

# MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS



*Pace Center for Girls, Collier at Immokalee helps girls look towards the future*

**BY MARIANNE KEARNS, M. ED,**

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**B**efore coming to Pace Center for Girls, Collier at Immokalee, Kimberlee began to see her world unravel—and with it, her mental health. She slowly started opening up to her therapist, Ms. Jama, and together they created a strong partnership and plan grounded in trust and care.

“The mental health needs in Immokalee are significant. The stigma is real everywhere, but especially in this community. For many girls, coming to Pace is one of their first opportunities to learn about mental health and to see what self-care is,” shared Jama Thurman, Social Services Manager at Pace Collier.

Without support, many girls like Kimberlee can struggle to find the best path forward and consequently develop harmful coping mechanisms that hinder their journey to a brighter future.

“People should give therapy a chance. Therapy has helped me find my confidence and motivation in life,” shared Kimberlee. “I don’t talk to many people about my personal life, but I talk to Ms. Jama, and she helped me.”

At Pace, we believe all girls, regardless of their story, deserve safe and supportive spaces to heal that help them become strong, compassionate, and successful women. Our exceptional team of counselors, therapists, and educators take into consideration each girl’s unique strengths, experiences as young women, and history with trauma when creating their individualized plans of care.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health challenges were the leading cause of disability and challenging life outcomes in young people, with the Surgeon General Reporting in 2021 that up to one in five children ages three to seventeen in the



US have a reported mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder.

Complex mental health challenges must be met with a multifaceted approach to support, which is why Pace’s model is designed to meet girls where they are both physically and developmentally.

“Part of the work we do here at Pace is to help girls find their voice. This is a huge part of any girl’s mental health journey,” shared Vitina Monacello, Therapist at Pace Collier. “For our girls, it’s really owning and embracing their stories in full context. It’s not disowning the difficult emotions or the hard things that’ve happened to them, or the struggles they’ve had. It’s finding their voice in all of that and making sense of their story for themselves so they can move forward.”

Beyond the pandemic and the added stressors this brought on, the adolescent and teenage stage is one of great transformation, both physiologically and

psychologically. Navigating this crucial stage of development can be difficult and requires guidance, support, empathy, and safety.

“I found something at Pace that you can’t find at other schools. I found a family that cared about me and my future, and I believed I could do whatever I set out to do. I found an extension to the family I already had that was uplifting and a positive driving force in my change for the better. Like countless girls before me, I found myself as well,” shared Precilla, a Pace alum.

Sometimes, just asking a girl how she is doing can be a crucial step to prevention or to beginning a healing journey. If you know a girl who could benefit from Pace’s programs, please contact Decorah-Cruz, Intake Counselor, at [diana.decorah-cruz@pacecenter.org](mailto:diana.decorah-cruz@pacecenter.org). To invest in Pace girls, please visit [pacecenter.org](http://pacecenter.org).