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## The Florida Times-Union

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# Important national center for girls opens in Jacksonville

By

*Special to the Times-Union*

This week in Jacksonville, we celebrated a major step toward creating a better future for girls and young women in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

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On Thursday, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency launched the Center for Girls and Young Women, a landmark venture to improve outcomes for girls - not just in Jacksonville or Florida, but nationwide.

That this event of national significance is occurring in Jacksonville is no accident. Our community has played a major role in advancing the state of knowledge and practice around what works for at-risk girls.

Since 1998, the national council has been engaged in research and learning around the unique needs of girls and effective strategies for addressing those needs in a juvenile justice setting. Much of that research has been rooted in a study of girls in Duval County and Florida's juvenile justice system.

In 2000, the national council published *Educate or Incarcerate - Girls in the Florida and Duval County Juvenile Justice Systems*, a groundbreaking report that outlined girls' unique paths to delinquency and the correspondingly unique, gender-specific strategies needed to prevent, intervene and support them. The national council followed that work with another highly acclaimed report, "A Rallying Cry for Change," released in 2006.

Unfortunately, Jacksonville has been fertile ground for this work. As the Times-Union reported in its Oct. 4 editorial (*Juvenile Justice: Don't Ignore Girls*), Duval County leads the state in the number of girls admitted to the juvenile justice system for misdemeanors and non-law violations, though it is far from the most populous county in the state.

While Florida has mandated gender-specific services for girls in the juvenile justice system, implementation has been uneven, capacity is inadequate and funding is erratic, according to the Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability.

Against this background, we are proud to be partners in Justice for Girls, a local initiative in partnership with the statewide advocacy group Children's Campaign, Inc., to reduce the number of girls entering the juvenile justice system in Duval County and improve the options for those who do.

We are equally proud of the opening of the national council's Center for Girls and Young Women.

The center will focus on research, assessment services, staff training and evaluation and will partner with the Children's Campaign to build an advocacy base.

These activities are intended to help juvenile justice and child welfare systems that are designed for boys meet the specific needs of girls and young women.

In other words, the center can take the lessons and knowledge gained here in Jacksonville and Florida and share them with communities across the country, leveraging greater opportunities for change.

We applaud the hard work of those who have led this effort: Barry Krisberg, president of the national council; Lawanda Ravoira, a nationally recognized girls advocate and now director of the Center for Girls and Young Women; and Roy Miller, president of the Children's Campaign and a trusted political guide and counsel. And we are humbled by courageous girls and young women whom we have met throughout this work.

We urge you to learn more about the unique needs of at-risk women and girls, to support efforts to help them, and to share what you learn with others.

Sherry P. Magill is president of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. Nina Waters is president of The Community Foundation in Jacksonville. Joan Van Vleck is president of the Women's Giving Alliance.

This story can be found on Jacksonville.com at [http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/101908/opl\\_345600610.shtml](http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/101908/opl_345600610.shtml).

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