more serious criminal acts. Consider the following examples:
  1. Julie gives an example of a judge sentencing a girl to probation with a 6:00 p.m. curfew, thinking the decision offers her a second chance. But if you don't have a stable family waiting at home, being there at 6:00 p.m. might not be a viable option. If the girl fails at probation, she is placed outside of the home. If she runs from that situation, a warrant is issued, which makes her a criminal.
  2. Stephanie runs away, so a warrant is issued for her arrest. Out of fear of being picked up on that warrant, she will not seek needed medical care for fear that giving her name will result in arrest and potentially the loss of her child to the foster care system.
  3. Sheila is repeatedly in and out of court and sentenced to a myriad of outpatient programs, but her lack of stable and safe housing is ignored. The programs don't work because she is still in the same environment that is contributing to her drug use and violence. When she fails, she is punished further. The cycle leads her to suicidal depression.

Give examples from the film where dependency seems to put a girl on a pathway to delinquency. If possible, look for similar “Catch 22s” in the services available where you live. How might those services be improved to eliminate the pathway from dependency to delinquency?

- Sheila believes that her father's coming home from jail means that she has to leave or face being beaten, despite the existence of a restraining order against him. If a young woman faced similar circumstances where you live, where could she go? What services exist? What needs to be created? What are the legal responsibilities of a parent? What should government or the community be responsible for?
- On a visit to Sheila in jail, Lateefah asks Sheila to think about “Why would the State want to let you out?” Assume that each of the girls in the film has been incarcerated. Why would the State want to let them out? What does the community lose if these girls end up in prison?

## **Skill Building**

GIRL TROUBLE does not provide specific skills training, but it can help participants think through the kinds of skills they might need in different kinds of situations.

Pick any one of the girls and focus in on one aspect of her situation. What are her rights? What are her responsibilities?

- Lateefah advises Shangra, *“You need to ask for what you want from the system. You can’t play like the system is going to take care of you.”* Would you know what to do if you had to interact with the justice system? Who would you ask? If the people around you didn’t know the answers, are there other places in your community you could go? If not, are there things you might do to help create ways for people to obtain the information they need? (The “Know Justice” Handbook described in the Resources section addresses these issues.)
- We see Sheila looking for a college admissions office, but she doesn’t yet have her GED and can’t pronounce the major she is interested in. If you were an admissions officer meeting with her, what would you tell Sheila about what she might need to do to get from where she is to being ready for college? If you don’t know the answer, where could you go to find out what is needed to be ready for college?
- Stephanie observes, *“When you are living on the streets, change is not instantaneous. You take gradual steps, and slowly you get better. What it breaks down to is having people on your side.”* What specific things did people do for Stephanie to let her know that they were “on her side”? Did they support all her choices? How did they support her even when they objected to her choices? How would you provide support to a friend or a peer? How would you support a friend who was making a choice that you thought was not in her best interest?

## Discussion Questions by Individual

The lives featured in GIRL TROUBLE provide an opportunity to learn from example, both good and bad. By looking carefully at each girl's story, viewers can also learn something about themselves.

### Shangra

- Name one choice that Shangra made or one thing she did that you thought was a good thing. Imagine that you were Shangra's friend. Name one choice or thing she did that you would have advised against. What would you have said to her?
- Shangra could live with her sister, but her sister does not want their mother to live with them and Shangra won't go there without her mother. If you were in Shangra's place, would you accept the invitation to live with your sister? Why or why not? If you were in Shangra's sister's place, would you let your mother move in so Shangra would move in? Why or why not? What kinds of programs should be available in our communities so Shangra wouldn't have to make this choice?
- Lateefah checks in with Shangra, who is earning good grades at Walden House: "*You've always been smart... Why is it better here [at Walden House]?*" What does Shangra say is different? Are there differences you notice that she doesn't say? What does this tell you about the impact of environment on one's ability to do their best?
- We see Shangra at Walden House. What are the hard parts of treatment for her? What are the things she appreciates about being at Walden House?
- Why does Shangra slip when she leaves the girls-only adolescent facility of Walden house and goes to the coed adult facility? What did Shangra need when she left that she didn't get? What temptations exist that challenged her ability to stay on course?

### Stephanie

- Name one choice that Stephanie made or one thing she did that you thought was a good thing. Imagine that you were Stephanie's friend. Name one choice or thing she did that you would have advised against. What would you have said to her?
- Lateefah asks Stephanie why she didn't tell anyone that she needed diapers for the baby. Why do you think Stephanie didn't tell anyone? What makes it hard to ask for help?
- Describe how Stephanie's view of her boyfriend's violence towards her changes over time. What do you think prompts the change?
- Stephanie reflects on her outburst at the Center: "*Maybe the feeling behind the feelings of anger is the feeling I'm not going to make it.*" What is the connection between fear and anger? What kinds of things are you afraid of? How do you deal with your fear?

- Stephanie says, *“If I didn’t have a baby, I probably wouldn’t care [about my future].”* How does being a parent change things for her?
- Stephanie asserts, *“I’m going to keep on making it, by all costs.”* Think carefully about the kinds of risks that Stephanie is and is not willing to take to “make it.” For example, is she willing to risk letting her protective shell down at the Center? Are some risks easier to take than others? What kinds of risks are the hardest for you to take?

### **Sheila**

- Name one choice that Sheila made or one thing she did that you thought was a good thing. Imagine that you were Sheila’s friend. Name one choice or thing she did that you would have advised against. What would you have said to her?
- Sheila is accused of selling drugs during work hours. The Center staff decides that they must fire her. What would you have done and why?
- As Sheila faces the prospect of a long prison term, she begins to think that her mistakes mean that her life is pretty much over. How does having hope for a better future, or lack of hope, influence people’s choices when it comes to things like using illegal drugs, committing crimes, getting an education, or taking care of one’s physical health? What kinds of things give people hope?
- Sheila says, *“I learned from just watching people.”* What did she learn from watching the people in her family and her neighborhood? What kinds of things have you learned from the people around you?
- Despite Lateefah’s advice that it will help with her case, Sheila doesn’t want to say what really happened at home. In your opinion, why might Sheila be hesitant to share information that might help her?
- Sheila’s defense attorney berated her by telling her “you screw up constantly.” What effect does this have on Sheila? What might be the consequences of such negative messages and treatment? How should Sheila expect to be treated by her attorney? Does her attorney’s approach help or hurt her?

# RESOURCES

## Web sites

[www.cywd.org](http://www.cywd.org) - The Web site of the group featured in GIRL TROUBLE, the Center for Young Women's Development.

[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org) - Child Welfare League of America includes resources related to foster care, juvenile justice, and much more.

[www.ncjj.org](http://www.ncjj.org) - The National Center for Juvenile Justice conducts research related to the treatment and adjudication of minors in the court system.

[www.girltrouble.org](http://www.girltrouble.org) - This is the Web site for the GIRL TROUBLE film.

[www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org) - The Web site for the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign includes information on the GIRL TROUBLE documentary and producers as well as a PDF version of this discussion guide.

## Books

### "Know Justice" Handbook, Center for Young Women's Development

The "Know Justice" Handbook provides explanations of legal terminology, information about juvenile justice processes, and other resources for youth involved in the system and their families. This 84-page handbook is fully bilingual and features art and writing by incarcerated youth. With the help of The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Tom Toldrin of Ross Periodicals, CYWD is printing 15,000 copies of the "Know Justice" handbook and distributing them FREE to youth throughout California. English and Spanish language versions are available for downloading on CYWD's Web site.



The "Know Justice" Handbook covers topics such as:

- What to do and what not to do if you get arrested
- The difference between juvenile and adult court
- Who's who in the juvenile justice system
- How to advocate for treatment
- What your rights are

### "Know Justice" Curriculum

CYWD has produced a companion curriculum to complement its "Know Justice" handbook. This curriculum expands on some of the information in the handbook and includes hands-on activities. This two-part publication is available for service providers or for youth. Trainers are also available.

### The Hook Ups Girls' Resource Guide

The Center for Young Women's Development's 20-page resource guide for young women involved in the juvenile justice system provides information on housing, employment, health care, and other resources. Available free of charge to young

women, this first-of-its-kind guide gives young women in San Francisco some of the tools they need to achieve stability after exiting the juvenile justice system. (This could be used as a model for other communities.)

***Teenage Runaways: Broken Hearts and Bad Attitudes***, Laurie Schaffner, Haworth Press, 172 pp, 1999 (hardcover and paperback). *Teenage Runaways* offers the perspectives of actual teenage runaways to help professionals, parents, and youths understand the widespread social problem of "last resort" behavior.

## To order GIRL TROUBLE

GIRL TROUBLE is available from distributor New Day Films, 190 Route 17M, P.O. Box 1084, Harriman, NY 10926. Tel: 888.367.9154; Fax: 845.774.2945; E-mail: orders@newday.com; Web site: [www.newday.com/films/GirlTrouble.html](http://www.newday.com/films/GirlTrouble.html).

Costs to purchase or rent the 74-minute VHS film are:

Institutional (Colleges/Universities): US \$275

Community Groups/Public Libraries/High Schools: US \$99

Rental: US \$75

## Companion Video

The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign features an outreach video documentary entitled the ***Center for Young Women's Development***, which provides additional information on the programs and practices of CYWD. *"All of the Center's programs have been designed with a holistic approach and recognizes that each young woman already has the experience and strength necessary to become a powerful leader and an agent for change."* The video can assist youth-serving or youth-directed organizations in developing local strategies to work with young women from the streets and the juvenile justice system, providing them with educational and employment opportunities and helping them build healthier lives and healthier communities. Produced by Dean Radcliffe-Lynes, this 14½ minute video may be used on its own or as a companion to GIRL TROUBLE. Visit the Reentry Web site ([www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org)) for more information on the video, to request a complimentary copy for a community or organizational screening, and to download the short discussion/resource guide.

# GIRL TROUBLE

## Production Staff

**Lexi Leban -- Producer / Director.** Leban is an award winning independent documentary filmmaker and public television producer. Her short films have screened at film festivals worldwide from San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, to the Berlin International Film Festival. Her film *More Than a Paycheck*, toured with the Women in the Director's Chair national film series. Leban is the Co-producer of *Mama Wuhunzi* (Women Blacksmiths) a film shot on location in Uganda and Kenya about women with disabilities who spark a wheelchair-building revolution in Africa. She is the Associate Producer of *Everyday Heroes*, an intimate portrait of several bold young workers in the AmeriCorps program of National Service. She teaches video production, editing, and compositing in the Digital Motion Picture Department at Cogswell College in Silicon Valley.

**Lidia Szajko -- Producer / Director / Cinematographer.** Szajko is an independent filmmaker and film educator whose work has screened at festivals internationally. Her work has received many awards, including the Isabella Liddell Art Award for Most Promising Woman Filmmaker at The 28th Ann Arbor Film Festival, the Peoples Choice Award at the 23rd Annual Humboldt Film & Video Festival, Honorable Mention at the Golden Gate Awards of the San Francisco International Film Festival and an Award of Merit at Superfest XVIII, An International Media Festival on Disabilities. Szajko is Chair of the Film Production Department at City College of San Francisco. She was appointed to the San Francisco Film Commission in 2001.

## GIRL TROUBLE Advisors

**Laurie Schaffner** is the leading academic advisor for the project. She holds a B.A. from Smith College and Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley. She is the author of, *Teenage Runaways, Broken Hearts and Bad Attitudes*, and is a professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois, Chicago. She also served as a Commissioner on the San Francisco Juvenile Justice Commission. She provided GIRL TROUBLE with the most current research on girls in the juvenile justice system.

**Julie Posadas-Guzman** is an attorney and coordinator of Girls Services at San Francisco Juvenile Hall. Her job is to provide training and workshops in the community for at-risk youth on street law and juvenile justice issues. She gives workshops for the girls incarcerated at Youth Guidance Center in San Francisco. Her support enabled the producers to gain access to the group at San Francisco's juvenile hall.

**Patty Lee** is San Francisco Deputy Public Defender for juveniles. She provided the project with information on the law, and how public policy affects criminal defense cases involving the girls followed in the documentary. She has also obtained both parental consent and the permission of Judge Donna Hitchins to film any court proceedings involving the main characters.



**GIRL TROUBLE** is one of the public television programs showcased in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. All productions incorporate the theme of **reentry into family and community by individuals who were formerly incarcerated**. These and other programs are elements of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), an outreach project supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Launched in February 2001, MCMOI links media broadcasters to local stakeholders as a means to promote the Foundation's mission to help build strong and connected neighborhoods for children and families. Visit the Reentry Web site at: [www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org).

MCMOI campaigns are managed by Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive, high profile educational and community outreach campaigns for media projects. For more information and community-use materials for these exciting programs, please visit the MCMOI Web site at [www.mcmoi.org/](http://www.mcmoi.org/).

For more information on the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, please contact:

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The Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign is funded by a generous grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation.



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