WOW was launched in 2011, as an innovative response to the urgent need to reach girls and young women of color across under-resourced Chicago communities.

**WOW is a two-year school-based curriculum, delivered through 26 weekly group counseling lessons,** implemented for 7th-12th grade girls and young women, living with high-risk for exposure to trauma.

**WOW Counselors deliver the weekly curriculum** in a designated classroom, inside the school, during the school-day, in a WOW room that is considered a safe space – free from stigma and judgement.

**WOW group sessions** include 10-12 young women and each counselor has a case-load of roughly 55 young women, per-school.

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**Impact**

- 62% of WOW students experienced fewer PTSD symptoms*
- 71% of WOW students experienced fewer depression symptoms*
- 96% of WOW students reported that the program has helped them make better decisions for themselves

*Of those starting in the clinical range

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7 out of 10 young women in WOW have clinically significant symptoms of PTSD, anxiety and/or depression

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WOW Student Demographics

- Latina: 38%
- African American: 46%
- Multiracial: 4%
- Other: 2%

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Program Structure

Group counseling addresses the social isolation that many girls experience during adolescence. They are given the opportunity to hear from other girls going through similar experiences, while in the circle, many instantly feel a sense of relief. It also gives girls a chance to have positive, caring adults give them guidance and support. The WOW program mainly consists of 50-minute group counseling sessions that meet on-site during the school day once per week. The program runs throughout the academic year. The WOW curriculum is informed by Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance Commitment Therapy, and Narrative Therapy.

*Student Story*

“By the age of 9, I had moved 11 times. My Dad was forced to move us to Chicago when the judge ruled that my Mom couldn’t take care of us any longer due to her poor health. Chicago was cold and loud. Most days it was hard to find the motivation to go to school.

‘I was so depressed and felt alone.’

This was one of the worst times in my life. I didn’t have a mother. I didn’t know how to brush my hair. The kids at school would tease me so I started to act out. I was failing every class. One day when I was getting into trouble in the hallway, I met my counselor who introduced me to the WOW program. I found a safe space where I could talk with my peers about issues at school and home. I felt safe and no longer alone. My counselor became a mother figure to me. She helped me with school dances, my hair, and providing me with the female influence that I needed. By my junior year, I started taking school seriously. My WOW counselor made me realize that there is more in life than high school and my neighborhood. That it’s possible for me to do anything. The circle saved me. If it wasn’t for the WOW program, I wouldn’t have graduated from college. I am now a preschool teacher, happily married and looking forward to earning my master’s degree.”

*Name nor photo used to protect confidentiality*