

# VOICES HEARD

## *Women & Girls Speak*

THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN 21ST CENTURY NORTHEAST FLORIDA

Executive Summary



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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

*Voices Heard* is the result of an 18-month research effort. The Women's Giving Alliance (The Alliance) commissioned The Florida Center for Public Policy and Leadership (The Florida Center) to conduct a study on the status of women and girls of the five-county (Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and St. Johns) First Coast area. The Alliance's goals for the study were to:

- Inform the Alliance and other donors so that their grants are targeted toward areas of greatest need and potential for impact.
- Influence the resources, services and support provided by community-based organizations, social service agencies, corporations and others.
- Provide information that will assist advocacy efforts designed to enhance the lives of women and girls and by doing so, improve our communities.

The methods used in the research process included accessing archival and quantitative data as well as qualitative data collection. While every effort has been made to check the accuracy and completeness of the information presented, any errors are the responsibility of the authors. Any questions about the methodology used for this study should be directed to: Dr. Jeffrey A. Will, Director of Research and Director of Urban and Strategic Initiatives at The Florida Center. (904) 620-4408; [jwill@unf.edu](mailto:jwill@unf.edu).

## ADDITIONAL COPIES

Additional copies of this report, the Executive Summary or a CD that is a compilation of all the data collected are available by contacting:

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# VOICES HEARD

*Women & Girls Speak*

THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN 21ST CENTURY NORTHEAST FLORIDA

**THE WOMEN'S GIVING ALLIANCE OF JACKSONVILLE**  
An Initiative of the Community Foundation

**THE FLORIDA CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND LEADERSHIP  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA**

## FUNDING PARTNERS

THE JESSIE BALL DUPONT FUND

THE REMMER FAMILY FOUNDATION, INC.

RIVER BRANCH FOUNDATION

BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF FLORIDA

WEAVER FAMILY ADVISED FUND FOR EDUCATION

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

# About The Research Partners

## **THE WOMEN'S GIVING ALLIANCE**

The Alliance was established in 2001, as a special initiative of The Community Foundation Inc. to enable women in Northeast Florida to direct their charitable interests in direct, strategic ways. Its members are from neighborhoods throughout the greater Jacksonville area, and include women from a wide variety of professions and ages.

The mission of the Alliance is to enlighten and inspire the women of Northeast Florida to be leaders in philanthropy and to demonstrate the impact of collective giving. The goals are:

- To increase philanthropy in the Northeast Florida area
- To involve women in strategic giving that produces lasting impact
- To improve the lives of women and girls in Northeast Florida
- To build an endowment to benefit future generations of women and girls

The Community Foundation promotes private philanthropy in Northeast Florida through donor education programs and the administration of grant-making funds. It provides donor education through the Philanthropic Initiative, a hands-on practicum in grant-making for Jacksonville's future leaders and philanthropists. In addition, it supports informed grant-making by a number of advised funds.

## **THE FLORIDA CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND LEADERSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA**

The Florida Center is an interdisciplinary public policy research and leadership enterprise. Founded in 2001, The Florida Center conducts research on both emerging and persistent problems that require effective public sector responses and seeks to identify and assess the potential impact of pursuing alternative responses that might address those problems. It also provides a neutral forum for discussion, debate and deliberation that enhances leadership capacity and development across a wide array of political, institutional and education sectors.

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to the individuals and organizations who have contributed time, expertise, energy and funding to conduct this study and to share its results with the community.

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# Why This Research?

The Alliance wanted to know how to make meaningful investments of philanthropic resources to better the lives of women and girls in Northeast Florida. To do so, we needed to have a more complete picture, by county, of the current realities for women and girls.

In addition to our desire to lead the effort to consolidate existing data, we wanted qualitative data to augment the quantitative data. We wanted to hear what women and girls had to say about their lives and to help explain, confirm or challenge the numbers. Hence the title of the study—*Voices Heard*.

## WHAT IS THE SCOPE?

A detailed report, *Voices Heard—Women and Girls Speak: The Status of Women and Girls in 21st Century Northeast Florida*, outlines the research findings that include whenever available, data by county and typically in comparison to state and/or national experience (see inside the front cover of this Executive Summary for information about how to order that report). The data and related commentary cover the following areas:

- **Demographics**— a profile of 51 percent of the First Coast’s population.
- **Family**— a look at women’s roles in the family and the issues of childcare and eldercare.
- **Economic Autonomy**— an assessment of progress, or lack thereof, of financial stability and independence for women.
- **Health and Well-Being**— a check-up on areas of health and well-being specific to women and girls.
- **Violence & Crime**— scrutiny of the limited data available on violence against women and the issues regarding juvenile crime.
- **Representation**— highlights women’s concerns regarding the lack of women in public and private sector leadership roles.
- **Resources & Support**— a gathering of information about Northeast Florida’s resources for women and girls.

The Executive Summary is drawn from the full report and highlights the results, organized by women and then by girls. While there are differences in the findings among and between each of the five counties that are noted in the full report, this summary primarily reflects results across the First Coast communities.

## WHAT HAVE WE FOUND?

Women and girls of the First Coast agree that change has occurred in their lives and environments, and many are reasonably optimistic about the future. Despite this overall optimism, the story that unfolds from this research indicates there



are only a few areas in the lives of women and girls that show positive progress and improvement. This is notwithstanding the fact that much of the quantitative data captured in this study is public information and has been available, and in some cases published, for the past few years.

While we must acknowledge and recognize that many of the issues and concerns women and girls face are complex and do not lend themselves to easy “fixes,” we expected greater progress in some arenas.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

In many ways, the issues that need to be addressed to make the future better for women and girls are not new developments. Perhaps that is the most significant finding of this study, and the greatest tragedy. The Alliance has determined not to turn a blind eye, but to focus its vision.

We will no longer accept these unhealthy realities for women and girls on the premise that some things never change. The Alliance is committed to:

- Further dialogue with the community about the results.
- Focus its attention and its grant dollars to convert the findings of this research into action.

As you read this summary we hope that you will be inspired to join this dialogue and help us drive the action that is needed to implement change for women and girls throughout our community.

# The Big Picture

## **A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE: WHO ARE THE WOMEN AND GIRLS OF THE FIRST COAST?**

Women and girls represent 51 percent of the First Coast's population.

Overall, this population:

- Is not very diverse racially or in terms of being foreign-born, other than in Duval County. The five counties ranged from being 65 to 91 percent white.
- Continues to be challenged by income inequity compared to males. Median earnings in 1999 for females 16 years or older in the five counties ranged from 57 to 73 percent of males' median earnings.
- Reflects the changes evident in the greater society regarding marriage and divorce. In contrast to the state, Northeast Florida has an overall higher percentage of divorces compared to the number of marriages.
- Has a majority who have education at the high school level or above.

Of particular interest is the age distribution. It provided information on the issues women and girls face today, and equally important, offered insight into the potential concerns and needs for the future. Two important considerations emerged relative to the age profile.

1) Women in their 40s and 50s made up the largest proportion of females for each geographic region. When those over 60 were included, the combined profile showed that 42 to 53 percent of women were 40 years and older. In the coming years, we can see that the First Coast communities are likely to experience challenges associated with aging populations and the attendant challenges for both women and their families.

2) Young girls and teenagers represented 22 to 30 percent of the female population. These demographics signal that there is a chance to make a difference in girls' lives, to prevent the recurrence of issues that face teens in particular, and to potentially reduce the prospect that girls will face some of the challenges their mothers and grandmothers have had to address.

## **IS LIFE BETTER OR WORSE? WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?**

*“I think 50 percent are optimistic but the other 50 percent don’t even think about their future . . .The idea of optimism, I don’t even think that’s on their radar.”*

This quote captures the sentiment expressed through the survey process and through discussions with women and girls. Many women were experiencing a better life and viewed the future as positive for themselves and for girls. However, that sense of optimism was limited to those with the skills necessary to financially rise above the circumstances in their lives. For those who are stuck in unskilled, low-paying jobs, those who lack healthcare and emotional support, and those who cannot adequately provide for themselves or their families, their primary interest is survival.

## **ARE THERE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT AND ASSIST?**

Getting help and support to cope with the challenges that women and girls face is critically important. Many First Coast communities have responded with great effort to the specific issues and needs of girls, women and their families. The research team identified over 140 services of particular value to women and girls. While there is a multitude of services offered, many concerns remain to be addressed.

The primary concerns are availability of valuable and quality resources for girls (particularly after-school activities) and accessibility of services both in terms of geographic access and time of day. Beyond availability of the right services at times and places that make sense for those who need them, a more pervasive dilemma was actual knowledge of those resources. Many women interviewed were unaware of existing programs, or had only a hazy idea of what was available or where.

# Women of the First Coast: Areas of Promise and Concern

## AREAS OF PROMISE

### *Higher Education*

At all local universities and colleges, females represented the majority of students. Both women and girls expressed optimism about opportunities for higher education and the resources that are available. The one exception pertained to the lack of doctoral programs and the low representation of women in science, engineering and computer science programs.



### *Confidence*

Overall, women on the First Coast expressed high levels of confidence in handling transactions like car or home purchases. They also noted that in the more “traditional nurturing” realms (healthcare, education, family issues) they felt their opinions were taken seriously.

However, that same confidence is not as evident when asked if their opinions on politics were taken seriously.

### *Making a Difference*

Given the large percentage of women who are registered to vote, women can (if they choose), and in some cases have, made inroads in the public sector. Women expressed optimism that there will be more appointment and/or election of women to positions of influence.

## AREAS OF CONCERN

### *Economic Issues*

Despite the progress in this country and Northeast Florida on gender

equity in the workplace, the economic status of women remains unequal to that of men. The economic status of women is characterized by the following:

- Women working full-time on the First Coast made as little as 67 percent of what men made in 1999. Nationally, according to the U.S. Census, women's hourly wages in 2003 still only equaled 81.3 percent of men's median wages. Despite the confidence expressed by First Coast women in many aspects of their lives, over half felt less than confident about negotiating for a raise. However, 71 percent believed they must perform their jobs better than men in order to achieve promotion or salary comparable to their male counterparts.
- In Northeast Florida the availability of jobs or career fields that provide not only basic employment but pay above subsistence level is limited. Many women still work in feminized jobs and professions characterized by lower status and pay.
- Poverty is a reality for too many single mothers on the First Coast; depending on the county 25 to 61 percent of them live below the poverty level.

### ***Childcare and Eldercare***

The challenge of managing their multiple roles and expectations surfaced as a worry for many women. While a great majority of First Coast women believed that women can work full-time and be good mothers, the resources to support them as primary caregivers for their children and/or their elderly parents posed problems. For some, it is a lack of awareness of resources; for some, it is accessibility of the resources (limited transportation is often cited as a reason); and for still others, it is the inability to afford what is available.

### ***Health and Well-Being***

Health issues fell into two major areas—the current state of women's health, and accessibility to quality and affordable healthcare resources. Both of these issues can be exacerbated for 13 percent of women polled who are not covered by a health plan or insurance.

#### **Current State of Women's Health**

Of the women polled for this study, 22 percent rated their health as being only fair or poor compared to others their age. More than 11 percent reported

they suffer from a chronic disease. The statistics reflected some serious issues related to women's health:

- Infant mortality rates for the First Coast did not exhibit any definitive trend; however, the rates for African-American mothers were significantly higher than those of the local population in general.
- Duval County had a relatively higher incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in females ages 15-34 than other First Coast counties or the state.
- Between 1997 and 2002 almost 1,300 females ranging from newborn to 50 plus years old were diagnosed with AIDS in the five-county area. Of those, African-American women represented 78 percent of all female cases on the First Coast.
- Age-adjusted mortality rates for breast and cervical cancer were high in two area counties, and lung cancer mortality rates for white women were among the highest in the nation.

### **Healthcare Resources**

Of women polled on the First Coast, 42 percent found the quality of the region's healthcare services to be either only fair or poor. Women interviewed pointed to a lack of healthcare options, lack of insurance, transportation issues in healthcare accessibility, and inequitable Medicaid and Medicare coverage for men and women. Others commented that if a woman had money and other resources, the available healthcare was affordable and of good quality.

### ***Violence Against Women***

Violence against women and girls is a serious problem in our society. While the state of Florida as a whole saw the rate of reported domestic violence against women increase in the last decade, the five-county area overall saw rates drop over that same time period. Although this is encouraging news, the rates of domestic violence are still unacceptably high; especially considering this is a vastly underreported crime. The impact of victimization is devastating, and is an area that needs continued attention in terms of community awareness, legislative vigilance and the resources to support women who are the unfortunate victims of assault of any kind.

# Girls:

## Areas of Promise and Concern

Previous pages of this report painted a picture of areas of promise and concern for women. However, obtaining information for girls that is comparable to that of women is more challenging. Some of the difficulty lies in the availability of gender-specific data at the county level, and in the sensitivity needed when interviewing girls to get more qualitative and attitudinal perspectives.

### AREAS OF SOME PROMISE AND OF SOME CONCERN

#### *Education*

Girls saw that there was a good prospect of access to higher education resources in this community. However, there were mixed views about the state of public education prior to college. More than 63 percent of women polled reported that they felt public schools on the First Coast failed to successfully educate girls.

Some girls reported that their early through middle school years were valuable experiences, but attitudes about high school years were mixed. Finally, some girls said that they were being encouraged to do well and to continue on to college.

#### *Self-Esteem and Self-Worth*

The complexity of self-esteem and self-worth surfaced in many forms and contexts with girls. While the study results revealed an increase in self-confidence to deal with many of



life's issues, the underpinnings of self-esteem were still rather weak for some girls.

Among girls, influences on self-esteem were body image, the opinions that others had of them and access to confidants. Body image concerns were reflected in the incidence of anorexia and bulimia. Although girls reported that they knew of others who engaged in unhealthy and unsafe eating practices, there appeared to be some shift toward the acceptability to be “thicker.” The other element that appeared to influence self-esteem was peer pressure, particularly regarding personal appearance.

Consistently, the importance of positive role models—one or more people to look up to—was reported. Although good models of behavior were available, most felt that more could be done to highlight them. In addition, support of mentoring programs represents an area that needs attention.



## AREAS OF CONCERN

Certain health issues posed serious threats for girls, as was the case for women. For girls those health issues were teen pregnancy/sex education and substance abuse. In addition, juvenile crime surfaced as an area of concern.

### *Births to Teens/Sex Education*

On the positive front, other than in one county, there has been a decline in birthrates to teenage mothers. The consequences of early childbearing have been documented extensively. Teen mothers generally have lower educational attainment, fewer occupational opportunities, increased likelihood of being impoverished and greater health risks than their non-parenting peers. For these reasons and more, the continued effort to reduce teen pregnancy is critical.

The topic of sex education surfaced as a major concern among both women and girls involved in this study. According to a large majority of those interviewed, the type of sex education received on the First Coast does little to deal with real issues or assuage the problems associated with teenage

sexual activity. Successful sex education must deal adequately with not only the obvious physical repercussions of intercourse, but also improve knowledge about health, wellness and self-esteem.

### ***Substance Abuse***

Substance abuse of all kinds remained a highly-visible and much-engaged-in activity for many girls on the First Coast—no county was exempt from this reality. Alcohol, marijuana and crack were all used. Girls reported that the greatest peer pressure they experience is related to the use of alcohol and drugs.

The issue of substance abuse among girls raises particular concern because of the motivations that characterize girls' substance abuse. Girls tend to use cigarettes, alcohol and drugs to falsely elevate mood, increase confidence and decrease tension or stress. As such, the emotional and mental conditions of girls—the reasons girls use risky substances—must be addressed to successfully prevent this behavior.

### ***Juvenile Crime***

Women on the First Coast were concerned about the problems that face the next generation, especially as manifested in criminal behavior. In line with state and national trends, there has been a slight rise in the number of girls referred for delinquency (one in four) and in the number of girls committed for delinquent acts. The programs and resources available for girls who are viewed as “at risk” or who have entered the juvenile justice system have increased, but the increase in female juvenile crime is troublesome and suggests a need for earlier intervention and more aggressive preventative measures.

# Taking Action

Studies, such as *Voices Heard*, often suffer from being an interesting exercise that is soon forgotten. To keep the results of this research effort at the forefront will require attention and diligence on the part of many.

## COUNTY GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

As might be expected, there are differences in the status of women and girls, depending on where they live. Each county has its share of areas that need attention. In all locations, there are opportunities to pursue more preventative strategies and dig deeper to learn more about and address the root causes of current circumstances. Each of the five counties has some unique economic characteristics, as well as singular challenges, that may require different solutions to address problems. However, county governments and local organizations would benefit from increased dialogue, across counties, about the issues to find common or similar solutions, or to work toward combined forces to tackle problems.

## STATE GOVERNMENT

The scope of this study did not allow for a thorough look at public policy and its impact on the lives of women and girls. However, improvement of the status of women and girls will depend upon state-level attention in some areas. Some attention is related to funding, and some is tied to legislative action, implementation or redirection of existing legislation. There are many community organizations with active advocacy programs that will benefit from further exploration of this study to pinpoint potential areas to pursue.

## THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The study findings identify several areas where employers can make a difference; among them are to consider flexible hours, benefit coverage for part-time workers and new approaches to address childcare and eldercare issues. A significant issue is to ensure that a given company is doing all it

can to close the gender wage gap. This includes scrutiny of current policies and practices in the areas of promotion, pay, training, and career and professional development.

## FOUNDATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL PHILANTHROPISTS

According to the New England Women's Foundation, nationally less than six cents out of every traditional philanthropic dollar is given to organizations for women and children, and less than 5 percent of all foundation grants are targeted for women and girls. Although comparable data are not available on the First Coast, it is generally viewed by those involved in philanthropy that the profile of local funding is not significantly different than what is seen across the country.

The results of this *Voices Heard* study clearly highlight a wide array of needs in the lives of 50 percent of the population, and the opportunity to make a difference.



## WOMEN AND GIRLS

The progress of women and girls to date has been largely due to their persistence and determination. It has also come about by women and girls working together to make a difference. Much of the future's progress depends on doing more of

the same. The study indicates several areas where women and girls can take the lead:

- Women who are eligible to vote are registered in large numbers. They need to exercise that right and the power of that vote. Women need to participate in the processes that influence legislation that will make a difference in the lives of women and girls.
- Women in positions of power and leadership on the First Coast need to make themselves more visible to the community at large. By providing young women (and men) with role models, they help to ensure that those of the next generation aspire to be and do more.

- To be more self-sufficient, women and girls need to continue to pursue a range of experiences that will train them in important life skills, including management and investment of their money, and how to negotiate raises and promotions at work.
- To maintain and improve their physical health, women and girls need to take control of it by taking advantage of health education opportunities and cultivating a healthy lifestyle.
- Finally, every woman and every girl need to participate in helping other women and girls succeed.





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