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.

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, which many instantly feel a sense of relief. It also gives girls a chance to have a positive, caring adult 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.

Our Impact

Impact Across All Regions

- 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
SELF-AWARENESS
Students develop a strong sense of who they are. They do this by exploring different aspects of their identity through activities and questioning each other.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
Students learn to identify and manage emotions. They learn how their perceptions often drive emotions and how this impacts behavior. Through group activities, they strengthen empathy, sensitivity and friendship skills. They will develop conflict resolution and emotion regulation skills.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
Students develop the ability to differentiate healthy and unhealthy relationships. They deepen their understanding of the importance of maintaining boundaries in their relationships. Through engaging role plays and share pairs, students strengthen communication skills. They are empowered to change negative relationship cycles.

VISIONARY GOAL-SETTING
Students learn the process of developing and accomplishing goals that add quality to one's own life, as well as the world around them. They explore what motivates them, what their aspirations are and how to harness these in line with their personal vision for success within their community.

LEADERSHIP
Students develop important leadership skills such as problem-solving, assertiveness and the importance of seeking leadership mentors. They also explore ethics, social responsibility, critical thinking, and accountability and the roles these have in their leadership journey. Through community service projects, students demonstrate leadership in their schools and communities. Through guest speakers and volunteerism, students develop career awareness and broaden their exposure to powerful female leaders.

As a freshman, Hannah* had a lot going on: she was entering a new school, fighting constantly with her parents, coping with the deaths of family members, and acting out at school. She was often in detention and had poor grades. She says her anger was out of control, making her reactive and aggressive.

Two and a half years later, Hannah is thankful for the role her WOW counselor had in helping her. "My counselor cared about my future," she says. "She created a safe haven - a safe, protective space for girls like me to come and tell her what's going on. Before WOW, I was going through so much. The only way I knew how to handle it was through fighting. When I got in this program, all of that went through the window." Now a senior, Hannah is a dean's assistant, has substantially improved her grades, and is on track to go to college.

WOW offers girls like Hannah an in-school resource where support and encouragement guide them along the path to womanhood. Through WOW, they find their power, their voice, and ultimately, their way.