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The YWCA of Portland, Oregon  
Girls' Emancipation Program:

## HELP GIRLS CREATE INDEPENDENT FUTURES

by Ruth Herman Wells, M.S.

"Oregon's at-risk girls and young women are the mothers of the next generation yet they are virtually invisible until one of their sons slashes your tires."

*Oregon Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee's At-Risk Girls and Young Women's Study Group, 1988*

When Neil Goldschmidt, Governor of Oregon, toured the YWCA Girls' Emancipation Program (GEP) as part of his state-wide "Children's Agenda" campaign, a long-time teen prostitute who had joined the program confronted the new governor with the system's years of neglect of older girls:

"How could you let this happen to me? First my family let me down and when I needed help, nobody ever noticed me except the pimps. I did the same things as the boys but there was no way to get help. There was nobody there when I needed them."

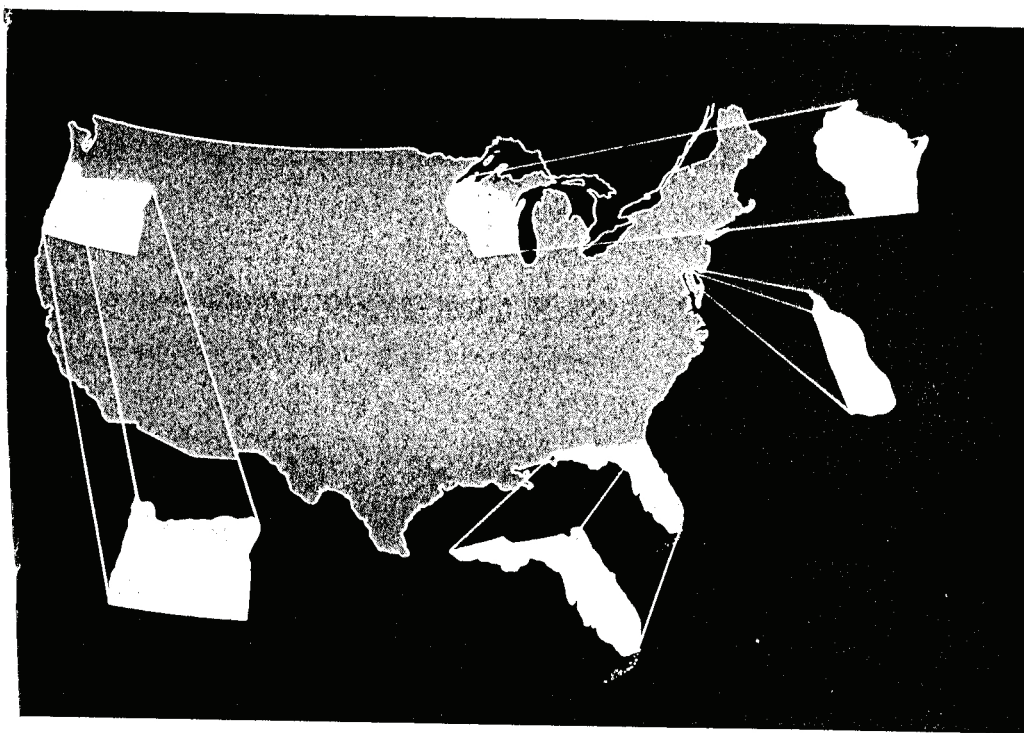
These accusations were well-founded as preceding governors had not addressed the state system's failure to provide older adolescent girls with the help they needed. A 1989 Catholic Community Services Foundation study showed that Oregon's Children's Services Division (CSD) devoted 60% of its resources to boys even though girls were 56% of the child abuse victims, 75% of the sexual abuse victims, and 54% of the physical abuse victims. In the state's most populous county, Multnomah County, CSD noted that 34% of the boys on their caseloads were provided treatment services while just 10% of the girls were given the same option. During the last two years, both the state and local CSD, along with the state's Child and Youth Services Commission, have committed themselves to identifying and rectifying statewide service distribution for girls.

The Portland YWCA secured one year of limited foundation support to begin a project addressing the gap in services for delinquent and troubled girls. A novel program design was created from "scratch." Once opened, it became apparent that there was an

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# PROGRAMMING FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

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