

# Theory of Change



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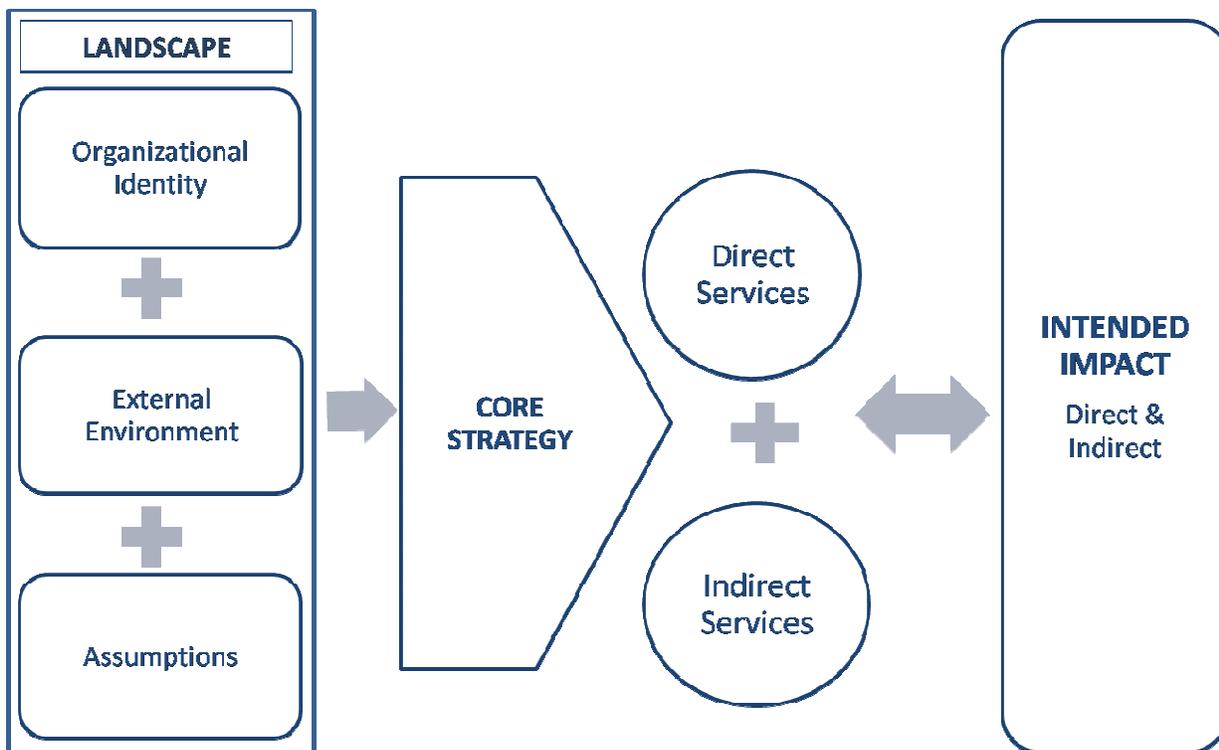
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## Introduction

This document outlines the beliefs that underpin the work of Powerful Voices. Our approach, our assumptions about how deep and lasting change happens in the lives of girls, our conclusions from research and best practices and the relationship between our actions and our intended impact all combine into a “pathway to change” or “blueprint” of how we see and understand the world we live in as well as the world we seek to create as a result of our efforts.

While our Theory of Change is a high-level tool for communications and accountability and does identify powerful strategies and outcomes, it is not a Strategic Plan. Our Strategic Plans are short-term (up to 5 year) plans that identify strategic catalyst points for targeted investments of time, money and energy. Specific outcomes, activities, and benchmarks are informed by our Theory of Change and, in turn, our Theory of Change is influenced by what we learn along the way as our work and the world around us evolves.

The visual diagram below illustrates how the different pieces of the theory of change used by Powerful Voices relate to and flow to and from one another. It is meant to provide a conceptual overview of how the different pieces work together to form a “causal pathway” leading to the intended impact, and shifts the focus of a nonprofit’s work from what is being done to what is to be achieved.



## LANDSCAPE

### Organizational Identity

#### Vision Statement

All girls live healthy, personally meaningful lives in a society that values them.

#### Mission Statement

Powerful Voices fosters adolescent girls' development by providing programs and promoting social justice so girls can realize their dreams, engage their communities and shape a better world.

#### Values Statement

**SAFETY** –*We believe safety is a basic human right.*

Safety is the freedom from the physical, psychological, social, and sexual harm. feeling and being safe is fundamental to and individual's positive self worth and subsequently healthy relationships.

**DIVERSITY**– *We believe in the power of diverse communities.*

Diversity is the variety of identifying experiences? Perspectives? Within a community, including ideologies, racial or ethnic classifications, cultures, gender identities, generations, socio-economic classes, sexual orientations, nationalities, abilities and life experiences. The diversity of the girls we serve, and amongst Powerful Voices' supporters, generates the rich perspective that enables us to offer the solutions needed to develop strong communities.

**JUSTICE**– *We believe in a more just society.*

For Powerful Voices, justice means making equitable gains in health, economic, educational and legal systems. Recognizing that disparity exists among the girls, we serve the girls with the highest needs and those with limited access to opportunity. Powerful Voices empowers girls and their community to advocate for justice and equity.

**INNOVATION**– *We believe innovation enables us to fulfill our mission.*

Innovation is the employment of creativity and critical thought to develop new solutions and approaches to achieve our mission. Combining proven practices with creative opportunities augments experiences and outcomes. Innovation leads to program enhancements and organizational development, more effective community outreach and fundraising, in addition to new marketing opportunities.

**INTEGRITY** –*We believe in acting with honesty and accountability.*

Acting with integrity is being ethical, fair, honest and accountable. At Powerful Voices, integrity is fundamental to our decision-making, leadership, direct services, donor and partner relations, as well as community-wide advocacy.

## Operating Capacities

Powerful Voices recognizes that in order to effect transformational change that endures over time, it must be a well-run and sustainable organization. On a regular basis, Powerful Voices assesses its operating strengths and weaknesses in order to inform financial and human investments in organizational development efforts. We assess our operating effectiveness in the following areas:

- Mission, vision, strategy & planning
- Program design and evaluation
- Human resources
- Senior management and leadership
- Information technology
- Financial management
- Fund development
- Board leadership
- Legal affairs
- Marketing, communications and external relationships

## The External Environment

Powerful Voices and its stakeholder constituencies exist within a complex landscape of socio-economic and political forces that have tremendous impact on the quality of life for girls, both positive and negative. We understand the value of following trends in the external environment and strategically assessing and responding in order to maximize organizational effectiveness both in the short and long term. We assess and follow trends in the following areas:

- Trends impacting adolescent girls
- Trends in policy, research and training
- Trends in available funding
- Trends affecting primary institutional partners
- Trends affecting all-girl program collaborators

## **Our Beliefs and Assumptions**

Powerful Voices' theory of change is grounded in a set of beliefs and assumptions that underpin our approach. Our beliefs and assumptions shape how we develop our programs, how we deliver our curriculum, how we set goals and how we communicate who we are to girls, parents, staff, board members, donors and partners. We have four overarching beliefs and assumptions:

### **A strengths-based approach is both respectful and effective.**

Our strengths-based program approach is grounded in resiliency and prevention research and draws from girls' knowledge, skills, values, interests, goals, creativity and passion. Powerful Voices believes the more we use our strengths, the more we lead our own lives in a meaningful way and positively contribute to our communities.

### **Girl-specific, relationship-based programs work to empower girls.**

Girl-specific programming addresses girls' needs for positive girl culture, values and identity development and healthy female connection both with peers and adults. Research shows that girls tend to make decisions within the relational context of peers. Powerful Voices believes adolescence is a crucial developmental time for girls. Skills related to thinking and communication developed during adolescence impact decision-making through adulthood.

### **Working within institutions to ensure safety and equity is critical to realizing long-term gains in girls' lives.**

Even today – decades since the civil rights, feminist and LGBTQ movements — we live in a society where girls are marginalized, sexualized and victimized. The publicly-funded school and detention systems are not historically designed to address girls' needs, often resulting in girls being alienated and institutionally oppressed. Powerful Voices believes that safety and equity are basic human rights within the school and detention systems and essential to promote cultural shift within these systems.

### **Life-long social justice activists are created when girls are encouraged to challenge bias, prejudice and inequalities in their everyday lives.**

Alongside working to build girls' emotional, social, educational and employment skills, we also believe in encouraging open critical analysis of societal norms so that girls may begin to challenge bias and prejudice and build a more just and equitable world. Research supports the importance of these skills and that a girl is more likely to take on leadership as an adult if this is practiced in adolescence. Powerful Voices believes this combination of skills is essential to the ability to accomplish goals, realize dreams, and shape a more just world.

## CORE ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

Powerful Voices will achieve its mission by creating, offering and evaluating culturally responsive asset-based programs for adolescent girls with the greatest needs and with limited access to the necessary resources. We will work in schools and detention systems, places historically designed for boys, to empower girls to shape and advocate for an environment that is responsive to their needs. Simultaneously, Powerful Voices will actively participate in the development, implementation and integrity of social justice policies for girls. Our approach to offering direct services, fostering community partnerships, and influencing policies will address the urgent need of individual girls while strategically impacting institutional change for the betterment of the broader community. We will increase organizational capacity and ensure sustainability by securing diverse and reliable funding streams.



## SERVICES

### Direct Services: Individual Growth & Development

Powerful Voices promotes the individual growth and development of girls by offering the following services:

#### Powerful Choices Middle School Groups

Groups help vulnerable youth to develop the skills to identify, prevent and terminate demeaning, violent and potentially exploitative relationships. Combining several evidence-based curricula, we will provide 100 truant middle school girls with the skills they need to stay safe. The program includes 30 weekly groups for middle school girls at Asa Mercer, Aki Kurose and Denny International middle schools, three 12-week community-based groups for lesbian, trans, queer and questioning youth and summer programs. Powerful Choices also includes monthly individual meetings with youth and a mentor, a family engagement component and participation in a youth-led social justice conference.

#### Youth Employment Program

Our employment program consists of two seasonal cohorts and serve a total of 20 girls ages 14 through 17. Powerful Voices provides training and support for girls who have been victims or perpetrators of violence to get them employment ready. The first cohort, ActiveVistas, focuses on careers in activism and advocacy. During the course of the program, participants gain exposure to local and global health and safety issues affecting girls and women while developing skills in teamwork, public speaking, writing, research, community organizing, facilitation, and management of group dynamics. In addition, they learn interviewing techniques; resume writing and work place expectations. Girls engage in developing critical thinking, presentation, and communication skills by developing and organizing workshops on topics related to girls' safety and health that are presented at the Powerful Voices youth led *Girlvolution* Conference in April. The second cohort is called DYVAS (Develop Your Voices and Speak). Over the course of the program youth work together to create their own media as a form of activism in a print and online accessible zine (alternative source of media). Girls create written and artistic pieces that relate to the weekly themes (such as how women are portrayed in the media) over the course of the program. Youth also accrue 32 volunteer hours to go towards their graduation requirement.

#### Case Management

Through a contract with the City of Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative we work with 36 youth annually ages 12 through 17 who are at the highest risk of being victimized or perpetuating violence. Case management services include, but are not limited to, prevention and intervention strategies for assessment, advocacy, and referral to employment services, education support services, mentoring, recreational programming, substance abuse treatment, and mental health counseling along with follow-up services.

## Indirect Services: Institutional & Community Advocacy

Powerful Voices promotes social justice for girls by:

Powerful Voices promotes social justice for girls by:

- Hosting our annual Girlvolution Conference. This girl-led conference began in 2010 and is produced by ActiveVistas, a Powerful Voices employment program. Over 150 youth and adult allies come together for one day each April to participate in workshops and dialogue on related to girls' safety and health.
- Sharing best practices & program models with collaborative partners in the region through our GirlJustice trainings, conference presentations and trainings.
- Building collaborations across the girl-serving sector
- Informing thought & community leaders on best practices with girls
- Advocating for progressive gender-specific policies and practices within the public education and juvenile justice systems



## INTENDED IMPACT

### Relationships & Identity

*Ensure girls connect to their personal values, take pride in their identity, develop healthy relationships with others so girls can meaningfully contribute to their communities and live the lives they most desire.*

#### Impact Approach

Use group and 1:1 programming to encourage healthy relationships, media literacy, minimizing girl drama, transforming the culture among girls to one that is based in respect of self and others. We believe that all of our programs teach girls to value themselves, their education and creating a positive girl culture.

#### Rationale

Relationships are central to healthy female adolescent development. Yet harmful, media-fed values in mainstream girl culture often form the backdrop for how girls relate to one another. Additionally, intimate partner violence, bullying and the rise in school gang activity all are rooted in the context of relationships. Our programs are a vital, one-of-a-kind opportunity to explore values and identity as girls build healthy peer and adult relationships and transform the culture among girls. This holds important implications for how girls understand their identity and form relationships over their lifetime.

### Safety & Health

*Prevent girls' victimization, address social/emotional development and promote healthy decision making to address health and safety disparities.*

#### Impact Approach

Use group and 1:1 programming to fill gaps in girls' social/emotional development, their tools for health and reproductive decision-making and the access they have to housing and traumatic stress treatment. We believe that our health education and in detention workshop programming addresses best practice curriculum related to girls' safety, social/emotional development, relationships and health decision making.

#### Rationale

Middle school is a key developmental time to address girls' health and safety issues, as patterns of violence and mental illness start early. Girls in the juvenile justice system—with victimization rates estimated as high as 80%—receive little or have no access to information that could save or dramatically improve their lives. A safe environment for health education and resource access is foundational to healthy decision making, yet the school and juvenile justice systems are challenged to adequately address these needs.

### Education & Economics

*Provide girls with knowledge of how education affects economic success, develop critical thinking, self-advocacy and employment skills to address education and employment disparities.*

## Impact Approach

Use group and 1:1 programming to develop girls' self-advocacy, critical thinking and employment skills to address education and employment disparities. We believe that all of our programs teach girls to value themselves, their education and creating a positive girl culture. We believe that our employment program addresses the economic disparities for girls of color, as well as the added employment challenges court involved girls face.

## Rationale

Greater educational attainment results in better employment opportunities and higher income. Girls of color continue to lag far behind in educational achievement and employment readiness; specifically, drop-out rates, pregnancy, truancy rates and wage gaps are highest for African-American, Latina and Native American girls. Immigrant Asian American ELL students are underserved and unsupported, experience academic difficulties and are stigmatized.

## Policy & Advocacy

*Support girls and the community to work together on girl's issues to promote equity and make the world a just place for everyone.*

## Impact Approach

Use outreach, training and advocacy to develop critical thinking, knowledge, and skills to raise awareness and move society in a more gender-responsive and equitable direction. We believe that girls' involvement in community service and service learning are fundamental to our social justice agenda. Areas of focus will include *group education* and *outreach* directed at individual change in working effectively with girls, understanding their needs and changing beliefs and norms that are harmful to girls. Another area of focus will be policy advocacy directed at changes in systems including improved juvenile justice, education, health and housing.

## Rationale

Educational and juvenile justice systems were not historically designed to meet girls' needs. Significant disparities in economic, education, health and juvenile justice outcomes for girls of color exist. In addition, girls desire to be a leader, as well as their involvement in programs to develop leadership skills, declines with age. Our programs develop leadership skills in tandem with awareness of inequity based on gender, race, class and other forms of discrimination. Policy makers, the community and those responsible for girls' development are among those we want to engage. Together, girls and adults can use these skills to advocate for next-generation gains in education, juvenile justice, employment, health, safety and interpersonal relationships.