

# THROUGH THEIR EYES:

**Stories of Reflection, Resistance, and Resilience on Juvenile Incarceration from San Francisco Cis and Trans Young Women & Girls, Trans Young Men & Boys and Gender Expansive Youth.**



YOUNG WOMEN'S  
FREEDOM CENTER



FREEDOM  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE

# Dedication

This report is dedicated to cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth and their families who have experienced harm, family separation, and long-lasting trauma from being involved in the juvenile delinquency system. Over the last three decades, we have heard systems-impacted youth advocate for the need to radically transform and abolish the juvenile delinquency system.

We know that as a community we can do better for young people. Young people deserve better from us as a society. All young people deserve to be nourished and loved, and should be able to grow up free of systems that criminalize them and demean their humanity.

With this report, we honor the brilliance and power of young people impacted by mass incarceration and racist systems of oppression. We see you. We stand by you. We fight alongside you for a free and joyous future.



## ABOUT THE YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER

Founded in 1993, Young Women's Freedom Center (YWFC) is a leadership and advocacy organization led by systems-involved cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender expansive youth of color who have grown up in poverty, worked in the underground street economy, and have been criminalized by social services such as foster care, welfare, and the mental health systems. By offering safety, sisterhood & siblinghood, economic opportunities, accessible education and healing, we build self-determination, confidence and self-worth. Our sisters and siblings support one another in living self-determined, healthy and fulfilling lives, while building our individual and collective power to change conditions, culture and policy toward decarceration and decriminalization. We believe that those most impacted by cycles of poverty, violence, exploitation and incarceration are the experts on their own lives and best positioned to identify and lead the change needed to support true and transformative justice.



Melendrez, A. (2021, February). *Through their eyes: stories of reflection, resistance, and resilience on juvenile incarceration from San Francisco cis and trans young women & girls, trans young men and boys and gender expansive youth*. Young Women's Freedom Center.

Copyright © February 2021 Permission is granted to reproduce and share this document with attribution to the Young Women's Freedom Center. For inquiries please contact: [info@youngwomenfree.org](mailto:info@youngwomenfree.org)



66

**The existentiality of prisons involves not only what prison does directly, but how it affects the society that accepts it as normal.<sup>1</sup>**

# CONTRIBUTORS

This team provided invaluable analysis around the development of this report. They exchanged countless emails, phone calls, and notes to refine the ideas and language presented here. They generously shared their years of expertise working in the field of social justice to produce this report.

## **Data Analysis Team**

Jocelyn Mati, Research Organizer

Leticia Silot, Youth Community Organizer

Tenaya Jones, Youth Community Organizer

Terriana Evans, Youth Community Organizer

Katie Manbachi, Community Research Manager

## **Designer**

Mike Nicholls, Founder of UMBER

## **Author**

Alezandra Melendrez, President of Freedom Research Institute

## **Feedback & Editing**

Amika Mota, Policy Director

Jessica Nowlan, Executive Director

Krea Gomez, Education Director

Ifasina Clear, Deputy Director of Leadership and Healing

Meredith Desautels, Attorney - Youth Law Center

Sara Kershner, Development Director

Thabile Makue, Communications Director

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from Executive Director .....	7
Glossary of Common Terms .....	9
<b>Introduction:</b>	
Gendered Punishment and Control .....	11
Research Purpose .....	25
Methodology .....	26
Overview of Data Findings.....	30
Note to the Reader.....	36
<b>Part 1: Experience of the Juvenile Delinquency System</b>	
Theme 1: Questionable Reasons for Incarceration.....	40
Theme 2: Negligence on the Inside.....	66
Theme 3: Enduring Impact of Incarceration .....	94
<b>Part 2: Envisioning a Healthier Future for System-Impacted Youth</b>	
Theme 4: System Recommendations – Voicing Needs.....	106
Theme 5: What Could Have Made a Difference? .....	120
Letter from lead Youth Participatory Action Researcher.....	135
Work Cited.....	141
Bibliography .....	143

## Letter from Executive Director, Jessica Nowlan Young Women's Freedom Center

**F**or nearly 3 decades, the Young Women's Freedom Center (YWFC) has been lifting up the voices and leadership of cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth that have been heavily impacted by poverty, violence, exploitation, incarceration, and public systems. This has included supporting them in surviving and reducing the harm of life on the streets, navigating public systems, and calling for an end to the criminalization and incarceration of young people. Long before the national research and data told us how harmful the delinquency system is on young people and their families, YWFC youth were at San Francisco's City Hall demanding change.

In the early 2000s, we created the Know Justice Handbook - for and by young people and mobilized youth and their families to organize for change. In the early 2000s, formerly incarcerated young moms drafted the Young Mother's Bill of Rights, which included the first-ever anti-shackling bill in the country that was adopted in San Francisco. As young people who had experienced incarceration ourselves, we conducted surveys of other youth, showed up to city hall, joined oversight commissions, did outreach in the courtrooms, started working in juvenile hall to build with young folks, and hired them when they were released to lead the conversations and campaigns for transformation.

With nearly 28 years of advocacy and organizing work centering our collective experiences, compromising, changing laws, and calling for something different, we have yet to see a true reckoning, acknowledgment, and commitment to the radical change we seek. While progress is being made, 3 decades later, cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth of color are not better off. Efforts thus far reflect the inability of our country and those in power to acknowledge how white and male supremacy has and continues to guide decision making at all levels - and what is at stake: people's lives and those of the ones they love most, including our children and young people, whom the "state" claims to rehabilitate through the delinquency system.

"Through their Eyes" is a body of work that centers the experiences and expertise of young people themselves who have experienced the delinquency system in San Francisco but reflects a shared understanding of youth in the system across the country. The realities of their experiences are hard to read, yet the truth they tell must be the center of our collective work moving forward to realize freedom and liberation for everyone.

Starting in June 2017 and spanning across three years, hundreds of formerly-incarcerated and system-involved people came together in California to develop a long-term strategy for the decriminalization and decarceration of our loved ones, families, and communities. We formed the Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition and created a Freedom Charter to guide our vision of true liberation for ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities.

This work has been powerful, delicate, and deliberate. We had to turn in and face the pain and trauma we experienced as young people who grew up in cells, turned eighteen on prison yards, were punished for the ways we survived, and acted out trauma from physical and sexual violence. Who were separated from our families and communities and who internalized the labels and messages we were given as children - that we were bad, broken, and undeserving of love and support. In our collective pain and struggle, we also found power, patterns, and clarity - it was a process of organizing what we all already knew.

Standing on the shoulders of the ancestors and movements, often led and fueled by women, queer and transgender people of color, that turned pain into power, survival skills into strategic action, and community and family networks into the basis of mass mobilizations, we followed. We worked together to reimagine what could be and built a framework and clear vision for a different future, Freedom 2030.

Freedom 2030 is a 10-year popular campaign and legislative agenda developed by over 300 cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth and adults who have experienced the extreme harm caused by the punishment system in our country and the last 20 plus years of moderate and surface-level reforms. It is a collective statement, strategy, and platform for deep systems and societal transformation. At its core, Freedom 2030 calls for an actual departure from the histories of slavery, colonization, exploitation of women and children, poverty, and disinvestment of communities that have created cycles of inter-generational incarceration and violence and sets forth a clear vision for a different future. We are no longer asking. We are building power to end the criminalization and incarceration of poor young people and youth of color in San Francisco, in California, and the United States.

“Through their Eyes” is a call to listen to the wisdom of young people who have had to navigate society’s failures and the tremendous harm we have caused. In their bravery and honesty, we hear the stark truth, the truth that is the hardest to face yet forces us to step back and look again, to go deeper to make the changes needed. The truth is not new. We have just not listened. Because we do not value the knowledge that Black, Brown and Indigenous youth, cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth provide. What inspires us are their informed visions for a different future and their concrete advice on how we can get there if we can only listen and then act.

With Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jessica Nowlan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jessica Nowlan

Executive Director, YWFC

## GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS

**Community Experts:** refers to the people interviewed for this study. The term Community Experts, or Experts, is being used instead of “research participant” or “subject.” Jocelyn Mati, our lead YPAR researcher coined this term to emphasize the intellectual contributions of the people we interviewed.

---

**Decarceration:** involves government policies and community campaigns to reduce the number of people held in custody or under custodial supervision in the United States. Entails reducing the rate of imprisonment at the federal, state, and municipal level.

---

**Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ):** is part of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. This is California’s state prison for young people who were charged with more serious cases, with longer term sentences.

---

**Dually-Involved Youth:** are children who are involved in the juvenile delinquency system and child protective services at the same time.

---

**Juvenile Justice Center (JJC):** is San Francisco’s juvenile detention facility at 375 Woodside, 94127.

---

**Research Organizer:** are directly-impacted youth trained as researchers. They combine their skills as community organizers to use research as a tool for advocacy and community transformations.

---

**System-Impacted:** people who experience the criminalization and control of government entities, organizations or networks. Systems include: juvenile delinquency system, adult criminal system, foster care, child protective services, welfare, subsidized housing, mental health institutions, and addiction treatment centers.

---

**Cis and Trans Young Women & Girls, Trans Young Men & Boys and Gender-Expansive Youth:** Cis is a term to identify those assigned a gender at birth that they feel aligned to. Trans is a term used to identify those assigned a gender at birth that they do not feel aligned to. The term “young women/men” is used because youth are in circumstances that require them to act in the best interest of their own welfare. This honors their maturity, power, and the resilience it takes to act on your own good when you are still young. This term honors this tension with respect to their chronological age.

**Note: Community Experts were asked to provide a pseudonym when interviewed. All names in the findings section were chosen by the Experts.**

# INTRODUCTION: GENDERED PUNISHMENT AND CONTROL



FREEDOM  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE



**“Women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds. When reform efforts undertaken on behalf of women neglect this fact, women of color are less likely to have their needs met than women who are racially privileged.”<sup>2</sup>**

The Young Women’s Freedom Center (YWFC) began in 1993 as San Francisco communities of color were devastated by the crack and AIDS epidemics and mass incarceration. Youth leadership at the YWFC focused on addressing the immediate needs of cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth through an ecological lens. Many young people at the YWFC were involved in the juvenile delinquency system, so their work focused on survival, advocacy and reform of that system. Over the years, the YWFC began using the term system-involved instead of justice-involved to express the carceral state’s more expansive reach and institutions. The YWFC defines a system as any government entity, organization, or network that participates in criminalizing and controlling people based on their gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, income or race. This includes but is not limited to: the juvenile delinquency system, adult criminal system, foster care, child protective services, welfare, mental health institutions, social service providers, subsidized housing programs, and addiction treatment centers.<sup>3</sup> The more expansive system-involved term allows the YWFC to address the various forms of systemic oppression that their members face and survive.

For the past twenty-eight years, cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth have led the Young Women’s Freedom Center towards dismantling the carceral state. As people directly impacted by mass incarceration, they understand the deeply intertwined realities of capitalism, racism, and sexism that have produced the American penal system. Their stated mission of decarceration is understood through the broader context and histories of the containment and punishment of Black people and other minority racial

and ethnic groups. The YWFC takes a more expansive view as they seek to understand the carceral state and how it has permeated into other institutional systems that govern and control the lives of economically marginalized Black and Brown people. A historical and gendered perspective of the development of controlling and punishing cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive people is useful because it provides evidence that mass incarceration has functioned as a machine to enforce capitalist principles rooted in a system of racial exclusion and elimination. It is the position of the YWFC that the institution of mass incarceration is a system predicated on a race-based caste hierarchy, as a means to exert continued control over Black people, in the legacy of slavery, the Black Codes, the convict leasing system, Jim Crow, and the War on Drugs. As we move forward nationally, we must come to reckoning as to why so many Black and Brown people have spent significant portions of their lives behind bars and dismantle the systems of capitalism and racism that support mass incarceration. It is not unnecessarily retrospective to take a quick detour into a historical and gendered analysis of the American penal system because how can we untangle the current political moment without an understanding of our accumulated history?

## A CASE AGAINST GENDERED PUNISHMENT AND CONTROL

The carceral state and mass incarceration have impacted Black women and torn apart Black families and are built on persistent degrading myths of Black femininity and motherhood. These centuries-old stereotypes have played a significant role in how Black women have been punished, incarcerated, sterilized, and separated from their children. In “Notes on the State of Virginia,” Thomas Jefferson asserts that orangutans are sexually attracted to Black women; he continues to question Black people’s humanity throughout the text, and even goes so far as speculating whether or not Black people are capable of dreaming.<sup>4</sup> These pernicious tropes that supported slavery and the Eugenics movement at the turn of the twentieth century persist today and fuel White and male supremacist ideology that has shaped federal, state, and local policies targeting Black women and girls.

These hateful ideas perpetuated by America’s founding fathers and written into the constitution are not relics of the past. Pamela Taylor, a West Virginia county employee, referred to our former First Lady Michelle Obama, as an “ape in heels,” and images comparing her to an ape circulated the internet while her family led us in the White House. The rhetoric around Black people’s inferiority supported by fallacious science has remained persistent, from overt acts of racial violence to small acts of implicit bias. Our sister Breonna Taylor was murdered in her home while sleeping as three undercover police officers unlawfully raided her home in Louisville, Kentucky. The racist ideology that perpetuates these small and large acts of violence prevents the perpetrators from being held accountable and needs to be directly and honestly confronted. School policies, foster care practices, criminal justice policies, and medical practices have all been infected by racist and sexist ideology and have robbed Black women of their freedom, reproductive rights, and self-determination.

Schools should provide a protective factor to children, but Black girls are criminalized and over-sexualized in many urban schools.<sup>5</sup> Once Black, particularly poor, women become mothers, many are accused of being “unfit,” and their children are taken away by child protective services, placed under the state’s supervision. In “Shattered Bonds,” Dorothy Roberts researched the racial and class disproportionalities in the foster care system. She found that Black children account for one-half of those in Foster care yet makeup one-fifth of the total child population. In Chicago, Black children comprised 95% of the foster care system in the mid-1990s.<sup>6</sup> In San Francisco in 2017, 55% of the children placed in foster care were Black, and 54% of the total cases were for neglect, a subjective category that criminalizes poverty.<sup>7</sup> Black women navigating economic marginalization are subjected to disparaging stereotypes that are not only culturally offensive and untrue but have real-world implications on their freedom and ability to love and care for their children and families.

Welfare reform has been shaped by a complex set of stereotypes portraying Black women as falling outside of the ideal norm of motherhood, from slavery to the myth of “welfare queens”.<sup>8</sup> Welfare expenditures have steadily decreased over time, adversely impacting low-income families’ ability to provide for their children financially.<sup>9</sup> In 1965, Daniel Moynihan published the Moynihan Report, entitled “The Negro Family: the Case for National Action,” a document that sought to address the War on Poverty and provide policy recommendations to President Johnson.<sup>10</sup> Moynihan blames Black single mothers for the decline of Black families, labels Black culture as pathological, and argues against welfare expansion. Moynihan crystalizes the idea that Black women are individually responsible for their children living in poverty. Political viability for welfare expenditures became tenuous as recipients of welfare were not deemed worthy of this social good.

Moynihan’s analysis had long-lasting impacts on the nation’s understanding of welfare. In the 1980s, as the Federal government passed punitive criminal justice reform, a corollary assault on the Black family, Black mothers, and their reproductive freedom was a significant target of policy initiatives. Under Ronald Regan, the 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act drastically reduced welfare expenditures at the federal level, and states continued to restrict welfare policies through the 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Beckett and Western analyzed state expenditures on welfare and incarceration rates and found that, “Welfare and penal institutions comprise a single policy regime aimed at the governance of social marginality.”<sup>12</sup> They argue that decreased spending on welfare and increased incarceration rates, specifically targeting Black people, can be viewed as a monolithic “policy regime” aimed at controlling Black people through confinement, incarceration, family separation and economic marginalization.

A study conducted in the early 1990s surveyed White Americans and found that 78% believed Black people rather live on welfare than work.<sup>13</sup> Newt Gingrich capitalized on this belief among White American’s in his 1994 Contract with America, where he advocated that state legislators reduce welfare spending, limit welfare recipients’ ability to have children, and placed personal responsibility for poverty on individuals.<sup>14</sup> These arguments centered around Black women taking advantage

of the system, supporting the Black family's continued economic marginalization. The contraction of welfare expenditures had adverse effects on women's ability to care for their children. A longitudinal study found that welfare reform in the 1990s hurt parents' ability to connect with their children and provide overall care, associated with mothers having to work multiple jobs with undesirable hours to provide for their families.<sup>15</sup>

Economic marginalization is a mechanism of capitalism to produce scarcity and target marginal groups. Audre Lorde reflects on this practice, "Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people."<sup>16</sup> Newt Gingrich continued to proliferate these racial stereotypes in the twenty-first century, calling President Obama "Food Stamp President," more veiled language around Black women trying to misuse the system.<sup>17</sup>

The stereotype of "welfare queens" proved to be more than damaging words and resulted in the violent assault of Black women's bodies. Black women were blamed for their children living in poverty. The response and welfare policy placed limits on their ability to have children. In the 1960s, Louisiana engaged in what they called Family Planning to limit the expansion of families on welfare. Black women receiving welfare who had more than one child were forcibly coerced into sterilization by threatening loss of welfare benefits.<sup>18</sup> The concept of "family planning" gained nation-wide support, notably from the Ford Foundation and Planned Parenthood; they funneled significant funds to the Family Planning movement and deemed it so successful that they supported the expansion of this initiative into Latin America.<sup>19</sup> Robert's research chronicles the lack of reproductive freedom available to Black women. She writes,

**From the slave master's economic stake in bonded women's fertility to the racist strains of early birth control policy to sterilization abuse of Black women during 1960's and 1970's to the current campaign to inject Norplant and Depo-Provera in the arms of Black teenagers and welfare mothers - paints a powerful picture of race and reproductive freedom in America.<sup>20</sup>**

Again, it is essential to emphasize that these are not issues of the past. A recent film, "Belly of the Beast," documents the power and advocacy of formerly incarcerated women who were non-consensually sterilized while incarcerated in California state prisons, as they hold the state accountable for these violent assaults on their humanity. The modern-day Eugenics movement is unbelievably pervasive. Immigrant women in privately owned ICE detention facilities were forced into non-consensual hysterectomies this last year.<sup>21</sup> The urgency to defend fundamental human rights of Black, Brown, and Indigenous cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive people are ever-present if we want to stop state and federal sponsored assaults on their bodies, families, and humanity.

In addition to being criminalized and punished through child protective services, schools, and welfare policy, women and girls are also profoundly affected by the developments of mass incarceration. Incarcerated populations began drastically increasing from the 1970s through the early 2000s, criminal justice policies

primarily targeted Black and Brown men, but women also became entrapped in this system. In the mid-1980s, the incarceration rate for women began increasing at an alarming rate; between 1986 and 1999, the female incarcerated population grew by 888%.<sup>22</sup> In 1980, approximately 26,378 women were incarcerated; that number grew to 215,332 by 2014.<sup>23</sup> The same criminal justice policies and police practices that targeted Black men affected Black women in similar ways. Between 1986 and 2005, Black women experienced an 800% increase in incarceration rates, primarily driven by drug-related offenses, while all non-Black women experienced a 400% increase.<sup>24</sup>

Incarcerated women faced criminal justice policy assaults that specifically targeted their gender through the collusion between the health care system and the penal system. In 1989, Charleston, South Carolina legislators created a policy that required maternity wards to drug test mothers for crack use; for women who tested positive, their newborn was immediately taken away, and police officers raided their hospital room and shackled them for transportation to local jails for prosecution.<sup>25</sup> Similar policies swept the country that targeted expectant mothers feeding off cultural hysteria around crack use, a racially motivated concern predominantly affecting Black women. This concern did not extend to the use of powder cocaine more associated with White drug use. Addiction is a medical condition that requires treatment through the health care system; addressing health concerns through the adult criminal system is unethical and does not facilitate a healthy recovery.

The criminalization of motherhood through the penal system is a concern that the YWFC has fought hard against. In San Francisco, we passed the Young Mother's Bill of Rights that put a moratorium on shackling incarcerated women while giving birth. The intersection of motherhood and mass incarceration is a serious social concern; 80% of women in jails are mothers.<sup>26</sup> Additional externalities exist when a mother is incarcerated because their removal from their family can create lasting negative impacts for their children. Children of all ages are traumatized when their mother becomes incarcerated, and they commonly develop attachment disorders that arise from even small amounts of maternal separation.<sup>27</sup> A study in the early 2000s found that 60% of children with an incarcerated mother developed an attachment disorder and that their IQ testing was negatively impacted by this trauma.<sup>28</sup> School-aged children are at higher risk of delinquency and behavioral problems when their mothers are incarcerated.<sup>29</sup> When a mother is incarcerated, a child's ecosystem is upended, and they are bereft of the social and emotional support that their mother provides. Considering that most women are incarcerated for non-violent offenses, policymakers need to find alternative solutions to ensure families' cohesiveness.

The increase in incarceration rates for women in the twenty-first century has primarily occurred in county-level jails with a fourteen-fold increase since 1970; in 2014, half of all incarcerated women served their time in jails.<sup>30</sup> Racial disparities that target Black women are persistent in jails populations, where 44% of the incarcerated population are Black women, 15% are Hispanic, and 36% are White.<sup>31</sup> The large number of women in jails indicates they are not serving time for serious offenses; otherwise, they would be transferred to a federal or state prison. In 2015

85% of women in jails served time for a non-violent offense.<sup>32</sup> For those cases where women are convicted of a violent offense, many of them are circumstances where women are defending themselves or their children against physical abuse. Instead of treating these women as domestic violence survivors and protecting them under the right to self-defense, they become charged and incarcerated, exacerbating the trauma they already experienced.

Women and girls get charged disproportionately with status offenses and survival crimes.<sup>33</sup> In 2012, women accounted for 75% of prostitution violations, 40% of liquor violations, 29% of curfew violations for the total incarcerated population.<sup>34</sup> These charges are not serious, and these women pose no threat to their community; incarcerating them and pulling them from their families is an excessive response to low-level offenses.

The women who are serving time for these low-level offenses have extensive histories of trauma and health concerns. A report by the Vera Institute found that 86% of women in jails had experienced sexual violence, 77% experienced partner violence and 60% experienced caregiver violence.<sup>35</sup> These women also present with health issues: 53% medical problems, 32% serious mental illness, 82% drug or alcohol abuse/dependence.<sup>36</sup> The rationale for incarcerating women for a low-level offense with extensive histories of trauma and medical conditions is questionable, and their needs would be better served in other systems and services provided in their community where they can heal and care for their families. Moreover, incarceration exposes cis and transgender women to high levels of gender-based violence within the institutions they are incarcerated in.

The YWFC has developed an intersectional approach to address their community's concerns that seeks to dismantle the penal system and transform policies in housing, the foster care system, schools, child protective services, welfare, victim's rights, and the health care system. Patricia Hill Collins developed a theoretical framework for understanding the multi-dimensionality of oppression that is useful in this discussion. She writes,

**Intersectional paradigms make a second important contribution to untangling the relationship between knowledge and empowerment – they shed new light on how domination is organized. The term *matrix domination* describes this overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate develop, and are contained.<sup>37</sup>**

What is crucial in this conversation is the necessity to explore and recognize the many ways that oppression shows up in people's lives and that people are blamed for the ways they survive and respond to intergenerational oppression. What does the matrix of domination look like right now, in the wake of COVID-19, continued police brutality, rampant gentrification, and increasing economic disparities? The YWFC focuses its advocacy and organizing work around decarceration.

The largest women's prison in the world sits in California's Central Valley in Chowchilla. California incarcerates more women than any other state. In 2017, America imprisoned one-third of all incarcerated women in the world.<sup>38</sup> Even if total

decarceration was successful, the needs and concerns of system-impacted people would not be resolved. It is crucial to link the concern from mass incarceration with the child welfare system, subsidized housing, schools, welfare, and the health care system. While systems and structures change over time, the conditions for people of color, particularly Black women, have remained highly problematic. The Black infant mortality rate is shockingly high and draws attention to the healthcare system's inequities. The New York Times reported that, "Black infants in America are now more than twice as likely to die as white infants - 113 per 1,000 black babies compared to 4.9 white babies. A racial disparity that is actually wider than in 1850, 15 years before the end of slavery, when most black women were considered chattel."<sup>39</sup> We must be alerted to the ways that power and domination transform. How can health outcomes for Black infants be worse today than before slavery? How can New York City schools be more racially segregated than before the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education supreme court decision?

**Amidst these injustices, the YWFC remains hopeful and persistent.** They have witnessed the power and brilliance of system-impacted cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive people. This community's leadership is needed to transform our social conditions to more adequately construct a society that works for everyone, where all people have the spaciousness to lead joyous and self-determined lives.

## GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY SYSTEM

Young people of color were also affected by society's negative beliefs about their identity and criminality. During the tough on crime era, Black boys were referred to as "super predators," and this untrue ideology provided the rationale for filling up juvenile detention centers across the country. Black girls have a corollary narrative perpetuated against them, that they too were violent. Nationally, the juvenile delinquency system grew in the 1990s and early 2000s; 41,000 girls were detained in 1990; in 2002, this peaked at 86,000 girls.<sup>40</sup> The landscape of the juvenile delinquency system has followed similar patterns as the adult criminal system. The Public Policy Institute of California reported that arrest rates for juveniles dropped by 84% between 1980 through 2016, and in the last decade, juvenile incarceration rates have been reduced by 50%, shrinking the overall size of incarcerated populations.<sup>41</sup> Over the past two decades, the total population of girls that are involved in the juvenile delinquency system has decreased, in large part because of Grassroots activism and reform efforts. Between 2004 - 2016, there has been a 51% decline in the total number of girls involved at every point in the justice system, although boys experienced a more significant reduction than girls.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, persistent issues remain for girls arrested, incarcerated, and otherwise supervised by the juvenile delinquency system.

The early court system took a social welfare attitude when dealing with girls and women who entered the criminal system. The court's purpose was to improve young women's character and morality and train them to fulfill their roles as good daughters and wives; this approach has much less to do with transforming harmful behavior and outcomes than keeping women within the existing social order.<sup>43</sup> In the last decade, advocates have fought for Girls Courts' across the country as a gender-responsive way to address young women's needs better and decrease overall system involvement.<sup>44</sup> The juvenile delinquency system has continued to adopt a paternalistic approach when handling girls, and it is not uncommon to hear a reason for incarceration or probation to be a desire to save or keep girls safe. When officers of the juvenile justice system decide whether to charge or detain a girl, some individuals are motivated to provide them with consequences because the youth has broken conventional tropes around femininity.<sup>45</sup>

During the height of mass incarceration in the mid-1900s through early 2000s, the arrest rates for girls increased, but this was not attributed to higher rates of delinquent or criminal behavior or higher levels of enacted violence.<sup>46</sup> Instead, researchers have found that the juvenile delinquency system was more aggressively prosecuting girls for non-serious offense categories; for example, girls are disproportionately arrested for status offenses.<sup>47</sup> National research on juvenile delinquency found that 67% of incarcerated girls were arrested on non-violent offenses, and 64% of all prostitution charges were made up of girls.<sup>48</sup> More recent upticks in arrests for girls are related to issues that began in their home and involved their guardian.<sup>49</sup> The types of offenses that girls get charged with are not issues that should be handled in the juvenile delinquency system; instead, their development would be more adequately and lovingly nurtured in their community through systems and programs that can address their trauma, meet their needs and build their sense of agency and self-worth in a developmentally appropriate manner where they can stay connected to their loved ones.

It is no surprise that youth of color are disproportionately represented in the juvenile delinquency system.<sup>50</sup> Girls of color experience higher rates of juvenile delinquency involvement at every point in the system, from arrests, convictions to detainment.<sup>51</sup> Black girls make up 14% of the national population, but account for 33.2% of the detained and committed population and are 20% more likely to be detained than their White peers.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to racial and ethnic minorities being over-represented in the juvenile delinquency system, the LGBTQ population is also overly represented.<sup>53</sup> LGBTQ youth face homelessness at much higher rates than their peers, a condition that can lead to increased risk of delinquency involvement. National data on youth homelessness report that LGBTQ youth represented 40% of the total youth homeless population, yet represent only 3% of the total youth population.<sup>54</sup> When families kick youth out of their home under the age of eighteen, they have limited options for finding work to support themselves, and they may need to work in the underground street economy, engage in sex work or sell drugs to make money to survive on the streets, placing them at increased risk of becoming delinquency involved.<sup>55</sup>

LGBTQ youth are three times more likely to be removed from their home by Child Welfare than their straight and gender-conforming peers; when they are in foster care, they are more likely to be placed in a group home instead of a foster family setting.<sup>56</sup> In a study across seven juvenile detention facilities with 1,400 surveyed youth, 20% of youth reported identifying as “lesbian, gay, bisexual questioning, gender non-conforming or transgender”.<sup>57</sup> When LGBTQ youth find themselves in juvenile detention facilities, the correctional officers inside are ill-equipped to meet their specific needs, and they go underserved and are often treated differently than their peers.<sup>58</sup> Detained LGBTQ youth risk further victimization by their peers because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and may even be targeted by correctional officers.<sup>59</sup> The rights of LGBTQ and gender-expansive youth must be protected; some may navigate complex home environments that lead to homelessness and involvement in the foster care system, this should not lead to increased risk of delinquency involvement.

All youth removed from their home and placed in the foster care system are at an increased risk of entering the juvenile delinquency system. Nationally, 9 - 29% of youth in the child welfare system become involved in the juvenile delinquency system.<sup>60</sup> Black youth in the foster care system had the highest crossover rates in the juvenile delinquency system, ranging between 7-24%.<sup>61</sup> When the child welfare system places youth in a single-family setting, the young person has greater placement stability, are less likely to experience abuse, and it is more common than they can stay in their community of origin, allowing them to maintain some social bonds.<sup>62</sup> When youth have multiple placements in foster care, this places them at increased risk of delinquency involvement.<sup>63</sup> When foster youth are frequently changing placement, they may run away to maintain their social bonds with family members and friends. A runaway foster youth has a greater chance of becoming caught up in the delinquency system because they may need to work in the underground street economy to make their way home.<sup>64</sup>

Group home placements are not ideal placements; youth in congregate care settings are 2.5 times more likely to get involved in the juvenile delinquency system than their peers in a home setting.<sup>65</sup> Youth placed in a group home setting have worse educational outcomes and lower test scores than their peers in a family setting and are less likely to graduate from high school.<sup>66</sup> For system-impacted youth, the foster care system, juvenile delinquency system, and schools become entangled into one monolithic system of control and punishment, a system intended to care for children proves to be harmful to low-income youth of color and LGBTQ and gender-expansive youth.

The pathways to the juvenile delinquency system are unique to girls and differentiated from the detained boy; girls experience higher levels of reported sexual and physical violence and PTSD.<sup>67</sup> The juvenile delinquency system most commonly detains girls for running away, substance abuse, and truancy; all three of these behaviors are the most common symptoms of sexual and physical abuse.<sup>68</sup> Detained girls are four times more likely to report having experienced sexual abuse than detained boys, and girls’ rates of complex trauma, multiple forms of childhood abuse or neglect, are almost twice as high as boys.<sup>69</sup>

During the mid-1990s in the Washington DC, juvenile delinquency system, 75% of detained girls had experienced sexual abuse, and 40% of girls experienced multiple childhood trauma and neglect.<sup>70</sup> For delinquency-involved girls, sexual abuse experiences are the strongest predictor of recidivism, even when controlling for previous delinquency involvement and behavioral problems.<sup>71</sup> Young people who have experienced childhood trauma have immediate neurological impacts on their developing brain and are at an elevated risk of alcohol abuse, violence, and risky sexual behaviors.<sup>72</sup> The juvenile delinquency system cannot be used as a proxy for mental health care much less for a loving environment. Criminalizing youth for behaviors associated with childhood trauma is highly unethical, and their needs cannot be met in a system designed to punish them.

With all of these statistical realities and persistent historical oppressions in mind, the YWFC has worked diligently towards the decarceration of San Francisco's Juvenile Justice Center. The persistent struggle for permanently closing the front door to JJC is fueled by the hope that one-day young people will be able to grow up without being punished and criminalized through the juvenile delinquency system. That the childhoods of all young people will be held sacred and vigilantly protected. The conversation about disproportionalities in the juvenile delinquency system for Black girls, Queer youth, transgender, and gender-expansive youth grows so tiresome. How long will this be the reality we chose to create? Young people deserve the best from the adults around them, the best that society can provide. The horizon where young people are not criminalized and incarcerated feels ever-present, but it is not yet secured, and this long journey requires a commitment from a broad base of adults who are inspired to create a different world that is deserving of the young people entering into it.

## CLOSE THE FRONT DOOR TO SAN FRANCISCO'S JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTER

The landscape of juvenile delinquency has undergone significant changes since the height of mass incarceration. In the 1990s, the halls were overcrowded, and the youth slept on floors because there were not enough beds in the facilities. In the 1990s, while social and political sentiments remained concerned with being "tough on crime," states and counties across the country, most prominently in California, began building new prison and jail facilities, creating a prison boom.<sup>73</sup> Tucker and Palomino's reporting found that between 1996 through 2007, 41 out of 58 counties in California either built new detention facilities or expanded existing ones.<sup>74</sup> In 2006, San Francisco expanded its juvenile detention facility to hold 150 youth. Expanding the Juvenile Justice Center (JJC) made sense when daily counts were high, but by 2018, 81% of JJC's 150 beds have remained vacant.<sup>75</sup>

San Francisco’s juvenile delinquency system has seen less overall involvement at every point of the system, but there are significant racial and ethnic disparities. In the 2000s, juvenile arrests began dropping, but racial disparities widened. In 2017, Black youth were five times more likely to become incarcerated than their White peers.<sup>76</sup> The racial landscape of San Francisco has dramatically changed, as low-income people of color have been pushed out of the city. In 2013 Black people made up 6% of San Francisco’s population, yet 56% of the total incarcerated population.<sup>77</sup> Those girls who continue to be incarcerated at JJC are overwhelmingly Black, and many live in Bayview Hunters Point, a predominantly Black neighborhood in San Francisco.

### SAN FRANCISCO JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT PROFILE OF GIRLS<sup>78</sup>

	Total Unduplicate Juvenile Hall Bookings	Black %	Hispanic %	From Bayview Hunters Point %
2016	88	60.23	22.73	21.56
2017	84	58.33	26.19	29.76
2018	84	66.67	22.62	20.24
2019	77	72.7	18.2	20.8

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ) found that those few youths left at JJC, three specific groups remained, “youth who are detained following arrest, youth awaiting transfer to an out of home placement, and youth detained for violating the terms of probation,” all of these groups represents very questionable and unreasonable causes for detention.<sup>79</sup> An analysis conducted by the Youth Law Center (YLC) in San Francisco found that 90% of youth detained at JJC had a diagnosed mental health condition.<sup>80</sup> The function and purpose of San Francisco’s Juvenile Justice Center are called into serious question by the research from YLC and CJCJ. The youth whom JJC has incarcerated should have been immediately diverted to another system that could have more appropriately met their developmental needs without causing unnecessary harm that is unavoidable in detention facilities.

The expansion of JJC, coupled with decreased daily counts, has resulted in a massive increase in the cost of incarcerating each youth. In San Francisco, the glaring reality of empty beds at JJC is difficult to ignore, with the cost of incarcerating one youth rising to \$270,000 annually, up from \$135,000 in 2011.<sup>81</sup> In the 1950s, San Francisco opened a detention facility in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Log Cabin Ranch, a place for incarcerated young people to go to before they were sent to DJJ, the California state juvenile prison. The Log Cabin Ranch had an operating budget of \$5 million a year. In the summer of 2018, the cabin was closed after a string of youth running away and persistently low numbers.<sup>82</sup> However, after the Log Cabin Ranch was closed, San Francisco did not adjust their annual juvenile probation budget of \$11.9 million.<sup>83</sup>

San Francisco's Juvenile Justice Center's budget has remained relatively constant since 2011, even with the closure of the Log Cabin Ranch and consistently low numbers of detained youth.<sup>84</sup> JJC has remained increasingly vacant since its expansion in 2006, and the cost of incarcerating each youth has created an untenable budget that is difficult to justify. Local politicians began seriously questioning the rationale to keep this expensive institution open; coupled with low juvenile arrest rates and persistently empty detention facilities, the cost-benefit for maintaining JJC no longer makes sense.

On June 4, 2019, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted on legislation that would permanently shut down San Francisco's Juvenile Justice Center by 2021.<sup>85</sup> San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Hilary Ronen, Shamann Walton, and Matt Haney led this unprecedented initiative that, once implemented, would close the nation's first urban juvenile detention facility.<sup>86</sup> Passing this legislation is a monumental win, one that the YWFC and countless activists and community-based organizations have been fighting for over the last three decades. Embedded in the legislation is the creation of a fifteen-person committee that would develop alternatives to incarceration and to re-appropriate funds into community-based models that support the healing and restoration of youth. Our collective hope at the YWFC is that San Francisco moves away from a system that disproportionality targets and harms poor youth of color through entrapment in the juvenile delinquency system and reinvests in their leadership and well-being.

## COVID-19 & DJJ CLOSURE

With plans well underway in San Francisco to shut down JJC, the COVID-19 pandemic immediately transformed every aspect of life. Community advocates became concerned with incarcerated people's welfare because they are at an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 due to living in congregate care settings with existing concerns over cleanliness. On March 24, 2020, Governor Newsom announced Executive Order N-36-20, which laid out how the state department would work with the California Department of Corrections Rehabilitation (CDCR) to keep incarcerated people safe from COVID-19.<sup>87</sup> Governor Newsom's Order outlined the safety procedures that CDCR would take to ensure that detention facilities would follow the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendations for reducing the spread of COVID-19.<sup>88</sup> For obvious reasons, family members and advocates of incarcerated people were not assured by Newsom's announcement and have fought hard to get as many people out of detention facilities as possible because not adequately addressing the spread of COVID-19 is tantamount to a death sentence for incarcerated individuals with preexisting health conditions.

As part of Executive Order N-36-20, Governor Newsom included a revised budget proposal that announced the closure of the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). The youth who were detained at DJJ were charged with more serious offenses and had long term sentences. As part of the Order, these young people would be moved back to their local county's detention center.<sup>89</sup> DJJ would determine those youth whose sentences they deemed too serious, and they would be transferred to a separate space at an adult facility at Central California's Women's Facility in Chowchilla.

Initially, Governor Newsom's Order to close DJJ would appear to be a victory for juvenile justice activism. However, his decisions at the state level have profound effects on the county's juvenile delinquency system and could reverse local wins to decarcerate and shut down juvenile detention facilities.

In June of 2020, Heather Bowlds, Director of the Division of Juvenile Justice, wrote a letter to parents of incarcerated youth at DJJ facilities, stating that parents could no longer visit their children, but efforts would be made to increase virtual communication.<sup>90</sup> In June 2020, DJJ had 782 young people in their care across four different detention facilities.<sup>91</sup> Bowlds announced that as of July 15, 2020, fifteen youth had contracted COVID-19 and that DJJ was taking extra precautions to keep youth safe from infection.<sup>92</sup> At this point in the summer with more information from the Center for Disease Control, DJJ was well aware of the impossibility of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in congregate facilities. Investigative research conducted by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ) through hard to find publicly available data and interviews with parents of incarcerated children in DJJ facilities found that DJJ was not following through on their stated promise to keep youth safe. Parents reported that DJJ facilities were not providing easy access to COVID-19 testing, and the strategy for maintaining social distancing resulted in youth having less access to phone calls, not being able to attend required educational courses, and being isolated in their cells for extended periods; these conditions violate the state's Youth Bill of Rights.<sup>93</sup>

In the wake of the rampant spread of COVID-19 inside CDCR facilities and rapid response by grassroots activists, new legislation was developed and passed in the state legislature in response to Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-36-20. SB 823 - Juvenile Justice Realignment is a bill that seeks to shutdown DJJ "the right way" by creating a state-wide oversight committee, stopping intakes to DJJ by July 1, 2021, moving services for youth to human services departments, and local counties will have more jurisdiction to supervise youth.<sup>94</sup> David Muhammad, the Executive Director of the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, commented on Governor Newsom's proposed closure of DJJ, "It is a very complicated victory fraught with potential pitfalls and unintended consequences," and SB 823 is an attempt to better address the needs of youth in a healing centered approach.<sup>95</sup> Of course, there are still concerns. Advocates are worried that local counties will transfer youth with more serious charges to adult facilities, and SB 823 is no panacea to the pervasiveness of the carceral state.

We have learned through the COVID-19 pandemic that decarceration is possible, incarcerated people can move back to their community where they belong, and legislative support is achievable. COVID-19 has sped up the bureaucratic process and social willpower to transform California's massive jail and prison system. At the YWFC, we hope that the legislative progress in San Francisco and state-wide in California is a watershed moment. Our primary concern in San Francisco is for the plans to shut down JJC remain and that another system does not develop that resembles juvenile detention under a different name. The YWFC has always held the urgency of decarceration in our hearts; we and many other organizations and activists have been fighting for progress for too long.

“

**You have always told me it takes time. It has taken my father's time. My mother's time. My uncle's time. My brother's and my sister's time. My nieces' and my nephews' time. How much time do you want for your progress?**

*- James Baldwin*

# PURPOSE OF THROUGH THEIR EYES

*Through their Eyes* is a research report that illuminates the experiences of fifty-one system-impacted cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth who experienced the juvenile delinquency system, incarceration, and probation in San Francisco. This report is a follow-up study to the YWFC's last report, *A Radical Model for Decriminalization*. A Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) team gathered in the Fall of 2019 to analyze the life course interview data for people directly impacted by San Francisco's juvenile delinquency system. This report centers the voice and expertise of system-impacted people by thoroughly detailing how they navigated being criminalized, incarcerated, and surveilled as children growing up in San Francisco. Part one of this report thoroughly narrates the experience of youth at San Francisco's Juvenile Justice Center. Part two explores how they envision a healthier future for system-impacted youth. All the stories shared provide critical insights for transforming an institutional system that cause youth long-lasting harm and trauma. The YPAR team that developed the analytical schema for representing these interviews is also directly impacted by San Francisco's juvenile delinquency system, thereby providing unique expertise that enabled them to make sense of the interview data more accurately.

In light of San Francisco's legislation to permanently shutdown JJC and Governor Newsom's Order to close DJJ, we hope that this report will provide sufficient evidence to support the immediate and permanent closure of all local juvenile detention facilities. The experiences shared are specific to San Francisco but are general enough for other jurisdictions to reconsider the validity of maintaining their juvenile detention facilities. The national trends of lower crime rates for juveniles, empty juvenile detention facilities, and subsequent soaring costs are reason enough for stakeholders to begin to reinvest city funds away from the juvenile delinquency system and into avenues that provide youth with generative opportunities to lead fulfilled lives. In the early part of 2021, the YWFC will be publishing a new report that will lay out a robust set of recommendations for decarcerating county juvenile detention centers and provides a framework for what comes next. These recommendations will be useful to anyone who wishes to begin investing in the futures of youth impacted by poverty, racism, and the carceral state.

We hope that the readers of this report take the experiences shared here seriously and see it as a call to action to abolish systems of harm and envision communities that nurture all young people. The Young Women's Freedom Center has been holding space for the stories of young people who have experienced the juvenile delinquency system for the past twenty-eight years. Unfortunately, the experiences shared in this report are not surprising. The Center has witnessed first-hand the harm that juvenile incarceration causes to young people, their families, and communities. The YWFC has provided leadership opportunities to thousands of system-impacted youth. They have seen what is possible when young people are empowered, allowed room to heal, and provided economic support. We know that there is another way that does not include juvenile incarceration. Another blueprint exists.

A blueprint that has no relation to the past and its oppressive systems of racism and capitalism that fuel the carceral state. More than any other reason, we hope you are corralled to fight for a future free of juvenile incarceration as a means of ensuring humanity and dignity for all children.

## METHODS

An authentic synergy exists between the commitments of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and the Young Women’s Freedom Center. The research team at the YWFC has remained committed to YPAR as a way to decolonize research practices. For the last twenty-eight years, the YWFC has invested in the leadership of cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth impacted by incarceration, poverty, and gender-based violence. YPAR and the YWFC share a commitment to youth leadership and activism to prioritize lived experience as a source of expertise and wisdom. In YPAR projects, adult researchers train youth in research methods, data collection, and data analysis to become co-researchers; together they actively transgress traditional power dynamics about who can be considered an expert.<sup>96</sup> Intergenerational YPAR teams explore social issues in their communities, utilizing research as a transformative tool to engage in civic and democratic activism.<sup>97</sup>

In response to San Francisco’s city council decision to pass legislation to shutdown juvenile hall in March 2019, the research team at the YWFC decided to revisit their interview data from, *A Radical Model for Decriminalization*.<sup>98</sup> This study developed a life-course framework to explore how women, girls, transgender, and gender-expansive youth navigated multiple institutional systems in San Francisco, specifically focusing on the juvenile delinquency system, foster care, and the adult criminal system. Community Experts shared details of their criminal cases, navigating the court system, the experience inside of the juvenile hall, interactions with staff, and experiences with juvenile probation. As Experts narrated their experience of the juvenile delinquency system, they described the more intangible realities of what it felt like to be incarcerated as a child and reflected on the impact that juvenile incarceration had on their lives. Interviewers spent considerable time asking people to provide recommendations for transforming San Francisco’s juvenile delinquency system.

In the Fall of 2019, a YPAR research team began analyzing their interview data. The research team developed this follow-up analysis to support the organizing and advocacy work of YWFC’s campaign to shutdown JJC and develop alternatives to incarceration through community-based support. It is crucial to YWFC that as San Francisco moves forward in re-envisioning alternatives to incarceration, that the work is guided by people directly impacted by the local juvenile delinquency system.

## RESEARCH TEAM AND TRAINING

Jocelyn Mati was part of the original research team that collected one-hundred life-course interviews. She was the lead youth researcher on this project and supported the facilitation and mentorship of the new team. Tenaya Jones, Terriana Evans, and Leticia Silot were youth organizers at the YWFC who graduated from the Sisters on the Rise internship program. They all worked on the Center's campaign to close JJC and have been conducting Huddles in the Hood, where they went out in the community and asked youth about their vision for alternatives to incarceration. The analysis team for this project was led by these four organizers' expertise, who had experienced growing up in San Francisco and were directly impacted by the juvenile delinquency system.

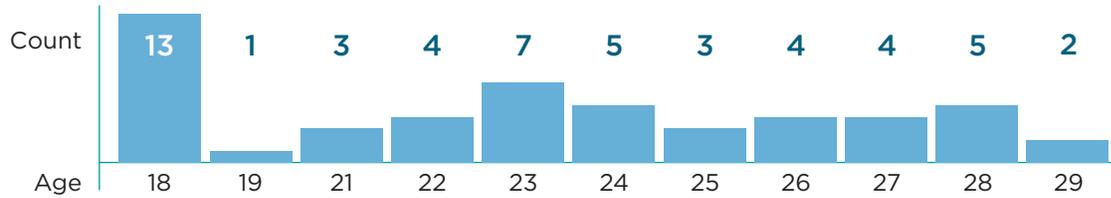
YPAR requires a high level of investment in providing training and leadership opportunities for young people to participate in the research process as equal partners. Katie Manbachi was hired as the community research manager. Her primary role was to train and support system-impacted youth to gain research skills. Katie and Alezandra worked together to develop a curriculum for conducting inductive qualitative content analysis.<sup>99</sup> Katie worked closely with the team to learn research skills; they met three times a week for two hours for three and a half months. Together, the team learned how to use Dedoose, an online platform for collaborative qualitative data analysis.<sup>100</sup> The sessions were scaffolded so that the team learned a new skill; once they mastered that, they moved on to a more challenging skill to build their analytical tool kit. For example, they began by reading the interview transcripts with one research question in mind - What was the experience of youth with San Francisco's juvenile delinquency system? At first, the team was excited to code anything they found interesting, but they needed to refine their coding to align with the research question. The training allowed for enough time to learn new skills, master them, and reflect on best practices in a collaborative and discursive setting, all while working with real interview data.

Youth researchers need to be provided with enough time to acquire new skills before engaging in the research process while being paid a living wage for their work. In the YPAR inquiry space, learning and doing happen concurrently, which means that this process can take longer than expected. The YWFC has invested in a research process that is time consuming, costly, and requires more staff to train youth researchers. The commitment to YPAR as a methodology demonstrates a larger commitment to providing high level critical educational opportunities to youth who are educationally disenfranchised because of community divestment of schools in low-income communities. System-impacted youth have interrupted educational histories and receive sub-standard and limited education while in detention facilities. In traditional research, youth are often constructed as problems to be solved through a white middle-class lens instead of powerful change agents in their communities. At the YWFC, we believe that young people directly impacted by the carceral state embody the critical expertise needed to engage in research, to problematize Western colonialist research practices, and develop new models of inquiry that inspire new possibilities of freedom.

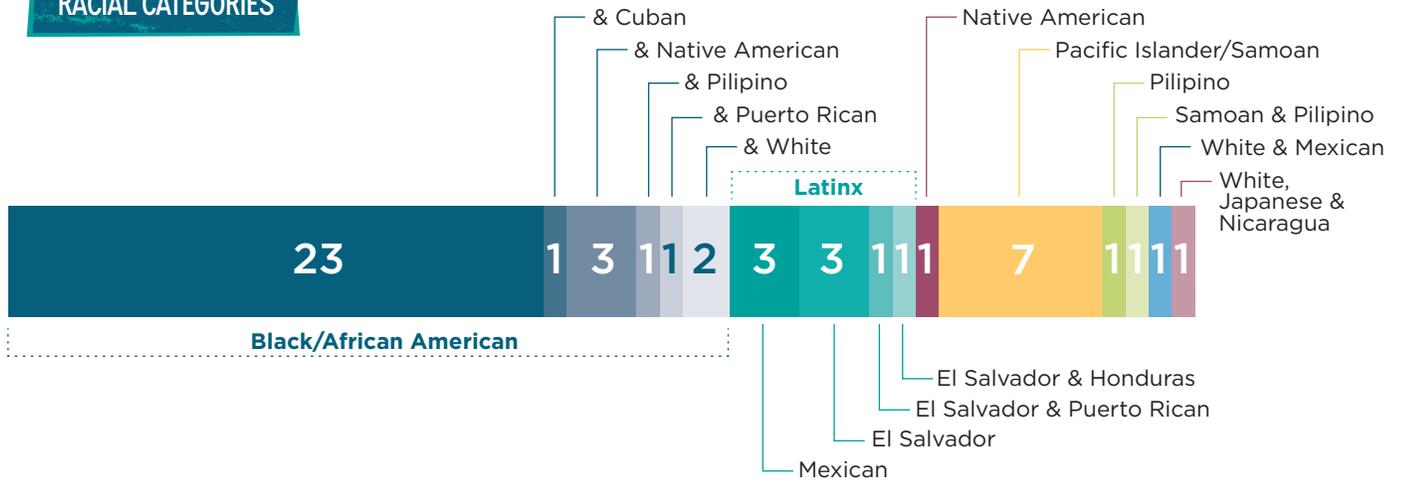
# DEMOGRAPHICS

Out of the one-hundred people interviewed, fifty-one were involved in San Francisco’s juvenile delinquency system and incarcerated at the San Francisco Juvenile Justice Center. The demographic information below represents the fifty-one people whose interviews were analyzed for this study. For more information on the larger sample, please refer to, *A Radical Model for Decriminalization*.<sup>101</sup>

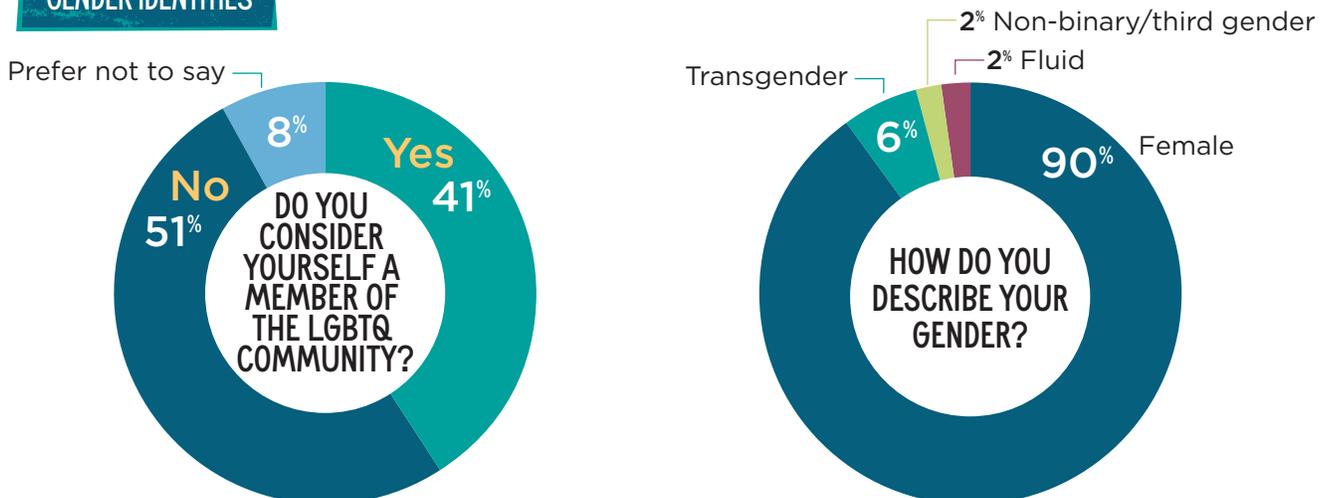
## DISTRIBUTION OF AGE



## RACIAL CATEGORIES



## GENDER IDENTITIES



## DATA ANALYSIS

Over three and a half months, the research team worked closely together to code twenty-two interview transcripts. The research team began by reading the transcripts out loud together to discuss the experiences they were encountering. The team refined their skills in inductive qualitative coding while highlighting interview transcripts. After each session, the team would write notes reflecting on the data to identify the themes arising from the interview data.

Once the team felt confident with their coding skills, they learned how to use Dedoose. The research organizers experienced a learning curve as they learned this new skill, but they enjoyed using the new tool once they felt comfortable. Now, they coded the transcripts independently, while in the same room, to talk to each other if any questions arose. After coding independently, the team would review each other's coding in a discussion to close out their research sessions and take notes and write their analytical findings. Together, the team coded twenty-two transcripts on Dedoose. Katie reported that this process went much longer than expected because the interviews were long and ranged from thirty to ninety pages. The research organizers shared that they appreciated learning these new skills and strengthening their resume and ability to gain future employment.

Once the team coded all twenty-two transcripts in Dedoose, they gathered a larger group to create the analytical schema to represent the interview data. Kazani Kalani, lead SF organizer, and Alezandra joined the team for these final sessions. The team printed out ten transcripts from Dedoose that they had coded and had physically cut each code. The team began to create themes, categories, and sub-categories through a dialogical process of physically sorting all the coded excerpts from the interview data. This allowed the team to see the different themes at the same time and rearrange categories and subcategories collaboratively. The research team engaged in a rich discussion on the themes and categories and created a final schema. The team identified and named five major themes that arose from coding the data, with categories and sub-categories. They created the final thematic tree diagram that represented the analytical framework for capturing youth experiences at JJC. Finally, the team created a codebook for each of the themes and categories. This final analysis phase took the research team two weeks to complete. Once the analytical scheme and codebook were created through a collaborative and participatory process, Katie and Alezandra used this framework to code all fifty-one interviews.

# SUMMARY OF DATA FINDINGS

## PART 1: EXPERIENCE OF THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY SYSTEM

- Theme 1: Questionable Reasons for Incarceration
- Theme 2: Negligence on the Inside
- Theme 3: Enduring Impact of Incarceration

## PART 2: ENVISIONING A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR SYSTEM-IMPACTED YOUTH

- Theme 4: System Recommendations: Voicing Needs
- Theme 5: What Could Have Made a Difference?

## THEME 1: QUESTIONABLE REASONS FOR INCARCERATION

These categories represent circumstances where youth became involved in the juvenile delinquency system, or were pushed deeper in the system for rationale that are unreasonable, unjust, or for circumstances beyond their control.

**CATEGORY** ***Survival Crimes:*** Youth were charged with a criminal case as a result of working in the underground street economy as a way to meet their basic needs. Youth acquired food, clothing or other personal items from local stores without paying. Other's engaged in sex work to make money, while some were forced against their will. Many of these youth were in the foster care setting or living in poverty. They did not have their basic needs met, and were charged criminally for attempting to meet these needs.

---

***Abuse of Power:*** Youth identified 4 scenarios where law enforcement and the court system unfairly detained and charged them - trumped up charges, gang enhancements, forced to plead guilty, and detained without sufficient reason. Youth with gang enhancements or trumped up charges obtained more serious charges associated with longer sentences. Other youth felt forced to plead guilty when they were innocent or when it was against their best interests because they were not given sufficient explanation by the court system. A few youth were held at JJC but later released once they were cleared of their charges.

---

***Probation Violations:*** Youth were pushed deeper into the system because they were set up for failure: too closely surveilled through juvenile probation and given excessively restrictive requirements. If youth violated the terms of their probation, they could face incarceration, a longer term of probation, or additional charges.

---

***School:*** School staff called in police enforcement to handle issues that arose inside of schools. Youth were then charged in the juvenile delinquency system.

---

***Foster Care Entanglement:*** Foster youth acquired new criminal charges related to their status in the foster care system.

---

**SUB-CATEGORY** ***Group Homes:*** Youth in group homes picked up new charges because of incidents that arose inside of their group home. Or they ran away to ensure their safety.

---

***Waiting for Placement:*** While Foster youth were waiting for a new placement, they were incarcerated at JJC because the system could not find an immediate home or group home for them.

---

## THEME 2: NEGLIGENCE ON THE INSIDE

Youth shared their experiences while incarcerated at JJC where they were inflicted with unnecessary harm that caused long lasting trauma in their life.

**CATEGORY** *Disrespectful Interpersonal Interactions:* Staff from the juvenile delinquency system spoke to youth in a degrading and disrespectful manner. These interactions reinforced negative and harmful stereotypes.

---

*Excessive Physical Violence:* Incarcerated youth were physically harmed by staff inside of JJC, while being forcibly restrained.

---

**SUB-CATEGORY** *Shackled:* Youth were placed at increased risk of physical harm while unnecessarily shackled.

---

*Solitary Confinement:* Youth were isolated in their cells for extended periods of time through a de facto practice of social isolation.

---

*Issues with Male PO's in Units:* Youth expressed extreme discomfort with male officers inside of JJC. Especially, when male officers could see them while using the restroom, undressing, and showering.

---

*Health:* Youth's health concerns were not properly addressed while incarcerated.

---

**SUB-CATEGORY** *Physical Health:* Youth may have made requests for medical attention but were ignored, provided care too late, or given sub-par care. Often worsening whatever condition, they were suffering.

---

*Pregnancy:* Youth were incarcerated while pregnant, and the conditions of detention made it impossible for them to care for their unborn child.

---

*Mental Health:* Youth's mental health was not adequately addressed while incarcerated and, in some cases, made worse by the care that they did receive.

---

**SUB-CATEGORY** *Medication:* Youth were mandated to take psychotropic medication without their consent or their family's approval.

---

*Therapy:* Youth did not feel comfortable receiving therapy from the delinquency system because they believed that this was designed to compile evidence against them.

---

## THEME 3: ENDURING IMPACT OF INCARCERATION

Youth share the enduring impact that being involved in the juvenile delinquency system caused them.

**CATEGORY** *Emotional Distress:* Youth describe the long-term impact of being incarcerated during their childhood.

---

*Jail is not a Place for Kids:* Youth concluded that juvenile detention is a developmentally inappropriate place for all children.

---

*Family Separation:* Youth were separated from their family as a result of incarceration, during a time when they needed the support of loved ones the most.

---

## THEME 4: SYSTEMS RECOMMENDATIONS - VOICING NEEDS

Youth provided insightful recommendations for transforming the juvenile delinquency system, that would better support the needs of system-impacted youth.

**CATEGORY** *Placement Self-advocacy in Foster Care:* Youth want to be a part of the decision-making process for out of home placements. They want to remain as close to their community as possible to maintain important ties to loved ones.

---

*Rethinking Probation:* Youth provided recommendations for improving juvenile probation that focused on them being able to enact self-determined goals.

---

**SUB-CATEGORY** *Reduce Excessive Monitoring:* Youth recommend that probation officers reduce excessive monitoring of their life because this places youth at increased risk of recidivism.

---

*Requirements Impede Goals:* The requirements that probation officers placed on youth impeded their ability to be successful because they were time consuming and not aligned with their own goals.

---

*Economic Support:* Youth identified economic stability through securing reliable and well-paid employment, as the most important goal post-detention.

---

## THEME 5: WHAT COULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE?

Youth reflected on what could have made a difference in their life while they were a part of the juvenile delinquency system.

**CATEGORY** *Positive Strength Based Interactions:* Adults working with system-impacted youth need to engage with them in a way that focuses on their strengths, and provide them with positive reinforcement.

---

*Supportive Service Providers:* Youth want the adult providers to visibly demonstrate they care for them and are interested in their wellbeing.

---

*Services that Address Root Causes:* Youth recommend that programs and services address the root causes of their delinquency involvement related to poverty and trauma.

---

*Community Support:* Youth highlighted the importance of receiving support and services through community-based organizations located in their communities, where they felt safe and trusted the adults they worked with.

---

“

**My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences.**

*The Cancer Journals,*  
**by Audre Lorde**

## AUTHOR'S NOTE TO THE READER

It is a political act not to remain silent. It is a political act to voice words that convey realities that hide in the shadows. What the visceral bodies of cis and trans young women, trans men and young men, and gender-expansive people know to be true is often not believed, scrutinized, or vilified. The survivors of R Kelly's abuse spoke out for many years with no recompense, and even now, they receive death threats for speaking out. Countless people doubted and picked apart Christine Blasey Ford's testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee. She also received death threats for speaking out against Brett Kavanaugh. Ford's status as a well-educated upper-class White woman did not even protect her. It is often easier to call survivors liars or say they misinterpreted their abuser's intentions rather than hold men or the state accountable for their behavior. These women who have publicly spoken out against gender-based violence have faced extreme public scrutiny and violent threats for not remaining silent. It is a political act not to remain silent because *our silence will not protect us*.

In this report, fifty-one people shared their experience of juvenile incarceration. They did so bravely. They shared difficult experiences, ranging from being spoken to in a derogatory manner, to not being provided with a basic standard of care while incarcerated, or being criminalized for being poor, for being Black or Brown, for being female, transgender or gender-expansive. Some people shared experiences of extreme physical abuse. Many of these experiences constitute a grave disregard for human rights. The United States of America is the only country in the United Nations that did not ratify the Convention on Children's Rights. In the preamble, it states, "Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding."<sup>102</sup> The institution of the juvenile delinquency system in America precludes this possibility. Right now, 545 children are detained in ICE facilities, and their parents cannot be found due to President Trump's racially motivated immigration policy in 2017.<sup>103</sup> Can America continue to have so little regard for the sacredness of childhood?

Throughout the interviews, I heard people say that no one believed them. People lodged complaints of abuse that occurred in group homes to their social workers. Nothing came of it. Others attempted to address the harassment they experienced while incarcerated. Nothing came of that. The adults around these young people did not take their disclosures seriously. No one attempted to interrupt the cycles of institutional violence these youth experienced, to protect the dignity of their childhood. Instead, they were criminalized and adultified. The people in this study shared the distinct understanding that if they lived in a higher rent neighborhood and not Bayview Hunters Point, or if they were White, then they would have avoided juvenile incarceration altogether.

In Claudia Rankin's latest book, *Just Us*, she writes about her friend, who was called into her child's preschool based on an accusation about her son being violent. The White teacher cried in the principal's office as she described an incident with a young black preschooler, who allegedly harmed her after she forcefully restrained

him. As Rankin reflects on this incident, she writes, “Is the harassment of black children by grown people an inability to contain their irritation at our survival?”<sup>104</sup> The absolute absurdity of a grown adult fearing a preschooler is shockingly prevalent and evidenced in the high rates of school suspensions for Black preschool and kindergarten students and these false narratives follow Black children throughout their schooling. These damaging stereotypes are endemic to American institutional systems and create the foundation necessary to perpetuate institutional and state violence against Black and Brown children.

At the Young Women’s Freedom Center, and in a small way with this report, we attempt to rewrite damaging narratives applied to system-involved youth of color. We seek to make visible the strength and brilliance of the young people that shared their experiences with us. As you read through the extreme obstacles they faced, I want to remind you that they were kids, just like the kids you know. Kids who wanted to have fun with their friends, play sports after school, and attend prom. Those regular quotidian experiences did not happen for these youth because they attended alternative schools and navigated cumbersome requirements placed on them by juvenile probation. I hope you also bear witness to the transformative leadership of the youth organizers that analyzed the interviews in this report and worked on the campaign to shut down San Francisco’s Juvenile Justice Center. They, too, have been impacted by juvenile incarceration but have transformed their lives and communities and are powerful leaders ready to show us all the way.

We enlist you in creating a radical future, free of a brutal system of mass incarceration. As I write this, I learn that Kamala Harris will become our first female, first Black and South Asian vice president. My deepest hope is that we can do better for our young people and provide them with nurturing systems that foster joy and self-determined futures. Now this feels even more possible. Remember the words of Angela Davis, that *freedom is constant struggle*. Stay vigilant. Together in community, let us alchemize our painful past into a beautiful new possibility.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alezandra Zaragoza Melendrez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alezandra Zaragoza Melendrez  
President of Freedom Research Institute, YWFC

**PART 1:**

**EXPERIENCE OF THE JUVENILE  
DELINQUENCY SYSTEM**



**FREEDOM  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE**



***I believe*** that young folks in our communities inherently have power, value, and brilliance that cannot be diminished by unjust, racist, violent systems.

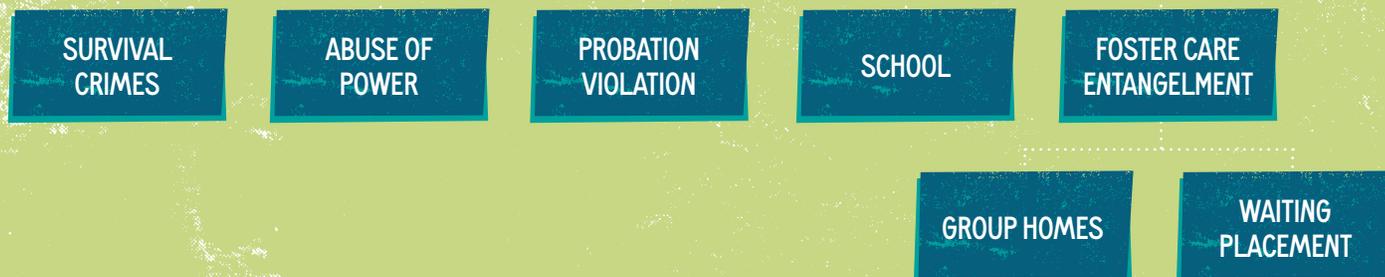
***I believe*** in a world where young people of all genders and all colors can pursue their dreams and passions without facing oppressive systems.

***I believe*** that all youth are powerful and unique in their own radical way and they should have the right to self expression in every way.





## THEME 1: QUESTIONABLE REASONS FOR INCARCERATION



Community Experts thoroughly detailed their juvenile criminal cases, their experience with the court system, detention at San Francisco’s JJC, and participating in juvenile probation. Experts provided rich contextual narratives around the personal and structural circumstances they were navigating while in the juvenile delinquency system. Their stories offer critical insight into the structures and pathways contributing to the disproportionate incarceration of low-income Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth. As Research Organizers analyzed the qualitative interview data, they immediately identified circumstances where Community Experts were being arrested and detained for cases that felt unreasonable, unjust, and potentially lacking legal bases. Research Organizers were involved in San Francisco’s juvenile delinquency system. From this place of experiential expertise, the team assessed which criminal cases fell within the scope of the juvenile delinquency system and which should have been handled differently. If the juvenile delinquency system did not criminalize poor youth of color for circumstances outside of their control, such as poverty and structural inequalities, the cases detailed here could have been avoided. Community Experts identified five circumstances where they became involved in the juvenile delinquency system but were unsure of the rationale or fairness behind their charges: *survival crimes*, *abuse of power*, *probation violations*, *school*, and *fooster care entanglement*.

67% of Community Experts worked in the underground street economy as a minor to meet their basic needs, such as securing food, feminine products, and clothing. When Experts acquired these goods, the system’s response was to criminally charge them; these scenarios comprised the category of *survival crimes*. In these circumstances, Experts had to navi-

gate adult responsibilities with the skills and economic access of a minor, and they expressed frustration for being criminally punished for securing their basic needs.

Community Experts conveyed two circumstances where the court officers charged them for reasons they deemed unjustified: *abuse of power and probation violations*. Experts believed that the arresting officer and prosecutor engaged in a process of “trumped-up charges” because the final charges were overreaching and did not match the circumstances of the alleged offense, thereby enacting an *abuse of power*. Experts serving a probation term expressed that probation officers overly surveilled and monitored them, increasing their risk of recidivism for violating terms of their probation that were unreasonable, such as a 6 pm curfew or stay-away orders from neighborhoods where family members lived; these incidents were categorized under probation violations.

Approximately 20% of Community Experts were charged with their first case in the juvenile delinquency system when a staff member from their school or a foster care provider called the police to handle an internal incident, detailing two pathways to the juvenile delinquency system that could have been avoided: school and foster care entanglement. Experts did not understand why their schools or foster care providers were so quick to call in law enforcement, a move that escalated the consequences of common issues that occur in both systems. Experts would have preferred school staff or foster care providers to directly deal with them because they viewed those spaces as better situated to resolve conflicts. They indicated the juvenile delinquency system unfairly punished them because of their race and class and that their White peers would not face similar criminal consequences for the same behaviors.

What follows is a detailed account of Community Experts becoming involved and incarcerated in the juvenile delinquency system. Other systems designed to promote childhood well-being would have more effectively dealt with youth in a developmentally appropriate manner, where youth would not have been unnecessarily criminalized.



## SURVIVAL CRIMES

Youth were charged with a criminal case as a result of working in the underground street economy as a way to meet their basic needs.

**“THEY ARE HUNGRY, OR THEY DON’T HAVE MONEY, SO THEY’RE DOING THINGS TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES.”**

Community Experts described becoming involved in the juvenile delinquency system while they were in the process of acquiring necessities. Experts characterized living environments at home or in the foster care system where they did not have consistent access to clean clothes, hygiene products, food, or mothers did not have supplies for their babies. Other Experts recounted unsafe or abusive relationships with adult caregivers; they experienced childhood sexual and physical abuse, which compelled them to run away, placing them at an increased risk of facing human trafficking. When Experts ran away from their out of home placement to protect themselves against abuse or violence, many worked in the underground street economy to find the means to travel home.

30% of Community Experts’ first case with the juvenile delinquency system involved stealing items at local drug or clothing stores, highlighting that thefts were motivated by securing basic needs. In the process of acquiring clothes or food, young people caught petty theft charges or could garner more serious charges with longer sentences if they ran away when they were apprehended, struggled with a security guard, or stole items over a few hundred dollars. When interviewers asked Alexis Ferrero what she took from a local San Francisco drug store, she replied, “Yeah, clothes and food, like hygiene stuff.” Alexis was a parentified young person trying to take care of herself, her child, and other family members and could not secure enough economic resources through traditional routes.

For those Experts in the foster care system, their lack of basic needs was even more acute because they moved around from different placement settings and had to rely on whatever a group home or foster care parent decided to provide. Ashley Flowers lived in a group home that did not provide access to a washing machine, so unable to clean her clothes, she stole clothes from a local store, where she picked up her first case. While in the foster care system, Brittany Love reflected on a criminal case she picked up, “I was at Larkin for the next four months. Then I got caught up one day doing something. I think I was stealing because I had no money, and I needed to eat. I had to do something. I got caught, or something happened. That's when I went to juvenile hall again.” Brittany, a trans girl and dually-involved youth, shared a tough decision she made to

acquire food and clothing from a local store due to the foster care system's inability to provide for her basic needs. Brittany was pushed further into the system, detained, and had to serve a longer probation sentence due to the foster care system failing her. Community Experts had to make difficult and dangerous decisions that could have been avoided if systems provided them with a standard of care. If Brittany's parents had provided the same lack of care, neglecting her basic human needs, as her group home, child protective services would have punished them. In Ashley's circumstance, her family was unable to provide for her economically; this reflects the economic and social marginalization that communities of color face, which leaves families less able to gain fair and equitable employment to support their loved ones.

Some Community Experts made the difficult decision to run away from their home or foster care setting to escape emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Fifty-one Experts had an average Adverse Childhood Experience score of 6.34, representing a much higher childhood abuse history than the general public.\*\* Experts shared they were unable to disclose the abuse, and those who did disclose may not have been believed. Lucy Books was living with a foster care parent and experiencing physical abuse in the home. When her social worker showed up for check-ins, they were conducted in the living room with her foster parent, because of the lack of privacy she did not feel safe disclosing the abuse. Many experts decided to run away from their homes or foster care settings because of few options to ensure their safety. Being underage with limited resources and options available to them, Experts entered the underground street economy while running away; some engaged in sex work or became trafficked.



In 2017, California implemented statewide reform to end the practice of charging minors with offenses related to solicitation of prostitution.\*\* Many of the older people in this study were not beneficiaries of this institutional shift. When Cynthia Harrison was twelve, she picked up her first case, she replied, “It’s hard for me to talk about. It’s for human trafficking. They’re charging me for prostitution, and I was actually trafficked at the time.” Cynthia was incarcerated at JJC for three months for being trafficked. Other Community Experts spoke of entering the juvenile delinquency system for charges related to sex work, even though they were minors. Reina Argueta defended herself against the man who trafficked her, resulting in charges for a violent crime as an adult with a lengthy sentence, even though she was protecting her safety as a minor. Community Experts contended with lasting trauma from sex work and trafficking, which was compounded once incarcerated.

The realities described by Community Experts underscore the importance of the institutional system’s ability to recognize the complexities that system-impacted youth of color face so that they are not further harmed. Shante Smith echoed this when she said, “They are hungry, or they don’t have money, so they’re doing things to support themselves. I feel like any institution is a barrier. That they don’t really give them counseling or help. They just call them at-risk juveniles.” Shante highlights the contradiction of an institutional system that criminalized and punished youth for structural inequalities and then, in turn, labels them as problematic. The survival crimes described here have much more to say about a society and culture that does not equitably protect and nourish all young people and says very little about the state of youth delinquency.



## ABUSE OF POWER

Youth identified four scenarios where law enforcement and the court system unfairly detained and charged them: trumped up charges, gang enhancements, forced to plead guilty, and detained without sufficient reason.

**“HOW DO I TELL THEM I REALLY PLEADED JUST BECAUSE I HAVE A SON THAT WAS WAITING FOR ME. I KNEW THAT DEEP DOWN INSIDE THAT IF I WENT TO TRIAL, I COULD HAVE REALLY WON THE CASE, BUT DO I REALLY HAVE TIME?”**

Community Experts identified scenarios where the system detained them without sufficient cause and expressed genuine confusion around their charges' validity. 39.1% of Experts reported that they did not understand their criminal charges or the court system. Experts illustrated four scenarios where their cases' rationale and justification were unclear: trumped-up charges, gang enhancements, forced to plead guilty, and detained without sufficient reason. Experts interpreted these charges as circumstances where law enforcement and the court system exerted too much power to detain and incarcerate them; they were punished too harshly and pushed deeper into the system. Experts made a clear delineation between straightforward cases that they understood would be criminal offenses and these cases where they were charged unjustly.

As young people enter the juvenile delinquency system, several touch-points exist where a youth's case could potentially be diverted: the arresting officer, district attorney, judge, and probation officer all could intervene and change the course of a case. All the Community Experts identified as Black, Latinx, or Pacific Islander, and many expressed concerns that the system punished them harshly because of their race or because they lived in overly policed low-income neighborhoods. Several Experts spoke of committing low-level offenses but then getting charged with more serious crimes based on questionable evidence, what they called trumped-up charges.

Ann Johnson got into a fight with a peer who was consistently bullying her at school. When police took Ann to JJC, she was charged with assault with a deadly weapon because they considered the use of her shoe in the conflict a deadly weapon. Others described petty theft incidents where the courts charged them with a more serious crime because they had physical contact with security guards who restrained them forcibly. Jane Lin stole items from a department store and should have been charged with petty theft, because she had brought a foil bag with her, this was deemed a burglary tool, and she acquired more serious charges associated with a longer sentence. In the worst scenarios, the court system accused Experts

of crimes that they did not commit, simply because they were near a crime site. This happened to Amber Rose, “Yes, basically they made my teen life hard for something that I didn’t do. I basically dropped out of school because of that because I didn’t want to go back to jail,” she happened to be standing near the site of a crime and because of her physical proximity was charged with an offense she did not commit and suffered years in the juvenile delinquency system.

Some Community Experts experienced longer sentences because of gang enhancements. This label on a criminal record constitutes a racist and harmful practice that targets people of color living in low-income neighborhoods. Kiesha Brown received a gang enhancement, which lengthened her sentence, but she was never in a gang, “I got gang violence, gang charges because I told them things that I’ve done in my life. I used to hang out on Mission Street and hang out with them, and then they’re like, ‘You’re trying to push that,’ I’m like, ‘What?’ I’m like, ‘I’m not- I’m an associate, I know them, but I’m not affiliated with the gang’”. Police regularly harassed Reina Argueta in the Mission neighborhood because her brother was in a gang. She was in elementary school and reported that this harassment followed her in school, where staff insisted that she was gang-affiliated when she was not. Reina expressed extreme dejection around being labeled at such a young age and how this later contributed to her system involvement. Community Experts reported being targeted and labeled as gang members because of where they lived, something they had no control over. This unnecessary practice significantly impacted their lives; they had to serve longer terms of detention and probation and followed stay-away orders that restricted them from visiting loved ones.

Some Community Experts felt forced to plead guilty to offenses because JJC staff told them that it was their best option, without explaining the long-term implications. Kelhani Reyes recounted this problematic decision,



**How do I tell them I really pleaded just because I have a son that was waiting for me? I knew that deep down inside that if I went to trial, I could have really won the case, but do I really have time? Being a single mother and a kid that relies on me to just be sitting there, when I have already been there for 12 months already. You know what I’m saying? People don’t want to hear that. You’re on a limited time. I just get discouraged, and I shut down.**

Alexis described a case where she was convinced to plead guilty to something she did not do. Alexis felt compelled to plead guilty so she could leave juvenile detention earlier but ended up on probation for four years. Alexis disclosed that she would have rather stayed in juvenile detention for a few months to serve her time rather than a multi-year probation term because this greatly hindered her ability to accomplish her life goals. Many other Experts communicated that they did not understand the legal process, and the court system did not take time to thoroughly explain their case, so as a minor, they engaged in a decision-making process with profound implications on their lives without the necessary clarity and support to do so.

Four Community Experts shared stories of being detained at San Francisco's JJC for cases that were eventually dropped. Bianca waited for two months, Sarah three weeks, Amber one week, and Janelle four months - they all served time for an unfounded case. They all described the negative impacts being incarcerated had on their lives and how they were no longer able to trust the system and police for causing so much harm in their lives without a cause.



## PROBATION VIOLATIONS

Youth were pushed deeper into the system because they were too closely surveilled through juvenile probation and given excessively restrictive requirements.

**“I WAS IN AND OUT BECAUSE I KEPT VIOLATING MY ANKLE MONITOR. YOU KNOW I’M A KID, I WANTED TO GO BE FREE.”**

**80** % of Community Experts had one or two convicted offenses, primarily for low-level cases, with an average probation term of 27.75 months. Experts outlined their cases in detail and all the instances of detention, but it became difficult for them to disentangle a new offense from a technical probation violation. Experts reported uncertainty about why they were incarcerated at JJC, whether it was because they picked up a new case or violated probation. Even those with one or two low-level offenses, they remained on probation for long periods, increasing their risk of becoming reincarcerated for violating minor infractions.

Community Experts detailed numerous requirements mandated by their probation officer, typically imposed without regard to their individual circumstances, needs, or goals. Experts chronicled an onerous list of requirements, which included: multiple in-person check-ins, daily phone calls, anger management classes, individual and family counseling, drug testing, early curfews, ankle monitoring, and stay-away orders from their community where family members lived. Experts found it challenging to manage so many time-consuming requirements while trying to stay in school, compounded by a lack of affordable and reliable transportation. Experts listed the many different activities they completed every week; eventually, they realized the impossibility of successfully meeting these requirements, such as a 6 pm curfew. Thus, it was hard not to feel that their probation officers set them up to fail.

In many circumstances, the terms of probation were directly at odds with the goals that Community Experts had for themselves. Expert’s primary concerns were performing well in school and garnering employment, but their probation requirements made that nearly impossible. Lucy Books was charged with stealing a phone at school, her only offense, but she shared she knew who stole it but remained silent to protect her friend. Initially, Lucy was detained at juvenile hall for four months; she stayed longer because the phone’s value required a longer sentence. While on probation, Lucy violated the requirements, she said, “I got locked up for violating probation. I was on probation, and I think I missed curfew or something. I had got locked up.” Lucy missed a 6 pm curfew, and her

probation officer reincarcerated her at juvenile hall for an additional twenty-eight days. Lucy was going to school, trying to work, attending to her numerous probation requirements while using public transportation in her underserved neighborhood of Bayview Hunters Point. Meeting a 6 pm curfew was entirely undoable under these conditions.

Community Experts reported being detained for missing one meeting with their probation officer or for a school absence. Shemey Scott had one low-level offense and was required to serve one year on probation. She ended up missing one day of school and was reincarcerated for truancy because this violated her probation conditions. Interviewers asked Alexis Ferrero about the second time she was detained, “No, still the same case. Because I missed a day with my probation officer.” Experts described a dynamic where probation officers required them to adhere to a battery of standard requirements without considering their individual needs or circumstances around their case. For example, some Experts had to submit regular drug tests, even though their case had nothing to do with drug use. Others described being forced to attend counseling sessions with family members that were not integral in their lives, causing more damage to already tenuous relationships. Experts were often unable to keep up with the copious requirements assigned to them; they were still developing time management skills, had more pressing concerns, and relied on others for transportation.

Ashley Flowers recounted the complications that young people face while being monitored by probation through GPS ankle monitors,



**It was YGC. It was in and out. After I had got out a month later, I was on my ankle monitor for a good six months, maybe, but during that six months, I was in and out because I kept violating my ankle monitor. You know I'm a kid, I wanted to go be free.**

Ashley was repeatedly incarcerated because of GPS ankle monitor issues and felt that the ankle monitor was another form of detention. She struggled to keep the monitor charged and had to sleep on the floor to keep it plugged in at night. Other Experts reported that they had difficulties with their ankle monitor because they did not have access to an electric socket because of housing instability or homelessness or because they could not afford to purchase an extension cord that would have enabled them to sleep in their bed. Ashley questions whether or not juvenile probation is developmentally appropriate because any kid would struggle with a 6 pm curfew or needing to charge their ankle monitor frequently.

For these young folks, with limited incomes and the need to commute all over the city for school, work, and probation meetings in Twin Peaks, a 6 pm curfew presents a set of unrealistic requirements. When youth on probation violate these requirements, they may be detained and pushed further into the juvenile delinquency system. Community Experts consistently advocated for probation officers to hear their needs and asked if they could spend that time working on goals that would support their development as a young adult. For these Experts, having probation involved in their lives for extended periods became an excessive burden that hindered their progress with school and their ability to create a context where they could meet their self-determined goals for freer and happier futures.



## SCHOOL

**School staff called in police enforcement to handle issues that arose inside of schools. Youth were then charged in the juvenile delinquency system.**

**“I WOULD’VE LIKED FOR THEM TO ACTUALLY HELP ME WITH MY EDUCATION. HELP ME WITH ME SEEKING THERAPY. NOT JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS.”**

**T**he School-to-Prison-Pipeline characterizes a practice inside schools where low-income students of color are harshly disciplined, and staff too quickly involve police, creating a direct pipeline into the juvenile delinquency system. Community Experts depicted school environments where school staff and security guards readily called law enforcement to handle school discipline issues, which they could have chosen to handle directly. Instead, these young people obtained a criminal record for issues that their White and middle-class peers typically avoided because their schools decided to internally address school issues. Community Experts elucidate three mechanisms inside their schools that created pathways into the juvenile delinquency system: over punishment through the prevalence of security guards and the practice of calling in law enforcement, inadequate policies to address community violence that permeated their campuses, and ignoring students’ disclosures of bullying.

Before jumping into the particularities of the enmeshment of the school system and the juvenile delinquency system, it is vital to provide a descriptive background of what school was like for the people in this study because they chronicled atypical high school experiences that were characterized by school placement instability, alternative school settings, and navigating structural issues and poverty. Community Experts articulated a belief and desire to do well in school as a means for their advancement and economic stability. Unfortunately, the realities that Experts had to navigate while attending school were immense, and any well-adjusted adult would have struggled. Lisa Hernandez detailed her experience, “I was living in Larkin. I was going to high school. It’s all like doing continuation and just getting my credits again. Towards the end of that, getting my diploma. I got a job telemarketing from The Chronicle. Then I started renting out hotel rooms in the Tenderloin.” Lisa continued to tell interviewers that she needed to make \$48 a day at her job while attending school, or else she would not be able to afford a night-to-night hotel room and would have to sleep on the streets. While in high school, Stacey Freedman went on-the-run from her foster care placement and was living in her car while working at a shoe store in Stonestown Mall. Eventually, she had to drop out of school, even though she was a strong student because homelessness and the need for stable employment were

more pressing concerns than attending high school. Jessica Gonzalez faced similar challenges, “I want to get my GED, but I’m not even going to get into that right now, because I need money. I’m trying to get a house. I mean, not a house. I’m trying to get a roof over my head. I’m not worried about the ABCs, you know?” Experts had to defer their dreams of graduation because of the immense burden that poverty enacted on them, not able to nourish their intellectual abilities. Instead of worrying about completing homework, many had to worry about where they would sleep each night and find ways to support themselves. For those Experts on juvenile probation, the additional burden of an array of requirements left little time to focus on school.

Community Experts communicated low levels of morale when it came to high school. 91% of Experts attended an alternative high school, which meant that they were expelled or informally asked to leave their community school. In community schools, youth can partake in afterschool programs, sports teams, or attend prom; all of these seminal childhood experiences are out of reach for youth who attend school in an alternate placement. On average, Experts attended 3.8 high schools; this included community schools, alternative schools in SFUSD, or schools in lockdown facilities. Many Experts moved around frequently because of poverty or their involvement in the juvenile delinquency or foster care systems; instability made graduating difficult. Once they turned eighteen, many attended Five Keys, an alternative school for system-involved people, so they could finally graduate, an environment they indicated was more welcoming.

**“FINDING OUT YOU HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY ISN’T THAT EASY.”**

41% of Community Experts had Individualized Education Plans (IEP). A few Experts shared that the additional support was appreciated, but many others did see the need to be labeled as a special education student because their coursework did not meet their intellectual needs. Intelligent Wisdom, a Black non-binary lesbian person, expressed their frustration with being placed in a special education classroom in high school, “I’d be arguing. My teacher’s like, ‘Because you’re not listening.’ You keep teaching me this stuff like I didn’t pass this packet three times. Give me something else.” Intelligent received an IEP even though they performed well in school, they felt incredibly frustrated in a classroom where teachers did not instruct but handed out simple packets, well below grade level. Intelligent breezed through their packets leading to behavioral issues in school as they acted out the feelings of shame and resentment. Cynthia Jackson had a similar reaction to being given an IEP, “Yes, I felt like in a way I was tossed to the side a lot. I never really felt like I got understood what I’ve been through with my learning disability. Finding out you have a learning disability isn’t that easy.” Cynthia and Intelligent wanted to be in a classroom setting that nourished their intellectual brilliance and challenged them; instead, teachers gave them below grade-level work that they found demeaning.

Community Experts reported concerns with how their schools handled discipline issues, dissatisfaction with being overly punished, and inadequately supported to make different decisions. 47% of Community Experts were suspended in elementary school, and 90% were suspended in middle school. Once youth reach their teenage years, school staff readily called in police to resolve school-based issues with students. Community Experts pointed out the prevalence of security guards in their schools who exerted excessive surveillance and force; 78% of Experts had security guards in their schools. Ashley Flowers depicted this,



**The security guard, imagine the security police at the school. They got a list for probation kids, so they posted it in there. I'm not from there, so they'd have to call the police and not our probation officer. The house manager gave them the number and told them not to call it, and I guess they called the police. I don't know what happened.**

Ashley was a dually-involved youth; she recounted how the school security guard, group home staff, and police all colluded together to create an easy pathway to recidivism. Community Experts believed that school staff were too quick to call the police for school-based issues or that the security guards became overly involved and escalated situations. Ashley was struggling in school, and the school's response was, "If you're not going to school, you're not following the program, so you're going to have to go back to jail or something like that." For many, the school system and the juvenile justice system worked hand in hand, creating a monolithic educational experience of surveillance and punishment.

Community Experts were frustrated when school staff quickly resorted to calling in the police instead of proactively working with them to resolve conflicts. Lillyana Tvio got her first juvenile offense from a fight at school and remained in the delinquency system several years afterward. Lillyana pleaded with her school to attend an alternative high school like Downtown, but she was expelled from the district. She was placed in a group home for the first time in her life due to a school fight, after being told by an officer that, "We don't want you anywhere in the city." In Lillyana's case, if she attended a school in a high-income neighborhood or a private school, criminal involvement would have likely been avoided, and the school would have taken a developmentally appropriate response to a childhood dispute.

Community Experts described high schools affected by community violence. Community violence pervaded inside of schools, and school leaders insufficiently addressed these issues and did not ensure safe learning environments. During their high school years, 65% of Experts had a classmate pass away due to a violent act. For many Experts, their school was not always a safe haven to learn. They had to deal with community violence resulting from historical oppression and margin-

alization of communities of color and state-sanctioned police violence, realities that permeated the daily life of their schools. CJ remarked, “You already know the history of San Francisco, so for you to put these certain groups of people that already can’t go to an average school together. You’re all going to put them all in one school and think it’s going to go smooth? It’s not.” Schools were not adequately addressing the realities that their students faced; CJ pointed out that this should be considered when making placement decisions. Sarah Taylor shared her concerns about an alternative high school, “It was a lot of people that was on probation there, and everyone had a pass, and everyone there was from different neighborhoods, and it was a whole lot of fighting and violence and stuff like that.” As a result of inadequate school policies to address community concerns and school-based conflicts, Community Experts became involved in altercations with their peers, and then the school called the police to step in.

Security guards often intervened to break up fights, but students could become harmed in the process or inadvertently harm the security guard. Then they could be charged with assaulting the guard, increasing the time they would have to serve in juvenile detention. Community Experts were unsure whether the security guards worked for their school or local law enforcement; they did share that the security guards commonly used excessive force when handling school-based conflicts. Experts illustrated school experiences where physical violence was a serious concern they had to worry about, initially from peers, but escalated by school staff, security guards, and inadequate policies to prevent conflicts.



A few Community Experts disclosed that peers bullied them in school because of their gender identity or gender expression or their sexual orientation. They shared this information with school staff, but eventually, after repeated and unaddressed confrontation from the bully, they intervened physically to end the bullying, which in turn got them involved in the juvenile delinquency system. Brittany Love shared her story,

“

**I don't know what the hell they were thinking. Then seventh grade, and then I got expelled from eighth grade because I tried to fight a boy in school because he was calling me all kinds of f\*\*\*\*ts and stuff in class, and the teacher would not listen ever. Every time I told her, and it was starting to really affect me. He was antagonizing me. Bullying me, antagonizing me. Always wanting to start conflicts in the locker room. There was a point where I used to go to the girls' locker room, and they wouldn't respect that. Because my name wasn't changed, I was so young.**

Brittany made a reasonable faith effort to ask for support from the adults around her, but when the bullying became too overwhelming, she had to intervene to make it stop. Lucy Books was on probation while attending high school. She violated the terms of her probation, “Because I got into a lot of fights. Especially because where I was from, I got into a lot of different fights because of that and being gay.” Her school suspended her four different times for similar incidents but did nothing to intervene to stop the bullying she was experiencing because she is gay. Bullies targeted Brittany and Lucy at school because of their gender identity and sexual orientation. Unfortunately, their schools did not ensure their safety and well-being, and as a result of defending themselves against bigotry ended up being disciplined in school and pushed further into the juvenile delinquency system.

Community Experts expressed confusion around the involvement of police and why security guards interacted with them harshly and violently. Mars Venus suggested a different approach,

“

**I would've liked for them to actually help me with my education. Help me with me seeking therapy. Not jumping to conclusions, because they were like, 'I was an out of control teen,' but I actually had problems. I had meningitis when I was two. That affects my education now to this day. They didn't focus on that. I could've been receiving answers, I could've been being taken care of, basically.**

Mars was coping with health concerns, probation requirements, and the impacts of living in poverty. While she admitted she was acting out in school, no one at school or juvenile probation took the time to assess the root causes of her behavior. Instead, they took the approach of labeling her as a problematic kid, missing an opportune moment to provide her with support and healing. Instead of school staff calling her probation officer or suspending her, Lucy would have liked to have been asked, “Why are you doing this? What’s the reason behind your acting out?” It was, ‘You’re not doing this in the class, go to the office. You’re going to go home.’” Like Mars, Lucy wanted the adults interacting with her to stop and take a moment to facilitate a conversation; for adults to stop with routines required by their role and show that they cared. Sarah Taylor wanted her teachers to build a deeper connection with her while in school. “I think they should take their time to actually get to know the students, instead of just sending them out of the classroom and absolutely not knowing what they’re going through and trying to change themselves for the better, because we know kids don’t just act that way for no reason.” Mars, Lucy, and Sarah were all system-involved youth navigating probation and complex structural issues in their communities, but when they walked into their schools, they had a hope that school would be a place where they could learn, grow, and be a kid. Instead, school for these youth was a place where they were labeled negatively, overly surveilled, and punished, spoken to in a derogatory manner, no doubt because of their system-involved status, race, and class, creating a structure that entangled school with the juvenile delinquency system. Experts craved a different relationship with school staff, one where adults got to know them, intellectually challenged them, and created an atmosphere where students would not be so easily labeled and treated as delinquent youth. Simply put, they wanted their school to be a place where they could be a kid.



## FOSTER CARE ENTANGLEMENT

**Foster youth acquired new criminal charges related to their status in the foster care system.**

Community Experts who were concurrently in the foster care system and the juvenile delinquency system were entrapped in a structural context that increased their likelihood of acquiring additional criminal charges as they navigated the complexities of living in out-of-home placements. Experts had early childhood experiences with institutional systems in San Francisco, 75% of them recalled being checked up on and questioned by child protective services. 49% of the Experts were part of the foster care system at some point in their lives, and on average, they entered the system at 6.8 years of age. A few Experts reported they were placed with a loving foster parent, although placement instability was typical, with the average placement being 4.83 settings.

Community Experts explained their involvement in both systems, but it became difficult to disentangle each system's jurisdiction over their life, where one system started, and another stopped was impossible to delineate. Experts indicated uncertainty about which providers decided their placement; they were unsure if it was their probation officer or social worker. Mars Venus witnessed her social worker and probation officer working together to keep her incarcerated. She shared, "The CPS worker was also eligible to put more warrants out for me, and they would have me picked up on the warrants, so it had a lot to do with CPS." Mars reported being detained twenty-seven times while dually-involved and described a challenging relationship with her social worker, "She was really nosy. She used to ask questions about my mom and stuff that shouldn't have been asked. Then when it came down to me going to juvenile, her having them hold me in juvenile and stuff like that because she felt she couldn't control me or whatever." Becca also observed her probation officer working with her social worker because they felt her mother was not a fit parent. As a result, she became a ward of the state and was placed in multiple group homes.

Community Experts expressed confusion about the role of their social worker and probation officer because it was not always clear who had jurisdiction to detain them or make placement decisions; too often, their best interest and well-being was not what guided the decision-making process. Overall, the collusion between social workers and probation officers established a framework where dually-involved youth could be readily pushed deeper into the juvenile delinquency system. Dually-involved youth experienced two common mechanisms that propelled this entanglement: cases arising from group home placements and detention at San Francisco's Juvenile Justice Center while waiting for a group home placement.

## GROUP HOMES

Youth in group homes picked up new charges because of incidents that arose inside of their group home. Or they ran away to ensure their safety.

**“I HAD CALLED SOMEBODY THAT WAS IN THE CITY, ONE OF MY FRIENDS. I ASKED THEM TO COME PICK ME UP, AND I LEFT. I WENT ON THE RUN AGAIN, AND I WAS HOMELESS.”**

Community Experts placed in group homes faced many difficulties while in congregate care. They shared that group homes did not meet their basic needs, and they did not have regular access to food or clean clothing. Foster youth receive a monthly stipend, but group homes may take this to cover costs, leaving youth with no money. Experts in group homes consistently complained of not having access to enough food; one youth said staff placed a lock on the refrigerator, others reported that staff did not honor their dietary requirements. Krystal Mitchell shared what she struggled with at her group home, “If they’re not giving you enough lunch money or allowance, whatever go get it on your own. It’s not enough. That \$20 is not enough; I need \$100.” Experts reported resorting to other means, including working in the underground street economy, to gain more income to purchase items that their group home was not providing them. Youth experienced a consistent substandard level of care provided by their group homes, causing them to make challenging negotiations to make up for what the foster care system did not provide them. For those Experts in out of home placements, the conditions inside resulted in them being pushed deeper into the juvenile delinquency system. They identified two common ways this occurred: staff quickly called in law enforcement to handle conflicts, and many went on-the-run seeking to escape abuse or reunite with their family and community.

Community Experts portrayed living environments where conflicts quickly arose with their peers, and staff did not adequately resolve or de-escalate these conflicts. Instead, group home staff quickly called the police to resolve issues that arose between residents; this action resulted in youth gaining new criminal charges and returning to juvenile detention facilities. After being detained at JJC, Lucy Books transitioned into a group home and shared her experience, which details prevalent issues in congregate care settings,



**I was placed there because it was supposed to help me try and transition back into school and hopefully by getting a job or something while I was there. The whole time that I was there, they never placed me in school. I got into fights with all the girls every day because either something of mine came up stolen or they thought I stole something of theirs. You know, stuff like that. I was just sitting in the house every day, getting into fights. I wasn't in school, they didn't put me in school the whole semester that I was there. I just felt like I was being unsuccessful. I felt like I was just sitting there just getting myself in trouble.**

Lucy conveyed the issues that youth face while in a group home setting and how difficult it is for young people to remain issue free. In Lucy's situation, she was sitting idle at her group home, and the staff did not enforce policies to foster positive relationship building between residents. Once the staff became overwhelmed, they would call the police to handle the incident, which had severe consequences for dually-involved youth. Ashley highlighted a similar scenario, "And I was like, 'You know you're being disrespectful, like why are you disrespecting me right now?' And the girl called me a bitch, so I just got up, and then we started fighting, and then they sent me to jail. But I was like. Why are you all sending me to jail when she was the one who kept like antagonizing me this whole time?" Ashley shared that she was having trouble with some of the other girls in the group home and repeatedly asked staff to address this, but nothing came of her complaints, and she eventually reached a boiling point. When youth reported being bullied, staff did not address conflicts or de-escalate them to avoid calling the police; instead, involving law enforcement was frequently the immediate or default response for group home staff. Ashley recalled that group home staff were quick to call in law enforcement and overreact to typical adolescent behavior; she was, "Breaking something or messing up their stuff," as a result, had to be detained at juvenile hall. Experts did not understand why staff used law enforcement to resolve issues inside their group homes and advocated for problems to be worked out inside the home, which would have facilitated more workable interpersonal relationships with their peers and staff.

Jazmine Banks had an incident in a group home at a level six facility where staff can restrain youth. She had a conflict arise with a peer, and a staff member confronted her and escalated the situation by forcefully restraining Jazmine. Jazmine struggled to break free of the restraints; once she did, staff called law enforcement and took her to juvenile detention. Jazmine shared, "So I had vandalism, assault on staff, and some other shit. So I went to juvenile hall until they were able to find me a placement." She had to wait six months before the system found her another group home placement. In Jazmine's circumstance, staff restraints open the door for abuse and physical confrontation, increasing the risk of assaultive charges, custody, and lengthy-time in detention, all adverse outcomes stemming from group home placements.

Community Experts disclosed running away from their group home placements, thus making a difficult decision to violate their probation, which they knew would result in another stay in detention or longer probation terms. They had to navigate undesirable living environments in group home placements and sometimes went on-the-run to escape abuse or reunite with their families. The vast majority of Experts placed in group homes ran away because too few options existed to address their concerns. Yasmine Smith was a strong student determined to meet her educational goals; she was disappointed to be placed in a group with peers unlike herself. Yasmine remembered, “Yeah, those girls was like smoking meth, and I’m just like, ‘Uh-uh, I’m not gonna be here in this group home.’ Like I don’t do nothing like this, never did, so why am I here?” and when asked if she ran away she replied, “Yeah. It felt pointless. I felt like it wasn’t helping. It’s not even what I need.” Yasmine’s placement in a group home negatively impacted her ability to remain a high achieving student. Her choice to run away was grounded in her desire to enact positive life goals.

Tekhnia Smith was experiencing abuse inside her group home and disclosed this information to her social worker, she recalled, “Yes. They knew why I ran away, what I did to be in that situation. They all felt that I ran away just because I knew I did something wrong,” but she ran away to avoid continued abuse. Tekhnia did reach out to her system provider, but no one intervened to make the abuse stop. Other Experts reported feeling uncomfortable sharing the abuse that they had suffered in group home settings for fear of retaliation or not being believed. 64% of Experts in the foster care system did not feel confident that they could bring an issue that arose from their group home to their social worker because they would do nothing to resolve the problem. Community Experts repeatedly questioned why the foster care system did not do a better job screening and assessing foster care parents and group home staff to ensure that they were placed in a safe environment.



Being placed in a group home placed significant challenges on dually-involved youths' ability to stay connected with their family. Another reason they decided to leave a group home placement was to return home. Community Experts shared how emotionally difficult it was to be removed from their community, with limited visits and passes to go back home, particularly acute during the holidays. Jazmine said, "Well, yes, I had placements. I had a placement, but I ran away from those places. I had one placement in Lodi, I had a placement in Yuba," and she reported that she ran away from every placement so that she could be closer to her family. Chy Smacks, a Black dually-involved gender non-conforming youth, shared a similar experience about running away from group home after group home so they could be close to their brother. Chy grew up in the Fillmore in San Francisco but was placed in Vallejo, Contra Costa, Monterey, and Salinas, and they ran from every placement back to San Francisco. During Christmas one year, Chy was finally placed in San Francisco but lost visiting privileges. They very badly wanted to see their brother and other family members during Christmas, but since they were unable to, they chose to run away to see their family. Chy was caught while they were on-the-run. As a result, they were detained at juvenile hall, faced additional criminal charges, served a longer probation term, and had to move to a group home setting in a more restrictive environment.

Part of the complication for dually-involved youth is how easily staff can push them deeper into the system because they are monitored closely and must adhere to draconian rules. Most adolescents engage in boundary-pushing, but for these youth, that resulted in incarceration. Intelligent Wisdom tells the story of having only one case and being subsequently placed in a group home. Intelligent ran away from all of their group home placements so that they could remain in their community. Intelligent had over twenty different stays at JJC, and all but the first stay in detention was for running away from their group homes. Ruth Gordan had a similar experience and had only one convicted offense, but remained involved in the juvenile delinquency system because she would run away from all of her group home placements until she aged out.

For Community Experts who decided their best option was to run away from their designated placement, they risked further incarceration and threats to their safety as they found their way back home. Most of the group home settings that Experts were placed in were outside of San Francisco; some were in other states. Experts had to navigate considerable harm as they made their way home without support or financial means. Ashley Flowers ran away from a group home in Fresno because the staff took away her holiday visit. Later, Ashley ran away from her group home in Wyoming. It took her six months to find her way back home to San

**"...THEY ALL FELT THAT I RAN AWAY JUST BECAUSE I KNEW I DID SOMETHING WRONG," BUT SHE RAN AWAY TO AVOID CONTINUED ABUSE.**

Francisco, working in the underground street economy and living on the streets as she figured out how to reunite with her family. Lucy Books, who survived abuse in her group home, said, “I had called somebody that was in the city, one of my friends. I asked them to come pick me up, and I left. I went on the run again, and I was homeless.” Experts who decided to go on-the-run were unable to seek support through a system that ignored their abuse complaints; instead, they faced chronic homelessness and risks to their safety associated with working in the underground street economy.

Community Experts revealed group home settings with unsafe environments, and some people experienced sexual and physical violence. Other Experts retold the immense sadness and isolation they felt being placed so far from their community. They had few options other than going on-the-run, which resulted in an array of additional criminal charges. Experts should not have been punished for escaping unsafe environments in their group homes because they ensured their emotional and physical well-being. Experts who were isolated from their families and communities were placed in impossible situations as they decided how to stay connected to family members at the cost of further incarceration. When Experts made the challenging decision to go on-the-run, they had to navigate traveling back home with no economic resources, putting themselves in extreme physical danger. Experts expressed that being removed from the fabric of their family’s lives was painful; this was when they needed family’s support the most. We are biologically programmed to want to be close to our families, and removing youth from their families disrupts a primal desire that cannot be ruptured.



## WAITING FOR PLACEMENT

While Foster youth were waiting for a new placement, they were incarcerated at JJC because the system could not find an immediate foster home or group home for them.

“THE GROUP HOMES THERE WOULDN’T TAKE ME, THE ONES IN FRESNO, THE ALL-GIRLS GROUP HOMES WOULDN’T TAKE ME EITHER.”

Community Experts experienced the entanglement between the foster care and juvenile delinquency system when they were detained at juvenile hall while waiting for a group home placement. Experts clearly delineated they were not being detained for a case but rather because the system could not find an out-of-home placement. Intelligent Wisdom recounted this very scenario, “That time, I was always going back. They were putting me in a group home, so I was sitting in juvenile for hecka long, waiting for a placement. I think it was two or three months.” Amber Rose waited in JJC for two weeks while she was waiting for a group home placement. Mars Venus reflected on how long she waited at JJC for a group home, she replied,

“

**Maybe three months. Three to six months. My mom had a CPS case and because I was a ward of the court. They were holding me in there on the prostitution case, but also because I was a ward of the court. They’d say I was a 5150. I was out of control. My mom, they said she couldn’t handle me, so they were holding me to find me a group home.**

Yasmine Smith was also incarcerated at juvenile hall while the system was finding a group home placement for her, “One time I was in there for like eight months waiting for placement,” she was fourteen at the time. Amber and Mars were mandated to live outside of their family’s home by the system and remained incarcerated in juvenile hall while waiting for a group home placement. In effect, the juvenile delinquency system punished youth for their inability to find a placement.

Experts outlined a process where detained youth are interviewed by group homes to see if they are a placement fit, an emotionally challenging and distressing process that for many caused long waits while remaining incarcerated. Stacey Freedman described this, “I was sitting for a while. I remember we used to be in G1, and they used to have people coming in, they’ll interview you, but it was basically up to them if they wanted to accept you in their placement or not. I had a few interviews, but I didn’t get picked. I remember when I did get picked, I was hella happy. I was 13. I went to Children’s Home in Stockton.” Later Stacey Freedom elucidated this further,

“

**The placement shit because you get pumped like thinking, I got an interview. ‘I’ll call you up for an interview.’ It’s just like you’re waiting for your PO to tell you if they accept you or not. I’m like, ‘What the fuck is that? Why would you even waste my time?’ Basically, it’s a pick or choose type thing. It’s like they make you feel like you at the pound or something. The wait too, it should be some type of thing where you could be still free with your family.**

Stacey reported that the longest she ever waited in JJC for placement was ten months. Not only did Stacey describe an interview process that made her feel both anxious and rejected, but she also questioned why she could not have waited for this placement with her family instead of remaining detained at juvenile hall. Brittany Love experienced long waiting periods as a trans girl in JJC because, “The group homes there wouldn’t take me, the ones in Fresno, the all-girls group homes wouldn’t take me either.” Brittany was initially incarcerated in the boy’s unit at JJC and experienced threats because this was not a safe placement for her, but through her advocacy, she was eventually transferred to the girl’s unit. Unfortunately, it was consistently difficult to find a group home placement that would accept trans girls, because of this, she had to wait inside juvenile hall multiple times. Brittany entered the foster care system at six years old and had fourteen different foster care placements once she aged out at eighteen. Brittany worried about her safety in most of her group home placements, and went on-the-run from the majority of them, and cycled from group home placements to homelessness while on-the-run, until she was caught by law enforcement and then incarcerated in juvenile hall; she cycled through this pattern from about age fourteen to eighteen. Experts revealed how painful it was to have to move around between different placements, separated from their family, which was all compounded by the increased risk of additional incarceration.



***I believe*** young people should be free of criminalization and incarceration. And have equal opportunity to heal and thrive.

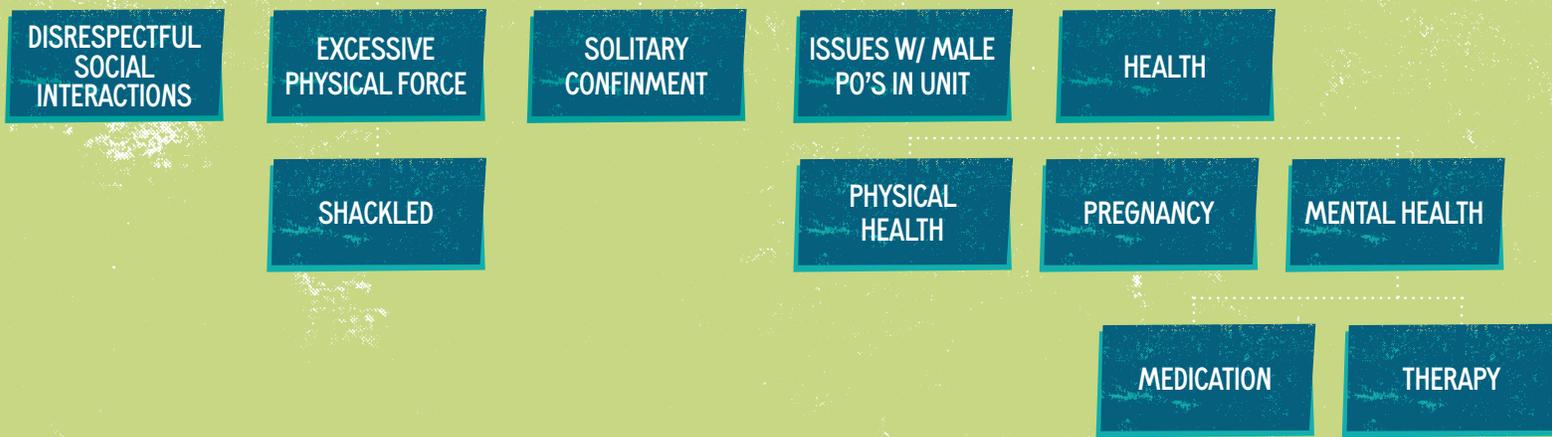
***I believe*** everyone deserves their basic human needs to be met and that none should be punished for trying to do that.

***I believe*** that society has failed in making our young folks feel anything other than safe.





## THEME 2: NEGLIGENCE ON THE INSIDE



Community Experts courageously shared their experience of being harmed while incarcerated at San Francisco’s JJC. The harm that befell on youth resulted from standard policies gone wrong and the lack of external oversight to ensure that young people were kept safe. Detention facilities develop policies designed to control incarcerated people through shackling, solitary confinement, restraining people during conflicts, and institutionalized healthcare. When policies designed to control incarcerated adults are used with youth, this can cause long-term trauma for youth who are in the process of developing. 49% of Experts became involved in the adult criminal system and were incarcerated at San Francisco’s adult facility at 850 Bryant Street. These Experts indicated few discernable differences between the juvenile and adult detention facilities; they did not find the juvenile facilities to have a greater focus on rehabilitation.

Experts lamented over the long-term trauma they contended with well after they left juvenile detention. They had no presumption that juvenile incarceration was supposed to be anything but challenging, but this experience caused Experts serious harm to their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. If individuals outside institutional systems caused this harm, they would be punished and held accountable. Community Experts identified the following areas of harm they survived while incarcerated at San Francisco’s Juvenile Justice Center: *disrespectful interpersonal interactions, excessive physical force, solitary confinement, issues with male probation officers in the units, and multiple issues around health.*

## DISRESPECTFUL SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Staff from the juvenile delinquency system spoke to youth in a degrading and disrespectful manner. These interactions reinforced negative and harmful stereotypes.

**“STOP ANTAGONIZING THESE KIDS WHEN THEY COME IN THERE. I’LL SAY LIKE EVERYBODY HAS A STORY. YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED.”**

Community Experts understood that juvenile detention would be grueling, but it felt entirely unnecessary that the staff inside treated them so unkindly and with so little dignity. CJ Mills said,

“

**Yes. I felt like the juvenile, the probation system like the juvenile staff, stuff like that, they didn’t care. They used to talk shit to us when we were in jail. They be like, ‘Oh we gonna see you back next weekend. We gonna woo woo.’ They used to be trying to be funny, but the judge, certain judges, they ain’t trying to work with you. Certain stuff like that with the juvenile system, they got the pros and cons.**

Sunshine Horace had a similar experience recalling her interactions with staff inside, “People in jail they were so evil at the time. The security guards they used to tell us, they stayed telling us that we would come back. It was really evil.” The Goat Pearl expressed similar concerns, “Like I said, they don’t need to make it always seem like it’s so bad. Like, ‘Yes, you’re going to keep coming back.’ That’s what you want to do. ‘You don’t care about your life. Yes, keep playing like that. Keep acting like that.’ They’ve got some fucked up workers in there. They had some stinky shit going on.” CJ, Sunshine, and The Goat all described interpersonal interactions at JJC that were harmful and void of a fundamental consideration of human dignity, which impacted them negatively because they were so young. With an open and heavy heart, Yasmine Smith echoed these experiences with the remarks, “I don’t even want nobody to ever have to be there. Like the way they talk to you up in there, they are disrespectful. They have no respect for you at all. They feel like you got up in here today and told us many times we don’t care about none of you all.” Many Community Experts shared that they understood incarceration at juvenile hall is supposed to be a punishment, albeit a questionable one, but being spoken to with so little respect for their dignity did not facilitate their ability to engage in rehabilitation, recovery, or reflection.

Krystal Mitchell suggested that staff should be required to take professional development training, so they are better equipped to deal with the stresses of working in detention centers, “I think all the workers need to take classes on themselves too. I feel you can’t just hire a person that really don’t know too much about it. They need classes just how they give us classes while we are in there. I see them angry all the time. Are you angry that you are at work? Are you angry that we are here?” Experts who reported not being treated well provided amnesty to staff, reflecting that they were not bad people but perhaps stressed and unable to show up to work in a productive way for interacting with the youth on the inside. Kiara Wilson described just this, “The deputies are really nasty. I feel like if you’re not having a good day or whatever, I don’t feel like you should work. If they are, they come into work, and they are mad, they are mad at their wives or whatever the case, they’re taking it out on the inmates. They are in there making their own rules. They’re talking to people crazy. It’s just crazy stuff going on in there.” Experts remarked that this kind of treatment made an already difficult situation even more challenging.

The lack of respect in interpersonal interactions between staff and Experts created a context where youth did not feel they could trust staff to implement fair policies or keep them safe. Friscolita Reyes detailed her complaint while detained, “The main one is favoritism. I feel like some of them be getting hella racial in there, like hella of racist. Especially with like black and brown and stuff.” Others described some of their peers getting preferential treatment, like extra snacks, phone calls, or time out of their cell, and frustration over not receiving the same access to what they understood to be privileges that were guaranteed to them. Community Experts were not always clear on the rationale behind the implementation of policies but distinctly knew that they were treated differently or targeted unfairly. Mari Johnson tied these issues all together when she said,

“

**Stop antagonizing these kids when they come in there. I’ll say like everybody has a story. You don’t know what happened. What the client was going through before knowing they came in there, before you got arrested and came in there. I don’t know if their officers of whatever are supposed to be in Juvenile Hall, but it wasn’t just with me. It’s like they kept antagonizing all them in there by doing stuff just to like instigate something so they can like hit staff. Well, this is like talk shit to them and cursing at them and calling them stupid, throwing trays at them just stuff like that.**

Mari and others felt that the staff would intentionally antagonize youth to elicit a response from them. Community Experts expressed wanting to do their best, but the conditions and treatment on the inside made that demanding. Yasmine Smith shared her concerns,

“

**I don't even want nobody to ever have to be there. Like the way they talk to you up in there, they are disrespectful. They have no respect for you at all. They feel like you got up in here today and told us many times, 'we don't care about none of you all. That's how you all wake us up talking about you don't care about us, 'nobody cares about you. We are not your mommas. We don't care.' You don't have to be that rude. We know we know we are Juvenile, but they are too hard on us.**

The quality of the interpersonal interactions between incarcerated youth and staff created a tenuous environment, heightening the complications between staff and youth during more explosive moments.



## EXCESSIVE PHYSICAL FORCE

Incarcerated youth were physically harmed by staff inside of JJC, while being forcibly restrained.

**“THEY CAN RESTRAIN SOMEONE. YES. THEY’LL KNOCK YOU DOWN, LITERALLY.”**

Fifteen Community Experts disclosed suffering physical harm by staff while incarcerated at JJC. Those who escaped physical harm, still witnessed their peers getting hurt, instilling fear. Experts understood that staff could use excessive restraint and force, at their discretion, for an array of issues that occurred inside of JJC. What they illustrated was a process of staff escalating conflicts, which then caused physical harm to youth. Experts described a culture inside JJC that used intimidation and excessive physical force to control and punish youth.

Chy Smacks is a dually-involved youth who cycled between foster care placements and juvenile hall. They revealed how detained youth were regularly controlled and harmed by staff while incarcerated,

“

**The force they use on us especially. Yes. In San Francisco, here they’re hands-on. Yes, it’s how they deal with us. You come out bruised and sprained and stuff like that. It’s the use of force. They walk in, let everybody see they’re putting their gloves on, and you know what’s going to happen.**

Chy’s account reveals a normalization of violence by staff and a culture that breeds fear for incarcerated youth. Krystal Mitchell witnessed one staff member repeatedly being too physically rough with youth. She said, “This Ms. \*\*\*\* she liked to whoop people’s ass. She kept trying to come at you with stuff.” Staff physically roughed up Krystal, she continued to share that staff intentionally antagonized youth by yelling at them or calling them names so they would act out, so that staff could use force against them. Alexis Ferrero reported what she observed while incarcerated at JJC,

“

**Yeah, they did, I’ve seen it happen. I’ve seen it happen every day. Either there was like this guy and he’d always, would say something. His name was Mister \*\*\*\*. He’ll just look at them and be like, ‘What? What are you saying?’ And he’ll come over there and take her off [the bed] and slam her to the ground and be like, ‘what did you say? You gonna say it to my face, you gonna say it to my face?’ And you can’t do nothing because if you do something back to them, then we’re gonna get you in trouble. They’re not gonna get mad about that. They’re gonna get mad at us and put more charges on us. For no reason. It’s just that crazy.**

Chy, Krystal, and Alexis characterized a culture of force and intimidation that staff engaged in as the de facto policy to control and discipline incarcerated youth. Alexis explained the complicated dilemma that youth faced when staff used excessive force on them because if they were to protect themselves against staff, they could acquire additional criminal charges or risk being mistreated for the remainder of their sentence. Ashley Flowers explained the atmosphere inside of JJC, “Whatever, it was jail. They are going to try to scare you, of course. They don’t have no weapons, but they would try to scare you. They get the biggest guys to restrain you.” Ashley, Chy, and Millie all reported that staff would purposefully call in colleagues who had a history of physically roughing up the youth when issues arose. While most people in this study did not report experiencing physical violence directly, they witnessed it, causing intense trauma.

Community Experts portrayed a culture inside JJC where staff commonly used excessive force while restraining youth; as a result, some youth suffered severe physical harm. Yasmine Smith disclosed, “He used to always pick me up out of everybody to just restrain me all the time. Why always trying to restrain me? He was restraining me three times a day. Yes, he was always restraining me all the time.” Samantha Lopez also witnessed this practice at JJC, “They can restrain someone. Yes. They’ll knock you down, literally.” Experts reported that when staff restrained youth who were getting in altercations with their peers or to enforce commands, they created more harm than was required of the situation.

CJ Mills experienced excessive use of force while incarcerated,



**Yes, to break up a fight. They was doing the most. They was, oh man. They’d throw us on the ground, and they do the most. They can just break the fight up. Just break it up normally. Like, they want to come break the fight up and want to throw you on the ground. They make you want to eventually hit them because the way that they’re handling you.**

CJ highlights complicated realities youth navigate, as they may feel antagonized and harmed unfairly, but must think of the consequences of defending themselves, thus weighing their safety with being pushed further in the system because of additional criminal charges. Reina Argueta told interviewers that she was frequently restrained at JJC because the staff accused her of being, “Belligerent,” but this was untrue; instead, they negatively labeled her as a reason to restrain and harm her forcibly. At the time of the interview, Millie Famous was eighteen years old and approximately one hundred and ten pounds. She recounted her experience of being restrained by staff inside of JJC, “It’s size. Size really, really. When he was leaning on me, he could have broken my ribs or anything. They were really on me, and it was on the concrete. I just think there’s too much force. Period. I don’t like it.” Experts described circumstances where staff would break up a conflict but took it too far and

caused them more harm, particularly because of their size and position of authority. Often, they felt unfairly antagonized by staff, intentionally to produce a situation where staff could restrain youth.

Kiara Bentley experienced staff harming her, even though she did not get into physical altercations with her peers, she said, “Yes. They used to be slamming me on the floor by my head and stuff.” Intelligent Wisdom shared, “The only negative experience I had is with the big one. Her name is Ms. \*\*\*\*\*. She stepped on my toe one day, and she broke it. She did. Because I was going to my room, but she plays too much.” Kiara and Intelligent disclosed stories of being physically harmed, and as they retold these experiences, they shared them as if it was par for the course, that sustaining injuries while incarcerated at JJC was an expected occurrence. They retold these stories without any expression of outrage, revealing the level of harm they grew accustomed to.

Mars Venus and Millie Famous survived extreme physical abuse while incarcerated, compelling them to make formal complaints. Mars grew dejected as she recalled the physical violence she suffered, “I believe I had a busted lip or something, but I had juvenile take pictures of me when I was there, and that was that. It didn’t go nowhere, obviously.” Mars sustained significant harm while incarcerated by a staff member. She had the courage to make a complaint while incarcerated, but she did not expect that the system would proceed with a proper investigation, and the system never consulted with an update of her complaint. Millie Famous disclosed an incredibly traumatic incident she experienced in JJC,



**They’ll do this first. They’ll grab you. They’ll be big men. There were these two big \*\*\*\*\*, and they’re big. They will attack you in one room. There’s like seven of them on one of me, my little small self. That’s when I told my mom. She still wants to file a lawsuit against the juvenile hall. They will slam you, basically. They will put your shirt over your head. You are a man. You are a man. I feel exposed. I was upset, and I couldn’t do anything because every time I move or try to fight back he would twist me, and then there was another one. They had different parts of my body. He had my head and neck. Then the other one had the shirt over me, then the other one had this on my neck. I’m like, ‘I’m done. I’m not going to be fighting.’ I’m saying, ‘Sorry, you are hurting me.’ I was like, ‘You are hurting me for real. I can’t breathe.’ They were on my chest, and I had asthma. I used to have asthma. It went away, but I had asthma, so they were leaning. He was leaning his knee in my chest, and I really couldn’t breathe. I was so scared. I told my mom everything. She was so upset, and they twisted my ankle. I was on crutches.**

Millie told her mother about this incident, and they both proceeded with lodging a formal complaint. They were unsure of their rights and unable to secure legal advice. Millie and her mother were unaware of any investigation that JJC conducted and never received any follow-up. Millie shared that she was still deeply affected by what happened. At the time of the interview, she lived in a short-term shelter in San Francisco, combating serious physical and mental health concerns related to incarceration, all compounded by this unnecessary trauma. Experts were unaware of any process that allowed them to make complaints, or they knew their concerns would be ignored, so they lamented that it was pointless to try to hold the system accountable.

Community Experts described policies and staff behavior that increased the trauma they encountered in an already devastating and frightening experience of being incarcerated as a child. Annie Egypt advocated for staff to engage in a higher degree of empathy,



**I would like to see them. Inside the juvenile system. I would like to see them uplifting the youth. I've seen them slam a female. Slam a girl. Smaller than me. And put their knee on her back. I wonder how she feel about that? How does she walk around to this day? Knowing that she got slammed to the floor by a man. Inside the juvenile system. Inside the classroom.**

Experts identified specific bad actors that went too far, they did not expect this behavior from all staff, but they understood that no one would be held accountable and that harmful attacks were permissible. Experts conveyed troubling occurrences of violence they experienced or witnessed while incarcerated and the lasting impact this had on their lives. They expressed a hope that this type of permissible behavior would cease completely, that their peers could be free or, at the very least, be physically safe while incarcerated.



## SHACKLED

Youth were placed at increased risk of physical harm while unnecessarily shackled.

**“IT WAS TRAUMATIZING. ME, BEING SHACKLED WHEN I WAS PREGNANT, AND THEY SHACKLED ME ON MY FEET.”**

**78** % of Community Experts reported being shackled at some point while at JJC, even though the vast majority of them were not charged with a violent offense. They expressed that this practice was unnecessarily harmful, both physically and emotionally. The use of shackling puts youth at a higher risk of being physically harmed. Experts reported that shackling was a traumatizing and humiliating practice. Yasmine Smith described being escorted to the courtroom at JJC, “Yes, and everybody was just staring. My feet shackled, and my arms shackled all the way around. ‘Why are you all doing that?’ You act like I’m going to go somewhere with all of you officers standing around. This was really embarrassing.” Cynthia Jackson was charged with petty theft in San Francisco and had no prior charges. Probation officers shackled and escorted her to the courtroom; she reported, “Yes, going to court they got to shackle me from my arms to my feet. I felt like a prisoner walking up in court with that orange suit on. Shackled as a thief?” Cynthia questioned the rationale behind being shackled because it was incongruent with her charges. Mars Venus was shackled during family visits. Brittany Love and Ruth Gordon were both shackled while on their way to receive medical care. Experts questioned the practice shackling young people in the halls, as it further traumatized them and often felt unjustified.

Unfortunately, some young people were put at increased risk of being physically harmed because they were shackled. Yasmine described how a probation officer injured her knee while shackled,

“

**Yes, I’m in handcuffs, and he is bending me over. He got moved off the unit because even his staff there told him that you’re going too far. Because I was screaming. You’re supposed to let me go, you’re not even supposed to do that. You are already me in handcuffs. You bended me up like that, like you went too far. He was still pushing my knee further and then it popped, and that’s when he let me go, and he was like, ‘I didn’t know.’ You were resisting. I was like, ‘Where?’ And then the supervisor and staff were there, and they all apologized to me for him and everything. I think he was suspended because I didn’t see him again. They gave me a knee brace and the x- rays and stuff. They popped it back, and they gave me a knee brace and then some ice and stuff and some pain pills, but that was messed up.**

Perhaps, Yasmine would not have been severely injured if she were not handcuffed because the combination of excessive force and shackling put Yasmin in serious physical danger while she was escorted to the courtroom. Alexis Ferrero had her feet and hands restrained while pregnant,

“

**It was traumatizing. Me, being shackled when I was pregnant, and they shackled me on my feet. That was the worst thing ever because I almost fell on my stomach, and they caught me. I was crying because it was just like. I was almost about to lose my baby. And it was just traumatizing because, if I would have fell on my stomach and then, I would be sitting in blood, and you guys are not going to do anything about it.**

Alexis struggled in juvenile detention while she was pregnant, and being shackled felt like a punitive and excessive step that caused her to worry about her and her child's health. Experts brought histories of previous trauma and were retraumatized by the use of shackling. They wanted to maintain their dignity, but shackling criminalized them further during routine practices, like visiting family, walking to court, and receiving medical treatment.



## SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Youth were isolated in their cells for extended periods of time through a de facto practice of social isolation.

**“IT’S ALREADY BAD ENOUGH WE’RE ALREADY IN THE CELLS.”**

Community Experts identified conditions that resembled the practice of solitary confinement, whereby they were isolated from their peers in their cells for extended periods. In JJC, solitary confinement is not a formal policy and does not resemble what occurs in adult facilities, but what Experts described was a de facto practice that caused harmful social isolation. Fifteen Experts described scenarios where they were socially isolated and called this solitary confinement. Experts described a practice they referred to as DRV, where staff could place youth in their cells alone and remove privileges like outdoor time, phone calls, visits, and attending programming. Stacey Freedman was frequently confined to her cell under this policy for twenty-four-hour periods; when asked how many times, she could not recall because it happened too frequently. CJ Mills detailed her experience with this policy,

“

**They still let you, you can go out and take a shower, and then you got to stay in your room, you got to eat in your room and stuff. Then while everybody else was out, you got to be in. You can probably come out and probably read a book or something for like 15, 20 minutes, and then you got to go back in. You don't get no phone calls, none of that.**

Grissley Rodriguez, Alexis Ferrero, Krystal Mitchell, Cynthia Hernandez, Samantha Lopez, Kiesha Brown, and Annie Egypt reported being regularly isolated in their cells, a practice that exerted additional forms of punishment.

Experts said that probation officers inside of JJC followed a policy called split, where they decided to separate youth based on their cases, with the stated intention of ensuring that issues would not arise between peers. Reina Argueta was put on split to keep her separated from her co-defendant. Reina also reported that split would sometimes occur if a youth's record contained a gang affiliation. When youth were incarcerated with opposing gang affiliations, they would be automatically split from each other. Reina questioned this process, where staff determined if a young person was affiliated with a gang based on their family members or neighborhood. She felt that these assessments were not always accurate or fair.

Ashley Flowers described a time when she was put on split, “Yes, you’re being squeezed, like, you’d be confined by yourself in a room. You won’t come out for like depending on how many splits you are on. You come out maybe 20, 30 minutes a day because I’ve been in a lot.” Kiara Bentley reported that she was alone in her cell for a month while she was at JJC because she was on the split program, “Because I couldn’t come out when everybody came out.” Sunshine Horace reported, “The whole two weeks I was in my room,” and when asked if she ever came outside of her cell, she said, “Barely, they used to bring your food upstairs that was the routine because we were all on split. When we got out, they were telling us all like someone is out right now. We were all in our rooms. The whole time why none of us was coming out? It was crazy.” Sunshine said that she came out of her cell four times during these two weeks. Amber Rose reported being in her cell for twenty-one days alone because, “When you first go to juvenile, for the first 21 days, you’re not allowed to come out.” When these youth were on the split program, they may have missed opportunities to attend school or community-based programming to remain separated from a peer.

Community Experts regularly reported being socially isolated because of the split policy, but several others shared they were socially isolated because they were gay or masculine representing or had mental health issues. Four Experts reported that they were treated differently because of their gender expression while incarcerated at JJC. Chy Smacks remained alone in their cell for six months at JJC and had minimal interactions with other youth and reports that they believe this happened because they were gay. Interviewers asked Intelligent Wisdom if they were confined to their cell, they replied, “Yes, they did that because I think they let me have a room because I was gay. Like one time, they would not give me and my friend a roommate because she was gay. We know it was because of them we cannot get a roommate. I said, ‘Put the ugliest one, I just want to talk to somebody.’” Intelligent’s story implied that gay youth were hypersexualized in JJC because this was the rationale for not allowing them to have roommates.

Millie Famous and The Goat Pearl experienced social isolation as a way for staff to handle their mental health issues. Millie was struggling with mental health issues when she arrived at JJC, and the solution was to keep her isolated in her cell, as opposed to addressing her mental health concerns. When asked if she was socially isolated, Millie responded, “Yes. Plenty of times. They actually had to because I will go so crazy in that cell.” Millie also experienced the split policy, so she was further isolated that way, “They already know if you fight in there, you’re going to have to go elsewhere. Then you’re going to have one person come out, then the next one. It’s already bad enough we’re already in the cells.” The Goat Pearl had this to say after she was asked if she was ever in isolated,

“

**By myself? I used to have episodes, y'all. I was always on suicide watch. They probably did it to me like, probably a total of four times and I was probably trying to be cool, because I didn't like that. If you're in there three, four weeks, if you acting crazy the first two days, you don't come out at all. You have to do a 48-hour stretch, and then if you're acting crazy on them the next two days, they try to put you on suicide watch for a whole week.**

In the circumstances of Millie, The Goat, Chy, and Intelligent, the practice of social isolation in their cells constituted additional punishment for factors outside of their control. Ashley Flowers was punished by being locked in what she described as a closet,

“

**I don't know. I was there so long to where it was like I didn't care about being on room time stuff. To where they tried to drag me out of my room and do all this stuff and locked me up in the closet. Yes, right there. They'd lock you up in there. Mind you I guess there's no windows, no nothing. It's not vented in there, it's nothing. So, you were in a closet with no air. There's no air in there. Every other room got a window. There's no window. That's not safe. They did that to me a couple of times where they had me in that room.**

Ashley described a questionable use of isolation that could have certainly led to serious health concerns. Experts described the social isolation as yet another way that they experienced developmental harm while incarcerated.



## ISSUES WITH MALE PROBATION OFFICERS IN UNITS

Youth expressed extreme discomfort with male officers inside of JJC. Especially, when male officers could see them while using the restroom, undressing, and showering.

**“HOW THEY HAVE MALE DEPUTIES IN THE SAME UNIT AS WOMEN?  
I DON'T THINK THAT'S RIGHT.”**

Community Experts repeatedly complained about the lack of privacy when using the bathroom or showering at JJC. Upon reflecting on their most troubling experiences at JJC, Experts reported great distress while using the bathroom or showering because the male staff was often present in the space, and staff did not attempt to ensure that males were outside of the unit while youth were in stages of undress. Alexis Ferrero described feeling uncomfortable when using the restroom, “Yes! Because every time I used the bathroom, they were walking past my window,” she shared that people could look inside of her cell, so she was not able to maintain her privacy. Grissly Rodriguez described the same issue during shower time, “Yes. They shouldn't have a guy, a male counselor working in the girl's units. Because when you're showering you could see them. So, I feel like if you could see them, they could see you.” Experts shared they felt very uncomfortable with male probation officers walking around their units and that male staff did not try to leave the unit while they were showering or provide them with privacy while going to the bathroom. Ashley Flowers described her experience with the male staff at JJC,

“

**They do have male staff that when you get naked and stuff, the guys will come around to check you and be in your room. They don't give you no, don't tell you. When they walk past, they'll be in a room, doing checks stuff. I feel like they should warn you. Especially when there's male staff or whatever. Or, shower time in juvenile. We'll be in our room, or we could dress in our robes or whatever, or gowns, and they just be like or chill. Like, 'Everybody, come chill in our unit' The guy, it'd be a whole group of guys sitting, having a meeting.**

Ashley shared that one day while several girls were showering, male probation officers held a meeting close by and that she found their presence very troubling. Experts were distressed with undressing procedures in front of female officers, and they described an intake process that resembled what occurs in adult facilities. Shante Smith detailed this, “You know how, when I went to juvenile, I had to cough and squat, and I'm a child. I feel like. How they have male deputies in the same unit as women? I don't think that's right.” 49% of the Community Experts reported that

they experienced childhood sexual abuse, so the process of undressing in front of others and not being able to maintain their privacy while showering was retraumatizing and inflicted further unnecessary harm during their childhood. Experts questioned why male probation officers were allowed in the girl's unit, just their presence was problematic to them, and they strongly advocated that male officers be removed entirely from the unit.



## HEALTH

**Youth's health concerns were not properly addressed while incarcerated.**

**B**efore delinquency involvement, Community Experts were navigating the destructive effects of poverty, and these conditions placed a burden on Experts' mental and physical health. For many, the months preceding incarceration at JJC were marked by highly unstable or unsafe living environments. They shared stories of challenging group home placements, unsafe home environments, or chronic homelessness. As part of the intake process at JJC, a staff member evaluates youth's physical and mental health, and this may be the first time a young person touches the system; thus, the intake process was a crucial moment for a young person's health to be assessed and appropriately addressed. Unfortunately, this was not the Experts' experience, and they reported that their health concerns worsened while incarcerated. Juvenile detention centers are ill-equipped to handle medical and psychological needs, so these young people were further criminalized and punished when what they needed were services that attended to their unaddressed needs.

58% of Community Experts reported that they received proper medical attention while incarcerated at JJC; this response may have captured Experts who entered detention without any health issues. 26% of Experts provided a neutral response to the same question, and 16% reported that they did not receive proper medical attention while incarcerated. Those who reported negligence from staff for not attending to their medical care identified three areas of concern related to their health: *physical health*, *pregnancy*, and *mental health*.



## PHYSICAL HEALTH

Youth may have made requests for medical attention but were ignored, provided care too late, or given sub-par care. Often worsening whatever condition, they were suffering.

**“NO, I DIDN’T EVEN HAVE AN INHALER IN THERE.”**

Those Community Experts who entered JJC with an active medical need and staff did not adequately address their concern, what they described is a serious display of negligence constituting a human rights issue. Lucy reported that she spent one hundred and twenty-two days at JJC. This was Lucy’s only case. When Lucy entered the system, she was not feeling well; when asked if she received proper medical attention, she said, “No. When I first went, I had an ear infection, and I was telling the nurse. They weren’t even doing anything. They were like, ‘Well, there’s nothing written in your papers. We don’t know what to do.’ It got really bad, and my ear turned really red, and then they finally gave me something.” Lucy also shared that she has asthma and regularly needed to use her inhaler, but while incarcerated at JJC, she said, “No, I didn’t even have an inhaler in there,” for the entirety of her stay. Lucy’s story elucidates a system that blatantly ignored her expressed medical needs, disbelieving her pain, likely because of her age, race, and status of being an incarcerated person.

Ashley Flowers was incarcerated at JJC for the first time at the age of thirteen for shoplifting. Ashley shared her account of not receiving proper medical treatment, “No. I was sick when I went inside. I had mucus in my lungs. They took me to the nurse, and she told me I had mucus in my lungs. That was it. I just went back into my dorm.” After being diagnosed by a nurse with a medical issue, Ashley was sent back to her cell, signaling to her that her well-being would not be cared for while incarcerated. Grissly Rodriguez also shared that she did not receive medical attention; she repeatedly told staff that she was not feeling well, but her complaints were ignored, and she was ordered to go back to her room. While Sarah Taylor did not have a specific concern, while she was at JJC, she saw another young person have a seizure; she relayed, “No one did anything, everybody was just on their walkie-talkies, and it was really bad.” Sarah’s experience instilled her with fear because she witnessed adult staff do nothing while her peer had a seizure.

A small subset of the Community Experts entered JJC while struggling with alcohol or drug dependency; only nine people identified addiction as an issue before entering the juvenile delinquency system. Of these nine, eight youth shared they did not get the support they needed with drug or alcohol withdrawals while inside JJC. Kiara Bentley was experi-

encing withdrawal symptoms when she first entered, and when asked if she received support with this, she replied, “No, they say, ‘Sit in there and go to sleep.’” The Goat Pearl also needed support and was given Benadryl to help with her withdrawals, but she did not feel this was sufficient. Chy Smacks disclosed that they were experiencing withdrawal symptoms, and when asked if they received any support with this, they said, “No, on your own.” Experiencing withdrawal symptoms can be deadly, so staff’s failure to seriously attend to these health issues and provide support reflects a neglectful approach that puts the lives of young people at risk.

Experts who entered juvenile detention and presented with addiction issues could have been diverted to rehabilitation facilities, where they would have experienced a more restorative and appropriate place to heal, but the system did not respond in this way. Cynthia Harrison reflected just this, “Yes. I was using heroin and cocaine. I’ve never been to rehab before. They never sent me to rehab, that’s where I probably should have been.” Had Cynthia had the opportunity to address her addiction, the system could have directed its resources to the root cause of why she was incarcerated in the first place.



Experts reported being pregnant while incarcerated. Priscolita Reyes entered JJC for an incident that occurred at her home and was incarcerated for approximately one year. This was her only case in the juvenile delinquency system. She was pregnant and reported that she did not receive any specialized support during her incarceration.

## PREGNANCY

Youth were incarcerated while pregnant, and the conditions of detention made it impossible for them to care for their unborn child.

### “THEY DIDN’T TELL ME IN JUVENILE HALL I WAS PREGNANT.”

pregnancy. Considering this was her first and only case, it would have been reasonable to divert her outside of the delinquency system, so she could have ensured that she appropriately took care of her pregnancy needs and protected her unborn child.

Cynthia Hernandez was also incarcerated while pregnant. When asked if she received support for this, she replied, “I had a miscarriage. I would say no, not really.” Mars Venus said that she did receive extra snacks while she was pregnant and prenatal vitamins. Unfortunately, The Goat Pearl had a tough time at JJC during her pregnancy; she shared,

**They didn’t tell me in juvenile hall I was pregnant. When I found out I was pregnant, I was taking these pills. I’m taking two. I’m taking antibiotics, and one night I was just feeling weird as hell. My heart started pumping; I started sweating uncontrollably. They were like, ‘Are you okay, Ms.?’ I’m like, ‘I don’t know, I’ve never felt like this.’ Then I caught a faint, and they were like, ‘No, we have to take you to the hospital.’ I found out I was pregnant. I was eight weeks, though, but I was already in juvenile hall for two months, so you all knew. Exactly, you get tested the first time you go. They didn’t tell me at all. By the time I found out, I was going on nine weeks. I passed out. When I came to the nurse she said, ‘I got some good news. You’re pregnant.’ That was my first faint ever. I couldn’t believe it. I came back through I was like, ‘Did she say I was pregnant?’ She was like, ‘Yes.’ I was crying.**

The Goat Pearl’s story draws attention to the intergenerational harm that incarceration perpetuates because the harm that occurred to her while incarcerated also affected her unborn child, who may have to contend with health consequences related to stress their mother endured while detained in a juvenile detention center.

Alexis Ferrero was pregnant while she was at JJC and shared that she was shackled on her feet, making it difficult for her to walk and protect her unborn baby. This experience conveyed to Alexis that controlling her as a prisoner was more important than protecting her and her unborn baby. She was viewed as a prisoner first, and no consideration was made as an

expectant mother. Alexis complained about the food and said, “There was like mold on the bread that I was eating, and I was pregnant. I had to eat it because I was just so hungry. And they’re supposed to give me more food. I feel like they should be able to give us more food when people are in there and pregnant because they only gave me like what everybody else is getting.” Alexis continued struggling inside detention while pregnant. She gave birth while incarcerated and revealed that she was shackled while giving birth, violating policy, and neglecting human dignity. Alexis explained that she had only one case for shoplifting and was arrested and sent to JJC for a reported seventy-two days. What Alexis and her unborn child had to go through while incarcerated was vastly disproportionate to her case and reflected how the consequences of incarcerating a young person can cascade and leave them more harmed than when they entered the system.

The majority of Community Experts had one or two non-violent cases, so instead of incarceration, these youth could have been diverted. Doing so would have required the system to move away from its one-size-fits-all approach and find an alternate placement so that the young people could receive proper care and maintain their unborn children’s safety. For all the Experts who had to navigate pregnancy while incarcerated, the mental, physical, and social cost this circumstance imposed on them, their unborn child, and their families was one that they carried with them long after their contact with the juvenile delinquency system.



## MENTAL HEALTH

**Youth's mental health was not adequately addressed while incarcerated and, in some cases, made worse by the care that they did receive.**

In addition to issues that Community Experts reported around their physical health not being addressed while incarcerated at JJC, they also shared concerns around their mental health. The issues that Experts identified around mental health were different in nature than the neglect they experienced to their physical health, because they complained about being forced to partake in mental health mandated by the system. Experts disclosed two issues around the mental health care they received while incarcerated: *medication* and *therapy*. They shared experiences with taking medication and attending therapy that deprived them of their autonomy and consent and had the effect of undermining their overall mental health.



## MEDICATION

Youth were mandated to take psychotropic medication without their consent or their families' approval.

**“NO. I DON’T REMEMBER HAVING A THERAPIST. I GOT PILLS IN THERE, BUT NO THERAPY.”**

Community Experts, whom JJC identified as presenting with a mental health condition, shared that they began receiving mandated psychotropic medication for the first time while incarcerated. Unfortunately, those people who did receive this form of mental health intervention consistently expressed dissatisfaction. Amber Rose said, “They put me on antidepressants, which was making me feel weird. I didn’t want to take the antidepressants. Basically, I was like I don’t like the way the drug. What you’re giving me is making me feel weird. She was like, ‘I really don’t care, as long as you stop smoking weed.’ It’s basically what you need.” Mars Venus was also prescribed medication for mental health concerns; she said, “It helped, but it just made me sleep. It made me have really, really bad periods. I would have nightmares, but it would keep me calm, and I would be able to analyze and think about stuff. That’s all it would do. It wasn’t doing anything else for me.” Chy Smacks shared that they were forced to take the medication and reported a great deal of frustration around this because it made them very sleepy and unable to complete their school work, and Chy felt the medication had a direct impact on their ability to perform well in school. Chy described feeling unable to engage in a conversation with their health provider about their medication’s adverse effects because they received medication through the delinquency system, which implied that this was a non-negotiable demand.

Community Experts shared that they received medication for mental health conditions that the system identified; they did not report follow-up appointments to discuss how the prescribed psychotropic medication was working for them, so their medication dosage could be adjusted or changed if necessary. These experiences reveal how the delinquency system and incarceration settings are a poor substitute for delivering mental health services, where the standard of care does not conform to what would be expected from the mental health system in the community. Experts were troubled by how easily the system assessed their mental health condition, labeled them by approaching mental health concerns with a one-size-fits-all approach, and mandated psychotropic medication. Ruth Gordon recalled, “No. I don’t remember having a therapist. I got pills in there, but no therapy.” Experts shared concerns over the short- and long-term side effects of the medication they received through the system, making them feel like they were problems to be solved by a pill rather than

complex human beings in need of dignified care and healing. The staff did not consult their guardians when making serious medical decisions for them. Moreover, they questioned whether it was even possible for them to consent to take medication because of the power imbalance that existed between them and the juvenile delinquency system. Ashley's story highlighted these ethical dilemmas,



**I don't know. I think once they did that, it was like, 'this is what you need to take for that to fix you.' It was like I was court-ordered. 'You have this.' My counselor tells me this is what I need, meds, and that's what they put me on. I don't know if I had to take them, but I was taking them. Then when I went to the group home, I was forced to take them. I always kept thinking, no point because now I had meds, and this is what they are for. I feel the meds were just like, just make me drowsy or something. It makes you high. You feel lazy and numb. Yes, it just does that. It means you feel more numb.**

Experts had different guardianship statuses while involved in the juvenile delinquency system; some had active parents, others were in the foster care system or wards of the state. Regardless, they were troubled when the system made serious medical decisions about their health and did not consult the adults in their lives who could have supported the decision-making process. The conditions of being incarcerated do not allow a young person to provide their full consent to taking psychotropic medication because they can too easily feel obligated or coerced to follow through with the system provider's recommendation for fear of retaliation. The juvenile delinquency system is not the best vehicle for providing mental health services, especially since being incarcerated is retraumatizing and can inflict further harm on young people. These Community Experts' stories raise serious concerns about the mental health care youth received.



## THERAPY

**Youth did not feel comfortable receiving therapy from the delinquency system because they believe that this was designed to compile evidence against them.**

**“I JUST FELT JUDGED A LOT BY THEM.”**

The stories above were of incarcerated youth receiving medication but often not receiving other therapeutic interventions. Some Community Experts were mandated to attend therapy while incarcerated at JJC or as a probation requirement. For non-delinquency involved individuals, they may seek therapy when they are ready and with a provider with whom they feel comfortable and aligned, and sessions can go at their own pace. For these delinquency-involved youth, they were mandated to participate in therapy, which created a fraught dynamic at the very outset. The therapeutic space requires vulnerability, and therapists and clients build trust over time; this type of relationship is challenging to build and maintain in a juvenile detention setting.

Community Experts who received therapy through the juvenile delinquency system felt like their therapist did not care about them or they did not meet with their therapist consistently enough to make any impact. Sunshine Horace explained, “Only people barely do their jobs. It was some lady they had me go through. My mommy met her a few times, but I never met with her. I met her once at JJC.” Experts observed that their therapist changed too frequently, and this inconsistency in care ruptured their ability to trust their therapist because they were afraid of being disappointed after trying to build trust with an adult. They also noted they infrequently attended therapy sessions so that little progress could be made. Kelhani Reyes believes in the healing possibility that therapy can facilitate. When asked what policies she would like to see changed at JJC, she shared, “I think mainly counseling for sure, and then two is therapy, being able to have therapists on-site to come in, check up on you. I’m not talking about once every month or wait until you’re about to commit suicide to come to see you.” Kehlani’s commentary highlights that therapy was not used as a preventative or restorative measure but instead used to deal with severe concerns after they arose.

Another issue Community Experts identified was they believed their therapist directly reported to the courts or their probation officer. Sarah Taylor explained, “Well, they had therapists on site. I didn’t trust talking to her because they ran to tell others like personal business about me. No, they didn’t want help.” In response to getting therapy while inside of JJC, Grissly Rodriguez said, “I didn’t really take it serious. I just would just tell her anything to get it over with because she would bring the report to my PO.” Reina Argueta explained that she believed her court-appointed

therapist was gathering evidence to build a case against her. Reina was unable to feel safe with her therapist, “Don’t try to push us to keep talking. I’m like, ‘I don’t want to talk anymore.’ I can’t talk to this lady,” which rendered the services ineffective. Mari Johnson went into detail about her relationship with her therapist and how she was involved in her court case,

“

**I just felt judged a lot by them. Especially, when it came to how they do case notes for going to court and stuff like that. He kept saying, I was like, ‘Damn,’ they make it seem like... I just felt judged. Every time I say something, they just had a label for me you know? You don’t know nothing about these people and they are just writing about you the whole time. You don’t know what’s being written or anything. I get skeptical. At least, explain what she was going to be writing. I just had bad experiences with their therapists.**

Mari’s experience clearly articulates the issues youth identified with therapeutic services being provided through the juvenile delinquency system. The immense sense of betrayal a person can experience as they are told to trust their provider, who later shares intimate details of their personal experience in a court setting. Amber Rose further explained this sense of betrayal she experienced with a court-ordered therapist,

“

**Therapy and that put my head in a bad place because they create a relationship with you, right? They are like, ‘You can trust us.’ They make you so comfortable. Sometimes, yes, as teenagers, we do go through things that might necessarily be considered harmful, but it’s not necessarily harmful. Sometimes, we just want someone to talk to. You create a bond with me, and then I tell you something that’s probably I’ve never told. And you’re just doing your job. With doing their job, they don’t understand the betrayal. Or they tell the people, and now CPS gets involved, and it really wasn’t that bad. I see a lot of kids that get put in foster care and get in worse situations than when they were with their parents.**

Amber shared information about her parents with her therapist, and the therapist reached out to CPS. Amber felt this was unnecessary, because she was safe in her home, and being removed was a far worse outcome. Therapists are mandated reporters, so there may be times when they need to contact CPS, but having a therapist so closely enmeshed with the juvenile delinquency system creates a context that was not conducive to personal healing. Mars Venus had a more mixed experience with her therapist, “I got therapy when I was in juvenile. I hold in a lot, and then I escalate it. I was learning how to take steps. I learned different stuff. She was trying to help.” Mars continued to narrate her experience of the effectiveness of therapy, “No, I really felt she wasn’t because after a while she

was just trying to place me in group homes. I really don't feel like she was trying to help." Mars started off having a positive experience with her therapist and was learning essential skills to self-regulate, but her therapist worked with the courts to advocate for Mars to be placed in a group home, thus destroying all the trust that Mars built with her. The entangled relationship between system-impacted youth, a therapist, and the juvenile delinquency system prevented substantive and lasting healing.

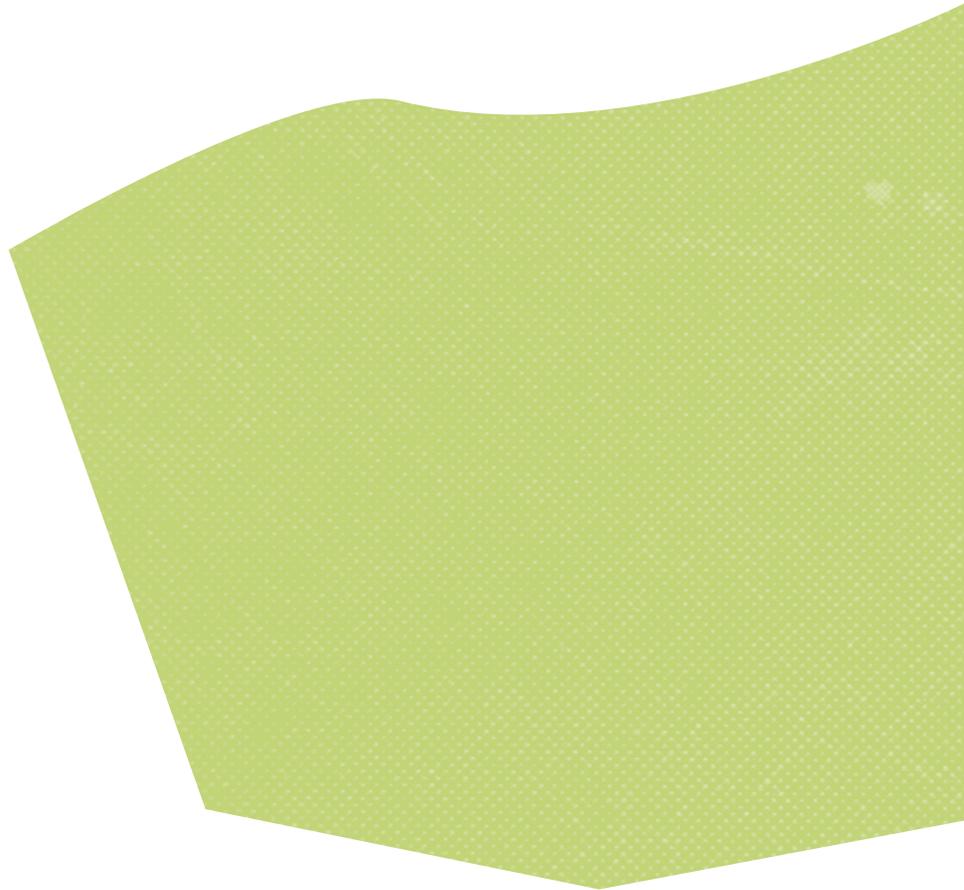
Therapy can be a vehicle for self-healing, but Community Experts expressed a need for it to be self-determined and with culturally responsive providers. Some Experts shared problematic encounters with their therapist, so much so that they felt it only made matters worse. Reina said that therapy, "Made me hate people more." Lillyana Tvio was court-ordered to attend therapy with her family as part of her probation term; her response was, "I feel like the family therapy just caused more problems within my family." Jessica felt similarly about her court order therapy, "I don't trust the therapy. They want me to go to therapy." CJ Mills detailed the issues in her therapeutic journey, "No, I got kicked out of anger management and therapy. I feel like in therapy and stuff; they talk at you instead of talking to you. That would irritate me. It would trigger me more." As part of probation, some Experts were required to engage in therapy with a family member that the court system identified, and if they failed to meet these requirements, they would receive a probation violation and could be detained again. The Goat Pearl retold her experience,

“

**Even when I got released, they did do a little therapy, tried to do it with my granny. That's not why I need to do it. What I needed to do was my own thing or something like that. Make our relationship better or some shit. My damage wasn't from my grandma; My granny didn't want to do that stuff. It was never like that. We'll be up there arguing.**

These stories highlight the absolute necessity for therapy to be self-determined and for youth to create a collaborative therapeutic plan with their provider. Probation Officers and the court system often ordered family therapy, but they were deciding who constituted a youth's family, imposing White middle-class values and ignoring youth's ability to self-identify their chosen family. Experts experienced a process that was intended to be helpful but, in some circumstances, caused more damage to themselves and their families.

Because of the inherent tensions in providing treatment through a court system, the Experts' experiences demonstrate that the juvenile delinquency system can never be an appropriate proxy for effective mental health care. The Goat Pearl described the system's failure to divert her to an appropriate system of care when they discovered her mental health issues at intake, "They could've listened to my psych evaluation. The guy told them I didn't need to be incarcerated. They said I need to be in a mental institution." By trying and failing to be a mental health provider, the delinquency system supplanted the systems that are actually designed to meet young people's mental health needs; instead, young people such as The Goat Pearl could have been more effectively treated through a community-based alternative that focused explicitly on youth's mental health concerns.





***I believe*** our young folks are not throwaways. They are our future. We as a nation must have to do better at investing in them.

***I believe*** that we are responsible for each and every young life that is in front of us and to protect them from systems that harm them.

***I believe*** giving support to these youth instead of treating them like adults and throwing them into jail.





## THEME 3: ENDURING IMPACT OF INCARCERATION

EMOTIONAL  
DISTRESS

JAIL IS NOT A  
PLACE FOR KIDS

FAMILY  
SEPARATION

**A**s Community Experts reflected on their time at San Francisco's Juvenile Justice Center, there were several moments where this was an emotionally painful task. When Experts relayed their experiences, they expressed anger and frustration for a system that neglected to view them as a child and provided little consideration for the adult realities they were navigating before they became incarcerated. Experts shared that the emotional impact of their sentence lasted long after they left those halls. Experts characterized three ways that juvenile detention had an enduring impact on their lives: *emotional distress*, *jail is not a place for kids* and *family separation*.

## EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Youth describe the long-term impact of being incarcerated during their childhood.

**“I’VE HAD A HARD LIFE. IT RUINED MY LIFE.”**

The long-term emotional, psychological, and spiritual impact that incarceration left on Community Experts was immeasurable; many were still working through the trauma they experienced due to juvenile incarceration. During the interviews, the rhythm of Expert’s stories slowed as they began to reflect on the impact incarceration had on their childhood. Incarceration did not end when they walked out of juvenile detention. The enduring impact of those halls framed how Experts thought of themselves in the world and shaped life choices afterward. Below are reflections from four Community Experts, ages eighteen to twenty, at the time of the interview.

“

**Millie Famous:**

**When I got out of the juvenile hall and I was just looking at myself, I was like ‘I don’t like how I look like.’ It’s not happiness. It’s like they took a whole piece of my soul and they kept it in juvenile hall. I’m telling you, it’s like the police kept a piece of my life, just how they take your DNA. They kept basically a piece of my soul in juvenile hall. It’s like I’m here, but I’m not.**

**Out here, it’s like I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to do at all. I’d be struggling but sometimes, there would be good days. I’ll just be like, ‘I’m happy.’ Like today, earlier, because we never went to sleep [in JJC], so we were tired, sleepy but we couldn’t even eat even if we’re hungry. I just didn’t have any appetite. I’ve been having problems eating since I left juvenile hall. I haven’t even eaten. It messed up my skin. The whole atmosphere in there. I stayed in there for six months.**

**Brittany Love:**

**I’ve had a hard life. It ruined my life. That put me in the system. It literally destroyed my life because I never was introduced to the system then as soon as I went to the system I would smoke weed and get violations. Didn’t go to school, violation. I argued with a teacher, threw a book, violation.**



**Annie Egypt:**

**I couldn't fight for myself. That impacted me. To this day I'm nervous around the police. Know what I mean? I cannot even be myself. Can't live in my community. Can't say what I gotta say. Whatever. I know what y'all can do. Like take me away.**

**Sarah Taylor:**

**I think it really messed me up because I grew up in a household where I always had someone that I could talk to at first, but I could never get that at juvenile. I felt like it was just like, I don't know. It stopped me from expressing myself and holding in a lot. It was crazy and I have seen some really bad things in juvenile hall. I've seen someone have a seizure. No one did anything, everybody was just on their walkie-talkies and it was really bad.**

When Community Experts moved through these old memories, their physical demeanor and the cadence of their voices were flooded with consternation. Millie, Brittany, Annie, and Sarah articulate the immense and lasting harm that juvenile incarceration caused them. All young people engage in developmentally appropriate boundary-pushing, but some youth, because of their race or zip code, are more likely to suffer institutional consequences. What is not conveyed in these accounts is the strength and resilience that Community Experts exuded. To make a difference, Brittany worked with advocates and staff at JJC to better meet the needs of transgender youth who were incarcerated, so youth after her would have a less painful experience. When Community Experts were asked about their career goals, overwhelmingly, they shared they wanted to give back to their community, work with youth, and transform institutional systems. People are complex and multifaceted, and the carceral experience was just one aspect of their lives. While these stories are devastating, they are not a full description of who these young people are. Experts advocated to be seen beyond the incarceration lens; many were loving mothers, who worked hard to support their family, and contributed to building healthier communities in their neighborhoods. Unfortunately, they shared that the system and people in general too often misunderstood them through a damaging monolithic lens.

The real toll that juvenile incarceration exacts on people is often not discussed by those who support and sustain the juvenile delinquency system. Experts conveyed they wanted the system to understand the lasting harm that incarceration extracted over them after they left the halls. During the interview process, Experts shared that no one had ever asked them how they felt about their experience or appreciated being able to share their perspective. Regardless of the reader's thoughts on prison abolition, it is emotionally painful to read reflections of a childhood incarcerated. Community Experts described austere circumstances that further traumatized them, which they had to spend considerable energies healing

from. Many Experts described being spoken to in harmful ways; just the very nature of being removed from their community was damaging and affected how they saw themselves in the world and their self-efficacy.

Too often, allies ask system-involved people to share these stories, but the stories take shape around the listener's dictates who want to hear played out tropes of a "reformed youth" who eventually got their act together. This kind of storytelling does not consider the structural and historical oppression of racism and sexism that created a context where juvenile incarceration became a possibility. For any person involved in the decision-making process of the juvenile delinquency system, it is incumbent upon them to take the time to hear the real cost and effects of being locked up as a child, and then afterward assess the ethical and moral case for maintaining a system that harms young people during critical years of their development.



## JAIL IS NOT A PLACE FOR KIDS

Youth concluded that juvenile detention is a developmentally inappropriate place for all children.

**“I DON’T THINK JUVENILE HALL WAS APPROPRIATE FOR A KID.”**

When asked to generate policies to reform the juvenile delinquency system, Community Experts were frequently stumped and subsequently concluded that jail is not a place for kids. Samantha Lopez questioned the moral and ethical viability of the juvenile delinquency system,

“

**Everything. It’s just a bad place. I personally don’t agree with it. I feel like everybody as a kid is going to make a mistake, and we’re not going to learn until we’re older, but sending somebody into a place like that isn’t necessarily fair. When I was locked up, I saw a nine-year-old that was arrested. It was hard because it was like. You’re not supposed to be in here if you’re still a child. It’s hard.**

Experts repeatedly expressed confusion around why the system was so harsh on them for what felt like minor infractions and that jail was not an appropriate response to these common issues among many kids. They did not feel that incarceration enabled them to build a positive self-determined future, and becoming delinquency-involved had the opposite effect. Krystal Mitchell touched on the unequal way that the law is applied to youth, “You’re locking kids up like that. You know a mistake is a mistake, it’s a lot of different alternatives to jail. If you were rich, White kids don’t go to jail for the same thing.” Experts clearly understood they were treated differently by law enforcement and the juvenile delinquency system because of their race and economic status.

Ann Johnson reflected on her experience, “I know it was jail, but we’re not animals. We were kids out there. Don’t be so hard on us. We messed up, we’ve been there. I know you don’t want to see us back here.” Ann recognized the contradiction that the juvenile delinquency system perpetuated because she assumed they did not want her to recidivate, yet adult staff treated her poorly while locked up. Ann and other people in this study reported feeling like an animal or a dog; no child, under any circumstance, should be made to feel this way. Krystal continued relaying her experience in juvenile detention, “It is hard on me. They never asked me why I was still in it, you know what I mean? You know right is right, wrong is wrong, but you never asked me. I was in jail for my 18th birthday, still trying to get out of it. It’s really hard. Not like I’m a fortunate ass a

kid, money that my mom made was to pay rent, put food on our table.” The juvenile delinquency system is not oriented to taking account of the complicated lives that young people are navigating before delinquency involvement. Krystal wanted someone to ask her what was going on in her life, to be understood, but was made to feel like her personal history and story did not matter.

Chy Smacks is a brilliant young person who performed well in school. They had to navigate adult realities, being placed in multiple group homes far from their community and cycled in and out of detention because they wanted to remain close to home. Chy advocated that the juvenile delinquency system, “Not just keep locking us up because I feel that makes it worse. We get locked up, you know we are going to act out or do something again. We’re going to come back. It’s going to get worse now most of my teens are gone because I’ve been locked up. It’s not like it’s helping. It’s like you all are institutionalizing me.” Despite Chy’s demonstrated resilience and excellent school record, their group home placement instability, forced separation from their loved ones, and repeated institutionalization made traditional pathways to success out of reach. Shemey Scott echoed these sentiments, “I don’t think they should have locked up kids like that because I have seen a lot of kids that were in there crying all night, begging for their moms to come and get them.” Shemey described the emotional harm that incarceration inflicts on young people, as she questioned the ethics of removing children from their families.

Ann remembered maltreatment by staff while she was inside, “Some of them. Some officers were some assholes. They were always yelling all the time, like, ‘Go do this, right,’ Why the fuck are you yelling for? I’m here just to talk to me. I’m not a dog. So yes, stuff like that.” Ann called attention to the counterproductive manner in which adult staff hindered the healthy development of children in their care. The juvenile delinquency system purports to stand in for parents; they make serious decisions around where youth live or what kind of treatment they will receive, yet they are not held accountable for treatment that a parent would be penalized for. What Experts describe, a detention hall where children are crying all night is not a system of care.

**“... IT’S NOT LIKE IT’S HELPING.  
IT’S LIKE YOU ALL ARE  
INSTITUTIONALIZING ME.”**

Instead, Community Experts asked that the system explore alternatives to incarceration. Star Martin shared, “I don’t feel like kids should go to jail. Period. When you’re under 18, you shouldn’t go to jail. A program or something I have to do every day after school or something. I don’t think juvenile hall was appropriate for a kid.” Trina Johnson also advocated for alternatives to incarceration,

“

**I don’t think that I should have been locked up. They really lock you up, not for falling off, they lock you up like animals. I think it should have been maybe like a class or something. That’s what juvenile should have been because some people went to juvenile, and they just turned into a brick wall all of a sudden. They’re really bad, a bad person after juvenile.**

Chy’s probation officer promised to get them supportive services upon release,

“

**I turned 18 and everything in juvenile hall. It was like I went in as a kid and came out as an adult. They told me, we’re going to set you up with ILSP [Independent Living Skills Program], we’re going to help you get your ID, we’re going to help you get a job, help you go back to school, you’re going to get therapy, all this other stuff, and I didn’t get none of that.**

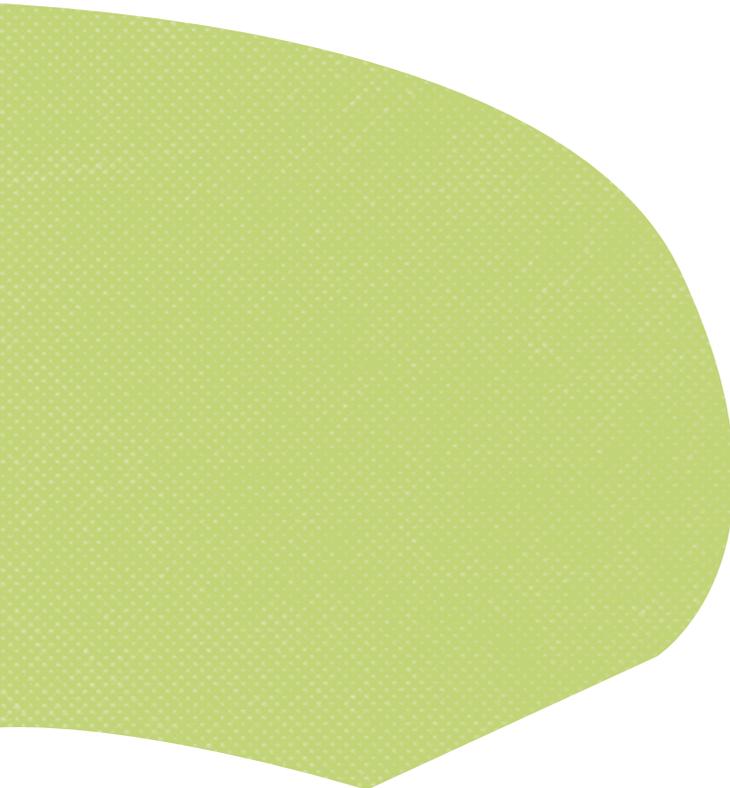
Chy was under the impression that they would get services as they aged out of the system. The support Chy described could have been part of a diversion program, focusing on preventative measures, instead of support received after being incarcerated. Community Experts did not thoroughly flush out what an alternative to incarceration could look like; trying to imagine a reality outside of the carceral state was difficult to envision. However, Experts did identify a desire to be understood in their complexity and to have systems address their core issues. Community Experts also indicated that wrap-around services addressing root causes of incarceration had to be provided outside of the juvenile delinquency system because they did not feel safe receiving therapeutic services or other programming via a system designed to punish them.

Experts shared losing an aspect of their childhood through a system of institutionalization, a cost they felt the system did not consider. Experts were told the rhetoric that the juvenile delinquency system was designed to rehabilitate young people, but their experiences characterized a system that further inflicted harm, where healing and rehabilitation was an impossible outcome. Khalia Hedgewood shared her thoughts on this,

“

**I just feel like they needed a lot of help and jail is not going to help them. Being locked inside a unit isn't going to help you. Being locked inside a room for how many hours or however many hours they want you to be in there, or they lock down the whole thing, and you just sit in there with nothing to do. It's like, 'Oh, read a book.' It's like, 'I've been here for eight months. I've read all the books, so what do you want me to do now?' You know, it's stupid. They did have yoga in the morning for the people that were there for a long time. They did have classes for them, but I felt like it really needed to be a lot more.**

Khalia described some attempts that JJC made to support youth, like providing books and yoga classes, but noted that this was entirely insufficient. Experts wished they could build skills and capabilities to grow into efficacious adults, but their experience inside juvenile detention and probation was not conducive to healthy childhood development.



## FAMILY SEPARATION

Youth were separated from their family as a result of incarceration, during a time when they needed the support of loved ones the most.

**“THEY DID ME SO DIRTY THE TIME I WENT TO COURT, AND MY SON WAS THERE.”**

**A**s a result of being detained, Community Experts were forcibly removed from their families and communities, and they expressed a sense of loss years later as they recalled missing seminal family moments. Experts wanted to stay connected to loving family members as they navigated the difficult realities of incarceration, but restrictions on visits and phone calls made this challenging. Annie Egypt remembered not being able to call and visit with her family regularly. She expressed the emotional impact of the severance of familial bonds as severe harm that occurred at JJC, “I would like to see. Let us get in contact with our loved ones. The youth. Cause you can’t take away your family from the little child. Come on now. You are breaking their soul.” Detained youth were allowed to have family visits and phone calls, but functionally this did not always happen consistently. Experts reported inconsistent access to phone use to speak with family members because phone calls functioned as a privilege that could be lost instead of a justified right they were entitled to. Kelhani Reyes recalled the isolation and separation she experienced from her family members and son,

“

**Being in Juvenile Hall to me was just as terrible as being in 850. I just feel so secluded there. I couldn’t call any of my family members. I was only entitled to call my mother, and that’s it. Even if my son was at somebody else’s house. The way they treat you, they’re supposed to, I guess, treat you different because you’re a child, you’re a minor. But they treat you like shit there.**

The harm that Kelhani experienced from familial separation and isolation was compounded by a lack of regular contact with her son, who was also affected by the harm caused by the juvenile delinquency system. Unfortunately, Kelhani’s son experienced further harm when she was in the courtroom, “They did me so dirty the time I went to court, and my son was there. When taking me out to court, it was terrible. They take you out of the room, so you walk out. I’m shackled here. I’m like, ‘Dude. I didn’t kill nobody. Why are they doing this to me?’ It was just bad. My son was crying. It’s terrible.” The intergenerational harm that occurs because of incarceration is incalculable, other family members suffered as Kelhani was “serving her time” compounding the total harm done to incarcerated people and their families.

Kelhani, Annie, and many other Experts spoke about the added difficulty they encountered while in the halls because they could not consistently speak to their families over the phone or in-person because this privilege was easily taken away. 82% of Community Experts shared that they had a family member visit them while at JJC, demonstrating support they received from loved ones, but they expressed that jail was not conducive to visits and procedures during visits were humiliating. For many, their familial support network may not fit the image of a White middle-class family, which hindered their ability to stay in contact with loving adults in their lives. Experts were not allowed to self-identify their chosen family and were restricted to phone calls to their “nuclear family.” Community Experts wanted to keep their connection with loved ones intact while they were incarcerated and do so in a dignified manner, but they shared that policies inside of JJC did not allow for this, and as a result, they experienced extreme isolation.



**PART 2: ENVISIONING A  
HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR  
SYSTEMS-IMPACTED YOUTH**



**FREEDOM  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE**



***I believe*** that system impacted people deserve healing and don't need to earn or prove that they deserve time or space to do that healing.

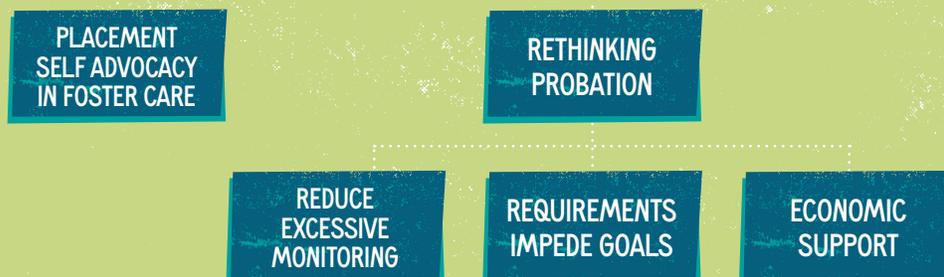
***I believe*** the young adults need to be listened to and regarded when decisions are being made that affect them.

***I believe*** youth have the right to speak freely because they are our radiant future.





## THEME 4: SYSTEM RECOMMENDATIONS: VOICING NEEDS



**A**fter Community Experts reflected on their experiences with San Francisco’s juvenile delinquency system and detention at JJC, they developed recommendations for the foster care and juvenile delinquency system. Experts’ ability to envision a reformed juvenile delinquency system was difficult as they combated feelings of dejection for a system that should not exist in the first place. Many echoed what Star Martin said with conviction, “I don’t feel like kids should go to jail. Period.” Community Experts generated ideas that would facilitate a harm reduction approach for the foster care system and juvenile probation. They provided insight into how systems could better work with youth to enact their own self-determined goals that align with creating a prosperous future free of system involvement. Regarding the foster care system, Experts believed it is crucial that dually-involved youth engage in *placement self-advocacy*, so young people can be part of a collaborative process that determines where they will live. Experts outlined reforms on how to *rethink probation*; they advocated for probation to *reduce excessive monitoring*, address that *requirements impede goals*, and for probation officers to focus on providing *economic support*.

Ultimately, people shared Star Martin’s sentiments that jail can never be a place for kids, but for those youth who remain involved in the juvenile delinquency system, they cannot be forgotten, and their immediate concerns must be addressed to reduce the harm caused by the system. Community Experts were asked to provide recommendations to transform the juvenile delinquency system and assess the system’s efficacy and system providers. They expressed shock and gratitude for being asked, noting they had never been asked about their experience inside the halls and have been systematically excluded from policy conversations. Experts’ critical analysis in this report constitutes a more efficacious blueprint for juvenile delinquency reform because these were derived through a participatory model of research, rooted in the lived experience and expertise of those most impacted by incarceration.

## PLACEMENT SELF-ADVOCACY

**When youth are placed in an out of home placement they want to be part of the decision-making process. They want to remain as close to their community as possible to maintain important ties to loved ones.**

**“THAT’S HOW THEY PUNISH CHILDREN BY TRYING TO MOVE THEM FAR AWAY, TRYING TO GET THEM OUT OF THEIR SAFE HAVEN AND THINGS LIKE THAT.”**

**Y**outh in the foster care system or juvenile delinquency system are often placed in a position where adults, with little connection to them, make collective decisions about where they should live. These decisions can involve a group of people, probation officers, social workers, and judges but often does not involve family members or the young person. Once a young person enters the juvenile delinquency system, their family environment is under a considerable amount of scrutiny, and the courts may decide to remove them from their home or make them a ward of the state. Under these circumstances, a young person may be mandated to live in a foster or group home far away from their community and school.

Community Experts’ lives got more complicated as institutions began making decisions about where they should live, and for those who were placed in congregate care, they were at an increased risk of further trauma and deeper system-involvement. Community Experts described a confusing and ambiguous decision-making process, where they did not understand the rationale for their placement decisions. Dually-involved youth shared concerns over whether their probation officer or social worker was making their placement decisions. Experts who entered the juvenile delinquency system for the first time, reported that the system unfairly assessed the “fitness” of their families, employing negative stereotypes judging their families if they did not align with the model of White middle-class families. Many Experts were removed from their homes or became a ward of the state based on unreasonable assessments about their safety and well-being, not considering the harm that occurs when children are removed from their community of origin. Unanimously, Community Experts wished they had some input into the placement process. Experts were at an age where they could advocate for themselves; they had concerns centered around physical safety, emotional well-being, maintaining community ties, and educational continuity, but these concerns were not considered in the placement process. Unfortunately, they said their social workers and probation officers did not share similar concerns and did not consult them for their input.

Once youth enter the juvenile delinquency system, judges and probation officers may decide that a young person's home environment is not "fit" and may mandate that a young person be removed from their home. Grissly Rodriguez shared her experience working with the courts and her probation officer, "It was with a lady named \*\*\*\*. In my court, she tried to remove me from my home. I still don't understand what she was trying to remove me from my home in my first place. She was disrespecting me, like telling me my parents can't take care of me." Grissly portrayed a painful experience where the court's officers unfairly judged her parents, who were loving and involved, but she was still unnecessarily removed from her home. Ashley Flowers struggled to communicate with her probation officer, "She wouldn't do what I wanted to do. It was always something she wanted to do. She always wanted me to be home when I didn't want to be home. I, at least, wanted to go stay with my grandparents. She didn't let me go stay with my grandparents. It was just always something with her." Ashley was on juvenile probation and required to live with her parents and be there for curfew, but she knew that her grandma's home was the most supportive place for her to live. Unfortunately, Ashley was restricted from living with her grandma because of probation requirements, and if she did stay there, she would violate her curfew and be re-incarcerated. Grissly and Ashley knew what was best for them, but their judge and probation officer did not consider their perspective. CJ Mills describes a lackadaisical process, "The judges just—whatever the PO would recommend. Like my PO would recommend me go to a group home. They just be like alright." The decision on where youth should live is a highly delicate process. Experts wanted their placement process to involve careful consideration from a team of caring individuals, including family members.

Dually-involved Community Experts moved around more frequently between foster and group homes; they expressed a high level of dissatisfaction about their placements. Becca Smith recalled frustration around her placement, "One thing that I would never do to a child, as long as they're safe in their environment and they like the environment. I would never take a child away from that environment." Becca was living with a foster mom for most of her life; once she was involved with the juvenile delinquency system, she was removed from that home, even though it was a loving and caring environment. After being removed from a loving foster care parent, for reasons unknown to her and her foster mom, Becca moved around between various group homes and struggled to maintain her grades, like when she was with her foster mom.

Star Martin advocated staying with her foster care parent that lived in the same community where she had roots,

“

**It should have been my option if I wanted to move back or not. I felt like I was forced to move back, and I really didn't want to. I mean, I was doing fine where I was all the time. I felt like if I would have stayed where I was, I feel like I wouldn't be in jail, in and out of jail. I wouldn't be struggling. I feel like I would have had a better opportunity to stay where I was at. I'm old enough to make that decision on my own.**

Other Community Experts described trying to work with their probation officers, judges, and social workers to communicate where they felt was the safest placement, considering the neighborhood they were in and the home's safety. However, adults with decision-making power often did not consider the young person's informed opinion. Experts desired a more collaborative process around their placements because this would have facilitated a more successful placement and less likelihood of a young person feeling the need to run away.

Millie Famous and Becca Smith wanted to remain in their foster parent where they were happy and safe but were required to move back to San Francisco. Millie requested to live outside of San Francisco because that was safer for her,

“

**No. My first placement was supposed to be in Oakland or Concord, or Nyack. I told them before I even got out. Don't let me live in San Francisco because that's where everything happens, good, bad. That's where everything happens. It still ended up with me going to juvenile. It still ended up with me getting detained or arrested, and it still ended me getting jumped by girls I don't know.**

Becca wanted to remain in Pittsburgh in her foster parent where she was doing well in school, but because of her delinquency case in San Francisco, she was required to move back, “Yes. When I wanted to go back to Pittsburgh because my papers were there.” Becca referred to the struggle she faced collecting her paperwork and school records, which foster and dually-involved youth face as they are required to leave their home school districts and attend schools in multiple different counties. When system-involved youth move around to different counties to attend school, it is difficult to maintain a continuity of school records, presenting enormous hurdles to fulfill course requirements, which delayed graduation.

The most problematic placement decisions occurred when youth were placed out of state, removing them from their community and support system. Ashley Flowers recalled being threatened by probation to be placed in Colorado, although she ultimately stayed in the Bay Area. Unfortunately, this happened to Mayra Jackson,



**That's how they punish children by trying to move them far away, trying to get them out of their safe haven and things like that. That's not a good fit for children. That's not a good thing at all. If you're a native of San Francisco and they had to move you all the way to Timbuktu, that's not going to do anything for you. You can't go there, you're just going to cause the next person hell, excuse my language. That's what happens. A lot of youth, they move very far away. They find their way back to the city. They come back to the program.**

Experts shared they were compelled to run away and return home when mandated to live far away from their community. Mayra described this scenario, and some youth may need to navigate the underground street economy and homelessness to travel back home with no resources or support. Ashley depicted why she ran away from a placement, “Yes, to avoid going to Fresno. Yes, because they were trying to send me away with my baby.” When Experts were placed far away from their communities, other issues arose. Ashley was sent to a North Western state, “You send me out of state. They don’t even give you the same resources that they do out here. They don’t have what they do for African Americans out here.” Ashley felt isolated as one of the few African Americans in a community hundreds of miles away from San Francisco. Kiara Bentley’s probation officer wanted her to leave her current guardian and live with other family members out of the state, “I ran away probably from the juvenile system because they wanted to send me to Samoa.” Eventually, Kiara did end up moving to Samoa per the recommendations from the courts, “Yes, I didn’t want to go to Samoa. I heard all these stories about how bad it was. I tried to convince them they said, ‘No, you have two weeks, and you’re leaving’ so in those two weeks, I said, ‘On the last week, I’m going to run away.’” It is impossible for family members or the system providers to monitor youth’s health and safety when they are placed out of state or to assess the quality of the placement. In Kiara’s case, she suffered extreme sexual abuse after being required to move away from her home, which could have been avoided had the system listened to her.

Community Experts advocated for their perspective to be honored by their probation officers, social workers, and judges; they wanted input on their placement to consider the safest option and where they were best equipped to meet life goals, like graduating high school. Experts and system-impacted youth have particular and distinct considerations they are balancing as they think about placement possibilities; ideally, adults around them listen to these concerns to ensure they live in the best possible placement. For most families, the state does not intervene so intimately into their lives, so when a young person must live somewhere other than their guardian's home, this decision needs to be carried out with the utmost care, love, and collaborative planning.



## RETHINKING PROBATION

Youth provided recommendations for improving juvenile probation that focused on them being able to enact self-determined goals.

Community Experts provided thoughtful and detailed recommendations for improving juvenile probation. They suggested that probation officers *reduce excessive monitoring* of their lives, because this leads to unrealistic expectations and increased risk of incarceration. Experts detailed a host of conditions of their probation term they felt impeded their ability to accomplish self-determined goals - *requirements impede goals*. Finally, Experts recommended that juvenile probation place a greater emphasis on providing and securing *economic support*. Overall, they described a relationship fraught from the beginning, as Experts preferred to receive mentorship, support, and services outside of the juvenile delinquency system.



## REDUCE EXCESSIVE MONITORING

**Youth recommend that probation officers reduce excessive monitoring of their life because this places youth at increased risk of recidivism.**

The very nature of probation requires probation officers to monitor the young people in their charge closely. Community Experts shared that their probation officer engaged in excessive monitoring and surveillance. Friscolita Reyes' probation officer monitored her in various ways; she had an ankle monitor, curfew for work and school, stay away orders, drug tests, and mandatory attendance requirements for schools and employment. Other young people had fewer requirements but had to check in with their probation officers frequently. Khalia Hedgewood had to check-in with her probation officer every day, and Ashley Flowers had to speak to hers three times a day on the phone. Ashley recalled communication with her probation officer, "You blowin up my phone or you calling three times a day and where are you?" If Ashley did not pick up the phone, she could violate her probation, garner negative consequences, or potentially become re-incarcerated. Brea Williams had a similar requirement, "I had talked to him almost every day. Whatever, they will call you wherever you go. If I was to leave the house, I got to check in like 24 hours before." Those youth who had in-person check-ins were presented with additional challenges since they had to commute to JJC with limited support for transportation while still meeting curfew and other mandates. Community Experts conveyed that it was challenging to speak with their probation officer so frequently while also adhering to their probation requirements.

In addition to frequent check-ins, Community Experts expressed distress when the interactions with their probation officers extended into their daily lives and became visible to their communities and peers. CJ Mills said, "He used to pop up in school. He'd pop up, and I still had to check-in." Kay Smith's probation officer also checked up on her while she was at school,

“

**Even though the probation officers, I had wanted to see me do good. But I just felt like it's annoying. They used to come to my house, they used pop at my school, pull me off the bus when I'm going home. It was a lot of people just like turning, all people looking around like, 'What's going on with her? What are they doing?' That kind of stuff. Maybe making it more comfortable. I guess it's not supposed to be. Being younger, maybe it should be, or they should be more. Instead of trying to punish people with giving jail time at that age, you should try to help them and put them into some kind of program or something that can help them.**

CJ and Kay depict the humiliation of having probation officers check-in on them at school around their peers; they wished their probation officers would have maintained a basic level of respect and discretion to ensure their privacy, so their delinquency status would not be revealed to their school community. Experts expressed dejection when they were outed in such a public way at school by their probation officer, which created a negative feedback loop where their peers and community could stereotype them as “troubled youth.”

A few Community Experts retold stories of their probation officers exceeding the scope of their role. Grizzly Rodriguez recalled, “Well, he’s the reason why I had left because he came to my house like at 3:00 am in the morning, but I don’t know. I feel like maybe they should do background checks like on, I don’t know. Yes, because even after that happened, I just felt like, man, he shouldn’t be working at JJC.” Grizzly ended up running away from her home to avoid these check-ins that felt overly invasive and not safe. Experts expressed feeling humiliated that the people around them became aware of their system-involvement because it felt like an unnecessary unintended consequence of the requirement of checking-in with their probation officer.

Probation officers monitor almost every aspect of delinquency-involved youth’s life, but this creates a dynamic where youth can easily violate probation for minor infractions and be punished with incarceration or a longer probation term. Yasmin Smith commented about her probation officer, “I felt like he did everything in his power to get me back in jail. He didn’t do nothing in his power to help me like stay out and get off.” Ashley violated probation and was sent back to JJC because she rode her regular school bus. She was mandated not to ride the school bus because she had taken a peer’s cell phone, and her probation requirements mandated that her mother escort her to another bus, but one day decided to take her regular route because she could not figure out another way to attend school. Later, Ashley ended up violating her probation requirements again because she visited her grandparents in a neighborhood where she had a stay-away order. Kay’s probation officer checked up on her frequently at home, she relayed, “They just told me to go to school, and if I don’t, I’m going to go to jail, or if I talk back to my mom, they can take me to jail.” Kay described a harmful dynamic where probation officers elicited information from her mother and used interpersonal issues between family members to initiate a probation violation, resulting in additional time in detention. Community Experts understood they had to work with their probation officers, but they felt that the monitoring was excessive and led to an inability to move forward in their lives, and caused intense feelings of isolation when their check-ins were done in public settings in front of their peers.



## REQUIREMENTS IMPEDE GOALS

**The requirements that probation officers placed on youth impeded their ability to be successful because they were time consuming and not aligned with their own goals.**

**“SHE JUST KEPT THROWING PROGRAMS AT ME. WHEN I TELL HER, I’M BUSY.”**

**A**s youth left JJC and transitioned back into their communities, they worked closely with their probation officer to meet their mandated requirements. Community Experts described an array of juvenile probation requirements that any well-organized well-adjusted adult would struggle to complete. As part of The Goat Pearl’s juvenile probation requirements, she had frequent drug tests, family counseling, anger management classes, community service, and attended programming through a local community-based organization. Even when Experts cases did not involve drugs, they were required to take frequent drug tests, this felt cumbersome and unjustified. Kiesha entered the juvenile delinquency system for shoplifting; as part of her probation, she had the following requirements: individual counseling, family counseling, stay-away order, a class to address shoplifting, curfew, and frequent check-in with her probation officer. Alexis Ferrero, Ashley Flowers, and Trina Johnson had curfews, ankle monitors, stay-away orders, weekly scheduled check-ins with their probation officer, and community service.

Community Experts expressly stated their goal was to get off of probation, and they tried their best to meet the requirements, but they pointed out that the amount of time it took to carry this out successfully was challenging and significantly impeded their ability to accomplish primary goals like school and work. They felt their probation officer set them up to fail, with such an unreasonable list of time-consuming requirements. Additionally, they had to meet these requirements using public transportation, frequently with little financial support, and lived in neighborhoods where public transportation is underserved, thus creating additional barriers to success.

Policies requiring Experts to attend numerous programs did not feel well-intentioned because they were not aligned with young people’s most foundational goals to enter adulthood successfully; it became an excessive burden and hindrance. Cynthia Harrison commented on her requirements, “She just kept throwing programs at me. When I tell her, I’m busy. She would just throw programs at me, like the anger management classes, I don’t get that.” Cynthia wanted to spend more time at school before becoming delinquency-involved she played volleyball on her high school team but could not continue because she was swamped fulfilling her probation requirements. Cynthia would have been better served if

she could have worked out regularly and interacted with her peers in a positive setting, instead of attending anger management classes that she found ineffective and frustrating because it reinforced harmful stereotypes placed on her by the system.

Alexis Ferrero found it challenging to meet the competing demands that probation placed on her, “They were a waste of my time. Having to come in every day to check in with her was just a waste of my time because I have to go to school, you know I have to go do my homework. And I need to do stuff, like, you’re telling me to get on top of my shit, but it’s hard because you’re telling me to do stuff at the same time you’re telling me to go do my hours on the weekdays.” Alexis described a setup where it was impossible to successfully complete all of the demands that her probation officer placed on her and attend school.

Community Experts had an enormous amount of responsibility placed on them; many of them had to work to earn income or take care of siblings, attend school, and meet various probation requirements, many unrelated to the circumstances around their case. Probation officers did not consider that all youth should enjoy childhood and engage in activities that facilitate camaraderie with their peers. Experts did not have time in their schedule to enjoy themselves or be in spaces that viewed them in a positive light. They desired a more holistic approach that would have centered their foundational needs of education and employment to have been set up for success as young adults. Instead, Experts were mandated to follow an array of restrictions and requirements that set them up for failure and technical probation violations, further disillusioning them from trusting the system and adults around them.



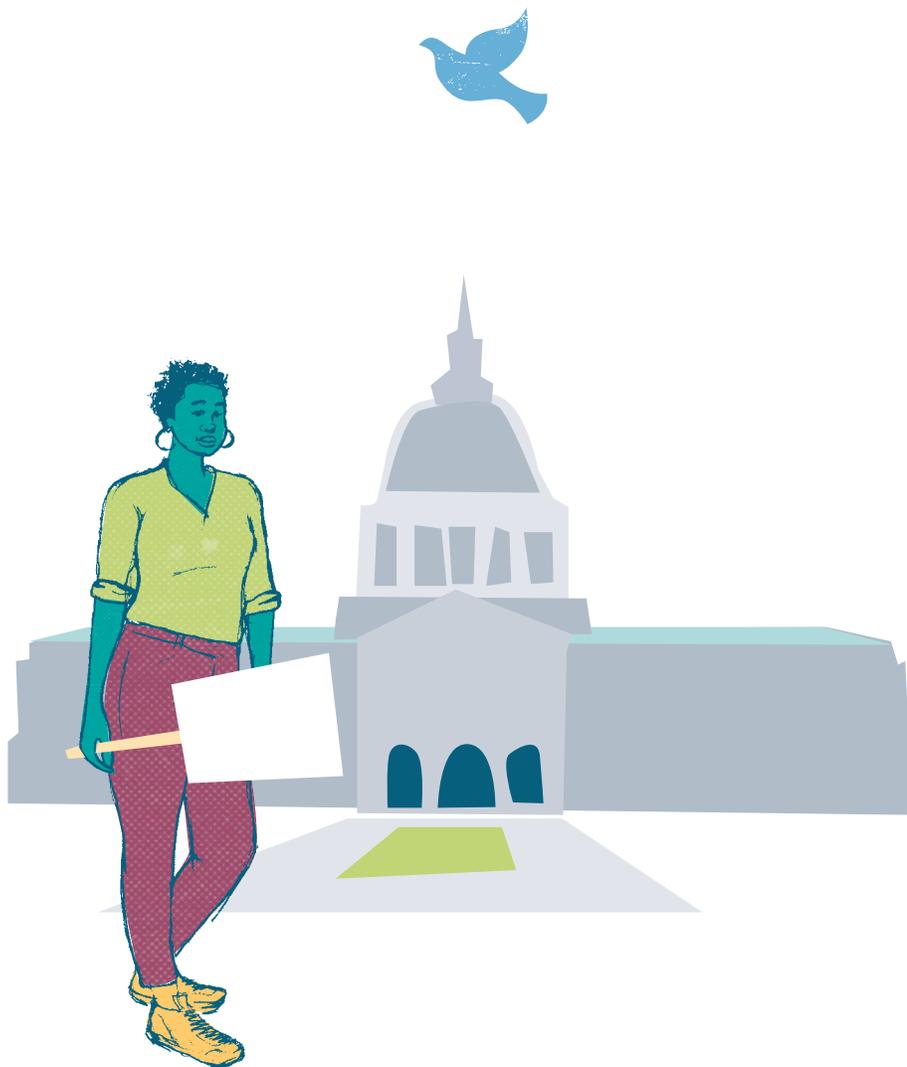
## ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Youth identified economic stability through securing reliable and well-paid employment, as the most important goal post-detention.

**“THEY ALL PUT ME IN PROBATION, AND THEY JUST TELL ME, ‘GET A JOB, GO TO SCHOOL.’” I DO ALL THOSE THINGS.”**

Community Experts wanted to work with the adults around them, including their probation officers, but structural and institutional barriers too often got in the way. All people in this study grew up in poverty, so as they transitioned back to their community and worked with their probation officers, they had to manage probation requirements while also navigating economic scarcity. Experts had immediate economic needs they had to attend to before fulfilling probation requirements. They identified securing meaningful employment as the most critical first goal to accomplish with their probation officer. Ashley Flowers identified this need, “Boom, meet your probation officer, ‘We have a program. You want to work?’ I’m pretty sure that child’s going to be like, ‘Yes.’ It’s going to help you get off probation, and right there is going to steer them the right way.” Ashley discussed the need for young people on probation to attend programs where they could acquire valuable job skills and suggested that probation officers partner with local businesses to find well-paid opportunities for youth so that they could build their resumes. Community Experts were frustrated with the lack of usefulness in probation requirements, where tasks did not translate into building blocks for their future; instead, this was obsolete and misguided busy work. Some probation officers did instruct youth to get a job but did not offer support to do so. Community Experts recommended greater emphasis on securing a job, building resumes, and interviewing skills.

Kay Smith got involved with the juvenile delinquency system for petty shoplifting, “They don’t have nothing for people that shoplift. I just get jail time every time, and it’s like I’m not learning nothing. They all put me in probation, and they just tell me, ‘Get a job, go to school.’” I do all those things.” Kay highlights the insufficiencies of juvenile probation to address basic needs and root causes of becoming delinquency-involved. Many Experts’ first case was for shoplifting; some took essential supplies they needed from CVS, like feminine products, diapers, or formula. Community Experts discussed shoplifting as a solution to meet their basic needs, not one person spoke of any system provider trying to address those needs and finding a way to support the acquisition of essential goods or the attainment of stable employment, so they did not have to acquire essential items illegally. Experts desired a greater focus on high-quality employment for youth because this would effectively address some of the root causes of involvement with the juvenile delinquency system. Collectively, Community Experts asked that the juvenile delinquency system consider their most fundamental economic needs first before stacking on an array of programming, classes, and counseling.





***I believe*** young women, girls, trans and gender expansive youth are capable and resilient beyond measure. They hold the power to radically transform the world for generations to come.

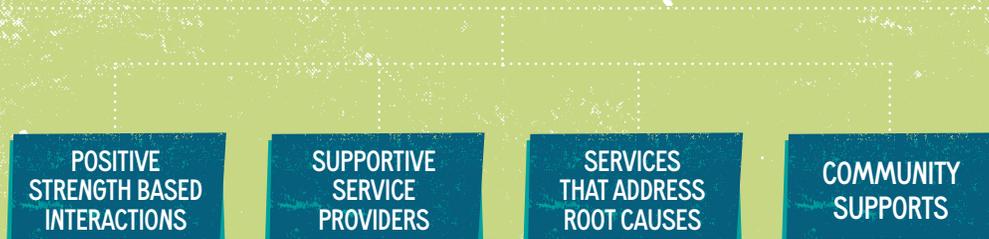
***I believe*** in young folks. I believe in their strength and their knowledge. I believe in their hearts and their fire. I trust they have the answers.

***I believe*** it is the job of everyone to create radical solutions guided and informed by those directly impacted by harm perpetuated by systems.





## THEME 5: WHAT COULD HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE?



Community Experts struggled to envision a reformed juvenile delinquency system because it caused so much lasting harm in their lives. They identified five approaches to working with system-involved youth they believed would have made a difference in their lives: positive strength-based interactions, supportive systems providers, services that address root causes, and community supports. Experts' recommendations are applicable to any system providers working with young people, it is not exclusive to the juvenile delinquency system; these ideas should be considered by anyone working with youth. Community Experts reimagined a community free of institutional systems, where youth can create meaningful relationships with adults and service providers and be supported in a way that felt authentic and self-determined. Overall, Experts wanted to be treated with basic human dignity by systems and service providers, and be seen as nuanced individuals, deserving of all the rights and access afforded to their White middle and upper-class peers.

## POSITIVE STRENGTH BASED INTERACTIONS

Adults working with system-impacted youth need to engage with them in a way that focuses on their strengths and provide them with positive reinforcement.

**“I’M A GOOD PERSON TOO, JUST BECAUSE I HAVE DONE SOMETHING,  
I CAN BE BETTER. EVERYBODY CAN BE BETTER.”**

Community Experts expressed a desire to work with the system providers in a manner that supported self-determined positive decision-making. Unfortunately, they portrayed problematic relationships with the adults in the juvenile delinquency system. Star Martin shared interactions with her juvenile probation officer, “Negative, it was weird. She would be so rude, mean just tear me down. When you treat someone like that, it made me feel more degraded like you’re degrading me. I’m a good person too, just because I have done something, I can be better. Everybody can be better.” Like all young people, the Experts wanted the adults to provide positive reinforcement and strength-based solutions and activities instead of engaging with them in a way that reinforced harmful stereotypes. Probation officers assigned Experts programs based on a deficit mindset, like anger management classes; instead, they wanted to attend programs that reinforced their strengths and reflected a positive conception of who they are.

Lucy Books wished that her probation officer would, “Instead of talking down at us, talk to us,” but lamented, “That’s never going to happen.” Several Community Experts reported that their probation officers and other staff at JJC did not speak to them kindly, and they felt these interactions were dysfunctional. Cynthia Harrison said, “The first one I had, she was really very mean. She was very harsh on me.” Friscolita Reyes shared, “I’ve had ones that haven’t been nice and been kind of more racist towards me.” Sunshine Horace’s probation officer would check up on her at school and remarked, “I was always going to school, and somebody would be like my probation officer is here. She just didn’t like me. She was very evil. She’d always lie to them.” Sunshine tried to attend school and perform well; at the same time, her probation officer would check in on her at school, making it hard for her to focus and think of herself positively. Experts wanted to undo negative social narratives that shaped their interaction with adult service providers to facilitate moving forward in their lives in healthy and constructive ways.

Community Experts wanted to be treated with kindness and consideration as they navigated the juvenile delinquency and foster care systems, experiences they recounted as causing them considerable pain and trauma. Being a system-involved youth brings a host of challenges that make growing up complicated. Experts expressed dismay and confusion around why their probation officers and other service providers in the foster care system did not work with them in a developmentally appropriate manner. Ashley Flowers asked that probation officers, “Be there for the clients more. A probation officer for a minor should be there, more supporting. They need to be there instead of treating them like they murdered somebody. That’s how they treat you. They treat you like you’re 50 years old, and you killed somebody. In reality, you’re just a child.” Ashley pointed out that delinquency-involved youth are too often treated like adults in an institutional system designed to punish adults. Intelligent Wisdom echoed this sentiment, “To remember that they are still kids and they make mistakes. Give them an opportunity to change instead of always using the opportunity to charge them as adults because they are still kids.” Ashley and Intelligent suggested that the juvenile delinquency system foster a dynamic that centers youth’s ability to learn and grow and not reinforce negative stereotypes, perhaps enacting a self-fulfilling prophecy. Experts felt that other youth, those who were White and from higher-income neighborhoods, were provided with loving environments and allowed agency and space to make common childhood mistakes.

Community Experts found it challenging to move forward in their lives when system providers were telling them they were terrible people; instead, they wanted to be treated with love and care. Alexis Ferrero suggested a strength-based approach to working with youth,



**Hear us out because they don’t do that at all. They don’t hear us. Just because we’re young doesn’t mean that we don’t know shit. Doesn’t mean that we haven’t been through shit that you guys have been through. I feel like they just need to be there more because some probation officers always say it’s our fault. Like it’s our fault for not doing stuff right. Or it’s our fault because we missed a day of school. Sorry, like, at least try to be here for us while we have this time and like, try to encourage us and tell us more opportunities that we have.**

As youth transitioned back to their community while on juvenile probation, Experts reflected that it is crucial that adults around them work to reframe the negative narratives youth may hold of themselves into ideas of self that are generative and rooted in positive youth development. Also, having adults recognize that Experts brought with them valuable wisdom and skills that could be utilized. Mars Venus explained this sentiment,



**I would like to see, at least if you're going to put me on probation, take the initiative. If you want me to check-in, make sure that I'm doing some activities. You want to keep me busy and doing something positive. Look into positive things. Don't look into negative things that you know you're already reading. You know that I already have a history. It's easy to do bad things you're already doing. When you're going on a good path, it's easy to do that, too.**

Mars suggested that probation officers proactively suggest programs and activities that would facilitate young people's ability to engage in strength-based activities. Instead of focusing on past histories, Experts described a desire to have the relationship between a young person and adult system providers be centered around building a better future and self-determined life paths. Community Experts found it challenging to work with their probation officers and other adults who focused too heavily on their past offense histories. Experts conveyed that system providers focused on all the things they did wrong instead of working to build skills and capabilities to do something different, which they found to be, at times, very demotivating. Experts wanted to have regular and healthy communication with systems providers centered around creating and enacting positive life goals.



## SUPPORTIVE SYSTEM PROVIDERS

Youth wanted the adult providers to visibly demonstrate they cared for them and were interested in their wellbeing.

**“I JUST FELT JUDGED. EVERY TIME I SAY SOMETHING,  
THEY JUST HAD A LABEL FOR ME, YOU KNOW?”**

Community Experts continually expressed a desire that service providers demonstrate genuine concern for youth navigating the juvenile delinquency system. The interactions they had with adults suggested to Experts they were not cared for or loved and perhaps disliked. Cynthia Harrison wanted adults working in the juvenile delinquency system to reframe how they worked with youth, “More people that really care for you in there. Really telling you how to go through the right pathway, not going through the wrong pathway, but Woodside, they didn’t really give support.” Alexis Ferrero spoke about her interactions with the staff at JJC, “Yeah, I just feel like they should be more supportive and understanding. We’re going through stuff ourselves at home, so you guys should, at least, help us.” Alexis continued relaying her experience,

“

**Yeah, it’s like super strict, and they didn’t even hear us. Like when we try, we’re just trying to talk to somebody, and we have nobody to talk to. And we’re trying to talk to you guys so you guys should like, build, like at least build a relationship with us while we’re there. You all shouldn’t just put us down like ‘Go to your room! You messed up, go to your room. You’re not staying in line? Go to your room.’**

Alexis and Cynthia made simple requests to be seen and heard, with a little compassion. They both recognized the necessity of being surrounded by supportive adults who taught foundational skills to build successful lives. Grissly Rodriguez reflected that an intervention by an adult that actively reached out and provided guidance would have made a difference in her life, “Yes, I fell off, and it was bad. I fell because I didn’t have no guide, no guidance.” Grissly wanted to have her caseworker and probation officer reach out to her and ask, “Yes, Grissly, how are you doing today?” Shemey Scott put this very simply, “I think they should have listened to me.” Cynthia reflected similar thoughts, “Yes, I think that they could have supported me better. I think they could be more understanding of how I felt.” System-involved youth spend a considerable amount of time with adults who work for the system, so Experts emphasized that these interactions must be grounded in authentic care.

Another way that system providers could have demonstrated care for the youth in their charge would have been if they interacted with Experts on a deeper and more holistic level that extends past what they read about them in court files. Community Experts believed if service providers in the juvenile delinquency system took the time to get to know their personal biographies, they would be better equipped to effectively interact with them and support positive changes in their lives. Mari Johnson recounted interactions with her probation officer, “I just felt judged a lot by them. Especially when it came to like how they make case notes for going to court and stuff like that, and he kept saying it, I was like, ‘Damn,’ they make it seem like. I just felt judged. Every time I say something, they just had a label for me, you know?” Tekhnia Smith felt similarly, “I just think someone who actually have listened to me because I was always constantly seen like I needed help. Something was wrong, and like that.” If Mari’s and Tekhnia’s service providers took the time to get to know their personal histories and strengths, details that exist outside of their criminal case files, perhaps the adults would have behaved in a less judgmental manner.

Community Experts felt most understood by the adults who had similar life experiences because incarceration is a very particular experience, and having someone who has been there can relieve the extreme isolation that is intrinsic to detention. Mayra Jackson suggested, “I say for people that care a lot, either you have to have been in their shoes before, or you have to know someone that has been in their shoes, or you’re just a person that just wants to give back to the community in general.” Similarly, Trina Johnson said, “In the juvenile system, I think there should be more programs on people that’s coming out, like outreach programs that’s not just there because they have to be. They’re just like, they want to help. I think they should hire people that’s actually been through it, and they can relate.” When youth cannot connect with adults who work in the system, they may feel like Sarah Taylor. Sarah reflected on her experience with adults attempting to demonstrate understanding, “They just sit there and just shake their head as they understand, but they don’t understand.” Stacey Freedman recognized the power of having a system-impacted person who cares work with system-involved youth,

“

**When you got somebody in your face, that’s been really been through that shit, and they’re in your face like, ‘I know,’ it touches you, it really touches you. I would say, more support from people who experienced it. I have nothing against nobody that have never been through nothing, and still want to be involved. I salute them off top, but it really makes a difference when somebody really been through that shit, and they are really trying to give back. I know a lot of people get through shit, then they say, ‘Fuck it. Fuck that shit.’ No, you got to really give back because that makes a difference.**

Khelani Reyes agreed with Stacey's assertion that system providers with similar lived experiences are more capable of relating to delinquency-involved youth,

“

**I think my main thing is I used to be in juvenile, and all these group homes and shit, and they used to be like, 'Oh, we're here for you, we support you. We this and we that.' But it's like how the fuck you going to support me? You ain't never be in my situation. It's hella hectic when you in that situation, and you're a kid, and all these people in your face. 'Oh, I'm here. I know I understand.' How the fuck you understand? You ain't never been in here. You ain't never, feel me? I think it would have been better if I look forward to them groups like when Marlene [YWFC] and them used to come in.**

Community Experts emphasized the importance of system providers sharing similar lived experiences and positional subjectivities because this fosters a depth of understanding that may feel elusive otherwise. Unanimously, they expressed an interest in building positive relationships with service providers; they wanted to be heard, respected and cared for. Unfortunately, even under the best conditions, this is impossible inside the juvenile delinquency system. Instead, these recommendations could be applied to adults working with system-impacted youth outside of institutional systems.



## SERVICES THAT ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES

Youth recommend that programs and services address the root causes of their delinquency involvement related to poverty and trauma.

**“THERE’S SO MUCH STUFF THAT THEY COULD’VE OFFERED ME. I WOULD’VE LIKED FOR THEM TO ACTUALLY HELP ME WITH MY EDUCATION, HELP ME WITH ME SEEKING THERAPY.”**

Community Experts expressed frustration around the requirements, programs, and supportive services mandated through the juvenile delinquency system. They felt these supports did not address the root causes of their system involvement. Instead, Experts advocated that the system understand youth more holistically and through a broader historical and ecological context that considers structures of racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry. Intelligent Wisdom illustrates this recommendation, “You need to start looking at stuff. Why are they acting like this? What is going on? Think of the root of the problem. They are not just out there to do anything because they wanted to be hanged. They are feeling something inside, so I think they should give them more therapy.” Yasmine Smith highlighted this when she said, “Y’all should have at least tried to understand what we’ve really been going through in our life before this stuff happened. What brought us to the point of feeling like why we had to do this? They don’t even care what you’re going through. They just put the cuffs on, take them off, throw you in the cell. That’s it.” What Yasmine uncovers is that if the system understood the complex histories that youth faced, they would understand why young people became delinquency-involved in the first place and would be able to suggest programming and supports that address root issues in young people’s lives. Intelligent and Yasmine recommended the system inquire into the root causes of delinquency-involvement; this more in-depth inquiry would facilitate a more compassionate relationship and more effective supports.

Reina Argueta wished her probation officer familiarized themselves with her family history, “Not just go to your programs and sit down with you and just fucking leave. You keep doing bad, and you’re going to stay in the program longer. Actually, take them out, have a conversation, like ‘Hey, how have you been in your relationship with your mom?’” Reina was mandated to live with her mother at sixteen and attend family counseling but struggled to do so because of complicated issues her mother was facing. When her probation officer mandated counseling, this exacerbated an already tenuous relationship. Lucy Books shared her experience with juvenile probation,



**Definitely more support from the system because I felt like, ‘I don’t have family. I have to lean on the system.’ I felt like I wasn’t supported. They weren’t trying to listen to what I needed. My biggest thing was staying in the city, and they weren’t trying to help me with that. And more like trying to connect with us like, I never felt anyone was trying to understand where I was. They weren’t connecting with me. I never felt a connection like that. That’s really important for a child to connect to the workers because you’re in my life, right?**

Community Experts yearned for system providers to build positive relationships and for them to understand their perspectives and life histories, instead of myopically focusing on whatever caused them to become incarcerated. Retrospectively, they wanted their most fundamental issues addressed by their system providers. Cynthia Harrison reflected on the kind of supportive services she would like to have received, “They really didn’t care about that. They just only cared about putting me in there and just locking me in. I was still a child at that time. They should’ve just given something like therapy.” Amber Rose also recognized that what she needed as a young person was not incarceration but therapy or another culturally responsive healing modality, “Just create a space for children to talk. A lot of things that I went through or the problems that I had was just emotional shit that I didn’t deal with.” While Experts advocated for therapeutic services, they consistently reported they did not want this provided through the juvenile delinquency system. Community Experts were very cautious about sharing intimate details about their lives with court-appointed therapists because they feared it could be used against them in court. Additionally, they indicated the need for culturally competent therapists who engaged with them without judgment.

Community Experts wanted services that addressed their holistic needs preparing them to enter adulthood in a successful and self-determined way. Khalia Hedgewood advocated, “I think that they should focus more on having a child become more independent and self-reliant. So that they’re not always trying to rely on their friends, they have to have resources. They need to have more, better things like that so that the kids can go if they don’t have anybody. Many people have issues.” Khalia suggested that system-involved youth have greater access to services in their community through local organizations. Mars Venus wished she could have received support services that addressed the root causes of her adolescent’s struggles,



**There's so much stuff that they could've offered me. I would've liked for them to actually help me with my education, help me with me seeking therapy. Not jumping to conclusions, because they were like, 'I was an out of control teen,' but I actually had problems. I had meningitis when I was two. That affects my education now to this day. They didn't focus on that.**

Community Experts recommend that probation officers and other system providers significantly focus on employment, school, and healing outside of the system, not through the juvenile delinquency system.

Mayra Jackson was a dually-involved youth and received wrap-around services through a local non-profit serving foster kids; she had a positive recollection of the support she received, “I had wrap-around services. They would come out daily and come see me. Take me to go do things in the community. Taking me back here to San Francisco for appointments and stuff like that I had. It was a positive experience, I would say.” Mayra was checked in by loving adults who helped facilitate transportation to the different programming and services, a real necessity for youth who have limited access to transportation. Part of Mayra’s fond reflections is likely because she also engaged in fun activities in her community, not just attending mandated counseling and meetings that positioned her as a person in need of “fixing.” Brittany Love was in and out of the foster care and the juvenile delinquency system from twelve years of age until she aged out at eighteen. She experienced continued hardships as she navigated the system but recalled one program where she was taken to do “kid stuff” with her peers; she went to parks and museums and was able to get to know San Francisco, a city that felt inaccessible before. Experts came from historically and economically disenfranchised communities and unable to access enrichment activities where the central aim is for young people to have fun and bond with peers. Throughout their childhood, Community Experts had to attend classes and programs that addressed their “problems” and positioned them as “troubled youth.” Instead, they would have benefited from programming that positioned them as leaders and allowed them to engage in new experiences around a city that often feels out of reach and that centered joy and happiness.



## COMMUNITY BASED SUPPORTS

Youth highlighted the importance of receiving support and services through community-based organizations located in their communities, where they felt safe and trusted the adults they worked with.

**“YES, SINCE I WAS 13. I’VE BEEN KNOWING JULIA FOR SO LONG. SHE ALWAYS BE AT EVERY LAST ONE OF MY COURT DATES. SHE’S REALLY MY FAVORITE BECAUSE SHE’S HERE TO SUPPORT THAT.”**

A few bright spots appeared in Community Experts’ accounts of detention when they described participation in programming from local community organizations that were not part of the juvenile delinquency system. Being incarcerated as a child is an isolating and traumatic experience; community organizations inside JJC alleviated some of the youth’s stress through strength-based activities that provided opportunities for joy and happiness. Community Experts spoke about positive experiences they had writing with the Beat Within; others spoke about enjoying dance classes, cooking lessons, and making art. Yasmine Smith spoke about Julia Arroyo, the YWFC’s Program Director, teaching the *Lift Us Up* curriculum, “She was hecka cool, and it was fun. I really loved it.” She also commented on the dance instructors the YWFC would bring in, “Yes, really enjoyed her dance program. I was really having fun.” Krystal Mitchell told us that her work with United Playaz, “was a real eye-opener,” for learning about how the state and city worked. Overall, Community Experts identified community organizations as providing a sense of well-being while they were incarcerated.

CJ Mills, Kelhani Reyes, and Reina Argueta spoke about specific people that regularly visited them, employees of community-based organizations who provided mentorship and one-on-one support for navigating their cases. Stacey Freedman recalled the people who made a real difference in her life, “Jack, Betty, and Marlene,” all adults who supported her and were not employees of the juvenile delinquency system. Mars Venus described this further, “I loved SAGE; they knew a lot. We used to do a lot of stuff with them. I used to go to a lot of their groups. That was a really good support system.” Staff from community-based-organizations provided programming and relationships that nurtured incarcerated youth and fostered building relationships with positive adult role models.

Community Experts highlighted the importance of the community organization's role in teaching them self-advocacy skills to navigate the juvenile delinquency system. Shemey Scott talked about getting regular visits from her CASA worker, and Brea Williams spoke about the YWFC

coming inside to help her with her case. Ana Johnson said that these individuals, "Come in and talked about it all the time and just telling me about how to handle stuff." Yasmine Smith, Friscolita Reyes, Millie Famous, and Mari Johnson described the community-based organization's staff accompanying them to their court cases, explaining their case's details and implications. 39.1% of Community Experts shared that they did not fully understand their case, and without this knowledge, there is no way they could self-advocate. The mentorship that individuals from the community organizations provided allowed youth to gain a complete understanding of their cases and learn how to navigate the juvenile delinquency system more effectively. Yasmine talked about her relationship with Julia Arroyo, "Yes, since I was 13. I've been knowing Julia for so long. She always be at every last one of my court dates. She's really my favorite because she's here to support that." It was clear that many of these advocates provided youth with a sense of stability and consistency and built trusting and loving relationships with youth during a turbulent time in their lives.

The loving adults that Community Experts spoke about were often system-impacted and grew up in similar communities. Experts shared they could create bonds with community-based mentors because of the similarity in life experiences, and they knew they could speak freely without judgment. Kathy Johnson was so inspired by her relationship with a community advocate while incarcerated, she was compelled to do the same for others, "That's why I need to go to school to be a counselor because I really want to talk to young kids and I want to help." Some Experts were able to create bonds with advocates while detained at JJC and then stayed connected to them when they returned to their community, getting involved with opportunities with local organizations, reducing their risk of recidivism, but more importantly, generating life-long networks of support and social capital. Kay Smith worked with the YWFC while at JJC and talked about getting involved with them once she was released,

**39.1% OF COMMUNITY EXPERTS  
SHARED THAT THEY DID NOT  
FULLY UNDERSTAND THEIR CASE**



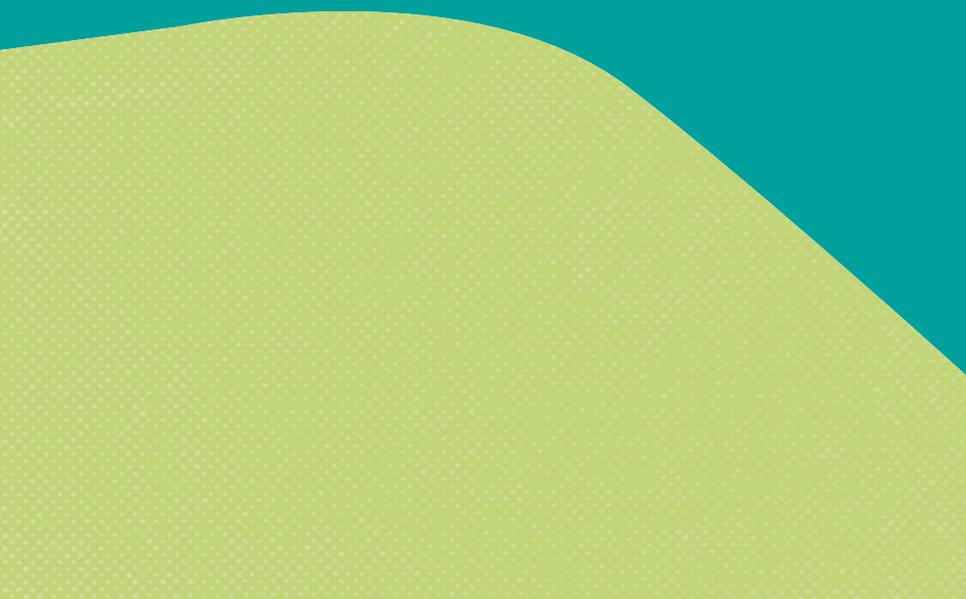
**I probably would've been in more trouble than I was. By coming there, it taught me stuff about real-life things. I was committing crimes and doing stuff because I didn't know what the consequences would be until it happened. They encouraged us to be in school. It was just all positive vibes here. It's like they took us out of our comfort zones and showed us new things, taught us how to be more positive, and want to teach people what they taught us, like giving back to people, and that's what we did. We did a lot of public speaking. We went to a lot of meetings and protests, and I forgot what else. We went to a women's conference. We went to a lot of places and spoke and met a lot of people and heard a lot of people's stories and stuff like that. It was a big eye-opener for me. I really feel like if I didn't work there, I probably would be a different person. I'll never forget what I was taught here, either.**

Experts shared the impact that loving and knowledgeable adults had on their lives and highlight the importance of building these kinds of relationships outside of the juvenile delinquency system, where they could build trust, positive self-images, and work towards building a self-determined future.





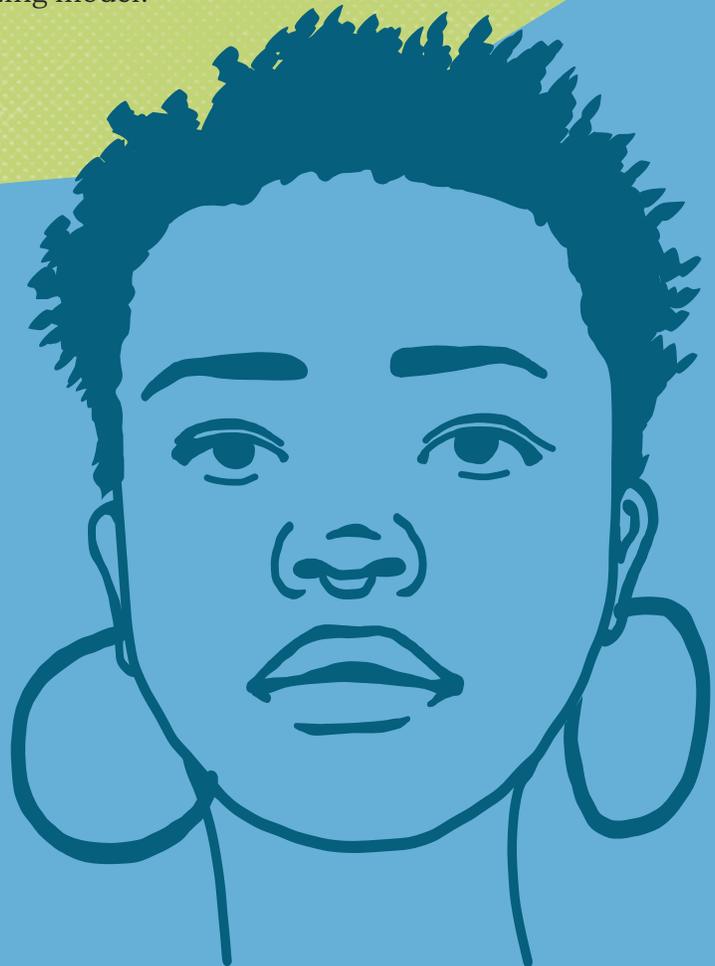
**Only within the interdependency  
of different strengths,  
acknowledged as equal, can the  
power to seek new ways of being  
in the world generate, as well as  
the courage and sustenance to act  
where there are no charters.<sup>105</sup>**



# Rashida Green

Throughout this document, the reader has seen Rashida Green in various aspects of her life. Rashida has read books, played with her friends, and enjoyed her childhood. At the same time, Rashida navigated the juvenile delinquency system in San Francisco. Rashida reminds the reader of the complexities that young people face once they become arrested, detained, and supervised on juvenile probation. The data presented in this report is emotionally challenging. Throughout the report, Rashida's face asks the reader to remember these are children who are experiencing these grave injustices through the juvenile delinquency system. Children who are incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities are robbed of their education and other seminal life moments. All children deserve to enjoy their adolescence without being criminalized and punished in a system designed to detain adults. Remember Rashida Green, and at every opportunity you have, fight to abolish systems and institutions that harm young people. Instead, spend all of your energies on investing in these young people's leadership so we can collectively build a radically different future.

Rashida Jones is a fictionalized person developed from three interviews from our original research project, and her larger story is presented in, "Centering the lives of San Francisco system-involved women and TGNC people: a participatory and decolonizing model.





## LETTER FROM LEAD YPAR RESEARCHER & SELF DETERMINATION COORDINATOR

I was born at the height of the Civil War in El Salvador, in 1989. My family was impacted and it was my mom's determination to move us to the United States where she thought my older brother and I might have a chance at a better life. We came to the United States at the end of the war, in 1992. When we landed in San Francisco, my mother had to work two to three jobs just for us to survive. My older brother took care of me. He would take me to school while my mom was at work before getting himself to school. When I started sixth grade at the same middle school as my brother, I noticed him getting into fights. I spent most of my sixth-grade year in the principal's office, often pushed out of class because I wore red knockers or a red jacket. In the year I started sixth grade, there was a stabbing at a baseball game and one of my brother's friends was murdered. My awareness of gangs grew.

Although there was a level of violence happening between young folks in my community, we also experienced terror in the form of police profiling and targeting, especially where I lived in the Mission. From the time I was eleven or twelve years old I began being profiled and stopped by police. My awareness of systems grew. People seemed to be swallowed whole by systems, taken away and sometimes never heard from again.

In 2001, my family was pushed out of our home so that the projects where we lived could be remade into mixed income housing. We moved deeper into the Mission and my brother got deeper into his lifestyle. He was incarcerated, and eventually deported in 2008. My mother and I were devastated. Although my mother was always at work, we couldn't afford what I needed to take care of myself, so I had to figure out a way to get by on my own. While my brother was incarcerated, I caught my first case. I was fifteen years old and I was facing multiple charges that had a long sentence attached to them.

There were so many young people in juvenile hall (JJC) that kids were sleeping on the floor and doubled up into single rooms on cots when I got there. At times, there were beds in the dining hall because there were so many girls, or girls were transferred to the boys' unit and had to carry all of their stuff back to the girls unit in the morning. All of us were Black and Brown. There were a number of youth who were facing deportation, many back to places they didn't remember or even speak the language of anymore. Most of us experienced abuse or neglect, from being over-medicated, to being attacked by guards. When the time approached for me to transition back to my community over a year and a half later, I felt anxious. I had been in a program for part of my time and I asked for outpatient care, but received nothing. I lasted less than a week back in the streets before getting locked up again. This time I was charged as an adult, I was seventeen. While I was in juvenile hall someone gave me the "Know Justice" handbook and I learned about my rights. I started co-leading circles. I stayed there so long, girls I had seen before cycled in and out asking,

"You're still here?"

On my eighteenth birthday a guard gave me a burrito, then the gang task force picked me up and transferred me to county jail with the adults. At intake they showed me that I had four pages of charges. I'd been charged several times with the same charge, without explanation. The only reason I was not deported was because my mother had completed my citizenship paperwork when I was fourteen years old. In the end, two charges were filed and I had to register as a gang member. I remember the shame I felt.

I had to show a card every time I was stopped or had contact with the police. I was also forced to move out of San Francisco. I was already within the push and pull of the revolving door of the system. So, months later when I was seeking help from an abusive relationship, black eyed and bruised, it was me who was sent to prison, for nearly three years. The police saw my record and decided I should not be treated as a victim or a survivor. Trauma seemed to be following me. When I got out of prison as a twenty-one year old, I witnessed the murder of a loved one.

I needed a catalyst to process that trauma and everything else I had survived. I felt it could break me if I didn't get the support I needed. I started going to the Women's Resource Center and joined Rising Voices where I wrote poems twice a week. I had been a part of programs that were connected to probation before; if the programs met in the day it was considered normal that my probation officer would barge in the middle of a session to confirm my attendance while I or other participants opened ourselves up to be vulnerable for a chance at healing. I chose this program because it met at night, probation was closed. It was during my time in this program, free from the surveillance and reporting, that I finally had the space to begin my healing journey. I had a beautiful son. I brought him with me to the program and started doing theater work and telling my story.

This is when I also began work with the Young Women's Freedom Center. Once I graduated from my program at the Center, Jessica invited me to return to lead a focus group. She saw my leadership skills and systems experience as an expertise. I never thought I would have a job like this because of my record. I started leading

youth participatory action research at the Center. I interviewed 100 people who had been in juvenile hall and the adult system. It was in these interviews that I began to develop an understanding of all the harms these system inflicted on youth, all of the hoop jumping, isolation, and punishment. It had not just happened to me.

Now, I am a Self Determination Coordinator at the Young Women’s Freedom Center. In my role, I facilitate freedom circles for system involved cis and trans young women and girls, trans young men and boys, and gender-expansive youth participants. I meet with them to provide resources, build relationships, and support them to complete self-determination plans. I come to this work knowing how little freedom we are allowed as people who have been impacted by systems. But I want people to be free, feel free, and have the skills to meet their determinations. I do this work because I see a need for it. I needed it myself.

The goal in my work is to help people find their power. I lead circles that educate and empower others. Together, we develop our voices. In Freedom Circles we problem-solve issues and advocate for ourselves by learning more deeply how the system works and how to combat its violences. In these spaces, we are able to create a new framework for being together outside of systems. We are practicing amnesty and collective care that was never modeled to us through systems. We map power and resources to build interdependence and mutual aid — from diapers and milk to paying rent to navigating probation check-ins and beyond. We are the experts of systems and we use these experiences to build a community. We take care of our own.

My work also includes harnessing the expertise of people impacted by systems through participatory research. This report was created in our community, everyone got together and began to name the systems they had been impacted by. We wanted to get an understanding of the depth and breadth of the possible experiences in each of these systems. We interviewed 100 people and many of them had very similar stories.

The interview process was very emotional at times, especially on questions of recalling abuse. But interviews were opportunities for healing too. We slowed down or stopped an interview if a participant needed to. We made sure people ate and had what they needed to take care of themselves. This process proves that we can uphold the level of rigor and standards of inquiry that research calls for without being detached and inhumane.

We found participants by conducting outreach all across the city. We sat in front of bus stops for hours, outreaching to all the young people who got off the bus. We had a pitch and we practiced over and over again. We posted in front of the marketplaces where people buy food and we’d start saying what we had to say as people entered and exited. We went to every nail shop on San Bruno Avenue, presenting the idea of the research to women and girls who may have been impacted by systems. We connected with participants in ways that were accessible to them — we took their phone numbers if they had a connected line, their Facebook or Instagram if they didn’t. We met folks in their neighborhoods, at their community colleges, and in parts of the city where we knew they might be.

We know how it feels to have people take or record our stories and not pay us and leave without ever hearing from them again. We know the feeling of uncertainty about what will happen with the use of our stories. Our own experiences of what has gone wrong informed our strategy of outreach and relationship building: we called people back once the report was complete, asking them to read it and point out anything we might have missed. We invited them to participate in community events like our Sister Warriors Convening to gain information, connection, and resources.

While the voices and stories of women impacted by systems are beginning to be heard more widely in books, films, and campaigns, the disappearances of our women and girls — from incarceration to trafficking to pushout, is still dangerously neglected. We approached this report with a wholistic lens on the systems' impacts on cis and trans young women, trans young men, and gender-expansive youth, their families, and their communities. We understand the role that racism, colonization, gentrification, and other intergenerational traumas have on our communities as well. So, while you will hear directly from those who are impacted, I hope you hear the echoes of their families and ancestors as well. These systems have stripped our families and communities of their rights to love us, raise us, and pour into us with care. Because of this, our healing has been disrupted. This healing is one of the main things we fight for. When we heal ourselves, we also heal our parents, we heal our children. We heal seven generations of ancestors and seven generations of future children to come.

In this report, you will encounter the experiences of women and girls who are trying their best to survive despite conditions within a system that is grossly outdated and predicated on their harm. You'll notice that the juvenile legal system's resources for punishment far outnumber those for real connection and healing. You'll read about the push out of Black and Brown girls in particular to cities and states they've never been to, without the consideration or resources for their family to maintain connection or reunify with them.

Growing up, if I would have had the support and stability I needed, my life would have been totally different. I didn't have what I needed to survive. In the process of acting out because of that, I hurt myself and I hurt my community. I know this because I have experienced so much more hurt as an adult. The difference has been that I have the support and care of the Center. I also have tools to transform the pain of grief I have experienced. I can reach out to people for healing and share space with others who have survived what I'm going through. When the juvenile legal system demands that young people transform their behavior without changing the social conditions to ones where young people can survive, harm is enacted. So many legal charges were on my head as a child. These charges could have stopped me completely from living as my full self. They could have stopped my whole life. They have stopped plenty of people's lives. All of this led to years of my life cycling between systems, when what I really needed, was healing.

We are whole people. We lead complex lives and we have complex needs. For many of us, meeting these needs requires a holistic healing approach to addressing trauma. One of the many problems with the juvenile legal system is that it does not focus on healing, instead it chooses to use and reuse band aid solutions of control and punishment as the answer to everything. The juvenile delinquency system, sees acting out in the form of tantrums, crying, depression or anxiety and their solution is to medicate children. In this same scenario, we advocate for trauma informed therapy with a practitioner of the young person's choosing.

Our young people continue to surprise us with their resilience. Even in the midst of a global pandemic, young folks who have been released from juvenile hall are thriving in their online learning environments. Many, without the same level of concern for their safety from threats of other students, are able to focus on school. And while there are surprises, there are still some things we have known to be true from the interviews of women and girls who have been impacted by systems across at least two generations.

**Young folks need consistent, safe places to sleep and live.**

**They need to be loved, have enough food to eat, and have access to care and products that meet their needs, from hygiene to gender affirming products.**

**They need to be informed on decisions being made about them and have their voices considered in final decisions.**

**They need early and consistent access to community-based healing resources that are not connected to or reporting to probation.**

**They need community members who support and mentor them.**

**They need real education options that meet them where they are on their learning journeys and account for their individual learning needs.**

**Young folks need to see a bigger context, they need to adventure outside of their neighborhoods and see greater opportunities to engage with the world.**

**They need representation of successful and trustworthy adults who share their identities so that they can see a version of themselves who has survived and is thriving.**

**They need complex, coordinated care for complex, unpredictable life circumstances; this includes extended TAY services, enhanced services for young pregnant people, providing services to youth despite warrants, and childcare.**

**They need dynamic care that exists flexibly outside the box of traditional frameworks of the medical industrial complex; they might need a somatic therapist with a punching bag, or a counselor who listens to the songs they write, or the option to be housed with a family member in a community where they feel safer.**

**They need to be able to access all of this life-improving care without being afraid that the police or probation will steal their freedom if they behave a certain way.**

**They need to be seen and treated as victims and survivors of multiple traumas; the readiness and resources to report their behavior should be replaced with the readiness and resources to meet the healing needs that have arisen from the trauma that created the behavior in the first place.**

Lastly, but also importantly, they need to be acknowledged and valued for their wisdom and they need safe spaces to be with other young folks who are also trying their best to survive.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lucero". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a decorative flourish at the end of the word.

Lucero Herrera  
Self Determination Coordinator

## WORK CITED

1. Martinot, 2014, pg. 189.
2. Crenshaw, 1991, pg. 1250.
3. Melendrez & Young Women's Freedom Center, 2019, pg. 11.
4. Jefferson, 1999.
5. Morris, 2016.
6. Roberts, 2002, pg. 27.
7. California Child Welfare Indicators Project, 2017.
8. Roberts, 1997.
9. Ibid.
10. Moynihan, 1965.
11. Beckett & Western, 2001.
12. Beckett & Western, 2001, pg. 44
13. Roberts, 1997.
14. Ibid.
15. Reichman et al., 2020.
16. Lorde, 1984, pg. 115.
17. Schell, 2015.
18. Ward, 1986.
19. Ibid.
20. Roberts, 1997, pg. 14.
21. Manian, 2020.
22. Lapidus et al., 2004.
23. Carson & Anderson, 2016.
24. Lapidus et al., 2004.
25. Roberts, 1997.
26. Swavola et al., 2017.
27. Bowlby, 1973.
28. Poehlmann, 2005.
29. Green & Scholes, 2004.
30. Swavola et al., 2017.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Hockenberry & Puzzanhera, 2014; Kendall, 2007.
34. Hockenberry & Puzzanhera, 2014.
35. Swavola et al., 2017.
36. Ibid.
37. Collins, 2000, pg. 228.
38. Kajstura, 2017.
39. Villarosa, 2018.
40. Rosenthal, 2019.
41. Macallair et al., 2019.
42. Saar, Epstien, Rosenthal, Vafa, 2015.
43. Knuper, 2001.
44. Saar, Epstein, Rosenthal, Vafa, 2015.
45. Nanda, 2012.
46. Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, Whitworth, 2008; Feld, Peck, Leiber, & Brubaker, 2009.
47. Zahn, Hawkins, Chiancone, Whitworth, 2008; Puzzanhera, 2014.
48. Sherman, Mendel, and Irvine, 2013.
49. Schwartz & Steffensmeier, 2012.
50. Davis & Sorensen, 2013.
51. Hartney & Vuong, 2009.
52. Puzzanhera & Hockenberry, 2016; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2016; Sickmund, Sladky, & Kang, 2014.
53. Irvine & Canfield, 2015; Irvine, 2010; Reisner, Bailey, Sevelius, 2014;
54. Abinati, 2010; Sullivan, Sommer, & Moff, 2001.
55. Abinati, 2010.
56. Irvine & Canfield, 2015.
57. Irvine, 2010.

58. Abinati, 2010; Irvine, 2010.
59. Abinati, 2010.
60. Cutuli et al., 2016.
61. Ibid.
62. Lee, Bright, Svoboda, Fakunmoju, Barth, 2011.
63. Ryan & Testa, 2005.
64. Sarri, Stoffregen & Ryan, 2016.
65. Ryan, Marshall, Herz, Hernandez, 2008.
66. Redding, R., Fried, C., & Britner, P., 2000; Ryan, Marshall, Herz, Hernandez, 2008.
67. Cauffman, Feldman, Waterman & Steiner, 1998; Abram, Teplin, Charles, Longworth, McClelland & Dulcan, 2004.
68. Saar, Epstien, Rosenthal, Vafa, 2015.
69. Baglivio, Epps, Swartz, Sayedul Huq, Sheer, & Hardt, 2014.
70. Acoca & Dedel, 1998.
71. Conrad, Tolou-Shams, Rizzo, Pacella & Brown, 2014.
72. Cicchetti, 2016; Danese & McEwen, 2012; Bellis, Lowey, Leckenby, Hughes, & Harrison, 2014.
73. Gilmore, 2007.
74. Tucker & Palomino, 2019b.
75. Macallair et al., 2019; Tucker & Palomino, 2019a.
76. Tucker & Palomino, 2019b.
77. Hartman, 2002.
78. Perla, 2017; Perla, 2018; Perla, 2019; Miller, 2020.
79. Macallair, Males, Washburb, & Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2019.
80. Tucker & Palomino, 2019a.
81. Tucker & Palomino, 2019c.
82. Matier & Ross, 2018.
83. Tucker & Palomino, 2019a.
84. Ibid.
85. Bishari, 2019.
86. Tucker & Palomino, 2019a; Macallair et al., 2019.
87. Newsom, 2020; Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2020.
88. Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2020; Newsom, 2020.
89. Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2022; Muhammad, 2020.
90. Bowlds, 2020.
91. Ridolfi, Menart, Villa, 2020.
92. Bowlds, 2020.
93. Washburn & Menart, 2020.
94. Unknown, 2020.
95. Muhammad, 2020.
96. Cahill, Rios-Moore & Threatts, 2008; Herr, & Anderson 2015.
97. Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, Noguera, Cammarota, 2006.
98. Melendrez & Young Women's Freedom Center, 2019.
99. Krippendorff, 2004; Rapley, 2007
100. Salmona, Leiber, & Kaczynski, 2020.
101. Melendrez & Young Women's Freedom Center, 2019.
102. United Nations Human Rights, 1990.
103. Dickerson, 2020.
104. Rankin, 2020, pg. 175.
105. Lorde, 1984, p. 11

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abinati, A. (2010). Legal challenges facing lesbian and gay youth. [Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 3\(4\).](#)
- Abram, K. M., Teplin, L., Charles, D. R., Longworth, S. L., McClelland, G. M., Dulcan, Mina. (2004). Posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma in youth in juvenile detention. *Arch Gen Psychiatry, 61(4)*, 403-410.
- Acoca, L., & Dedel, K. (1998). No place to hide: understanding and meeting the needs of girls in the California juvenile justice system. [California Wellness Foundation.](#)
- Baglivio, M. T., Epps, N., Swartz, K., Sayedul Huq, M., Sheer, A., & Hardt, N. (2014). The prevalence of adverse childhood experience (ACE) in the lives of juvenile offenders. *OJJDP Journal of Juvenile Justice, 3(2)*, 1-23.
- Beckett, K. & Western, B. (2001). Governing social marginality: welfare, incarceration, and the transformation of state policy. *Punishment & Society, 3(1)*, 43-59.
- Bellis, M. A., Lowey, H., Leckenby, N., Hughes, K., & Harrison, D. (2014, Mar). Adverse childhood experiences: restorative study to determine their impact on adult health behaviors and health outcomes in a UK population. *Journal of Public Health, 36(1)*, 81-91.
- Bishari, N. S. (2019, June 4). San Francisco to approve closure to juvenile hall. [SFWeekly.](#)
- Bowlby, J. (1973). Attachment and loss: Volume II: Separation, anxiety and anger. In *Attachment and Loss: Volume II: Separation, Anxiety and Anger* (pp. 1-429). London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.
- Bowlds, H. (2020, June 22). COVID 19 letter to parents. [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.](#)
- California Child Welfare Indicators Project. (2017). Entries to foster care. [Data set]. [Berkeley University of California.](#)
- Cahill, C., Rios-Moore, I., & Threatts, T. (2008). Different eyes/open eyes: community-based participatory action research. In J. Cammarota & M. Fine (Eds.), *Revolutionizing education: youth participatory action research in motion* (pp. 89 - 124). New York: NY: Routledge.
- Carson, E. A. & Anderson, E. (2016). Prisoners in 2015. [U.S. Department of Justice.](#)
- Cauffman, E., Feldman, S., Watherman, J., & Steiner, H. (1998). Posttraumatic stress disorder among female juvenile offenders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 37(11)*, 1209-1216.
- Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. (2020, May 15). [CJCJ applauds Governor Newsom's proposal to shutter DJJ.](#)
- Cicchetti, D. (2016). Socioemotional, personality, and biological development: illustrations from a multilevel development psychopathology perspective on child maltreatment. *Annual Review of Psychology, 67*, 187-211.

- Chesney-Lind, M. (2002). Criminalizing victimization: the unintended consequences of pro-arrest politics for girls and women. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 2(1), 81-90.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of Empowerment* (2nd). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Conrad, S. M., Tolou-Shams, M., Rizzo, C. J., Pacella, N., & Brown, L. K. (2014, Aug). Gender differences in recidivism rates for juvenile justice youth: the impact of sexual abuse. *Law and Human Behavior*, 4(305), 305-310.
- Cutuli, J.J., Goerge, R. M., Coulton, C., Schretzman, M., Crampton, D., Charvat, B., Lalich, N., Raithel, J., Gacitua, C., & Lee, E. L. (2010). Children in Youth Services Review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 67, 84-94.
- Davis, J. & Sorensen, J. R. (2013, Mar). Disproportionate juvenile minority confinement: a state-level assessment of racial threat. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 11(4), 296-312.
- Danese, A., & McEwen, B. S. (2012). Adverse childhood experiences, allostasis, allostatic load, and age-related disease. *Physiol Behavior*, 106(1), 29-39.
- Dickerson, C. (2020, Oct 21). Parents of 545 children separated at the border cannot be found. [The New York Times](#).
- Feld, B. C., Peck, J. H., Leiber, M. J., & Brubaker, S. J. (2009). Violent girls or relabeled status offenders? *Criminology & Delinquency*, 55(2), 241-265.
- Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ginwright, S., & James, T. (2002). From assets to agents of change: social justice, organizing, and youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 96(1), 27-46.
- Ginwright, S., Noguera, P., & Cammarota, J. (2006). *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change: new democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Green, M. & Scholes, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Attachment and human survival*. New York, NY: Karnac Books Ltd.
- Hartman, C. (2002). *City for sale: the transformation of San Francisco*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hartney, C. & Vuong, L. (2009). Created equal: racial and ethnic disparities in the US criminal justice system. [National Council on Crime and Delinquency](#).
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2015). *The action research dissertation: a guide for students and faculty* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hockenberry, S., & Puzanchera, C. (2014). [Juvenile Court Statistics 2011](#).
- Irvine, A., & Canfield, A. (2015). The overrepresentation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, gender, nonconforming and transgender youth within the child welfare to juvenile justice crossover population. *Journal of Gender, Social Policy and the Law*, 24, 243-259.

- Irvine, A. (2010). "We've had three of them": addressing the invisibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and gender non-conforming youths in the juvenile justice system. [Columbia Journal of Gender & Law, 19\(3\)](#).
- Jefferson, T. (1999). Notes on the state of Virginia (F. Shuffelton, Ed.). New York, NY: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1785)
- Kajstura, A. (2017, Oct). Women's mass incarceration: the whole pie 2017. [Prison Policy Initiative](#).
- Kendall, J. R. (2007). Juvenile status offenses: treatment and early intervention. *Technical Assistance Bulletin*, 29(1), 1 - 12.
- Krippendorff, K. (2013). Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Knuper, A. M. (2001). Reform and resistance: gender, delinquency and America's first juvenile court. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kucsera, J., & Orfield, G. (2014, March). New York state's extreme school segregation: Inequality, inaction and a damaged future. [The Civil Rights Project](#).
- Lapidus, L., Luthra, N., Verma, A., Small, D., Allard, P., Levingston, K. (2004). Caught in the net: the impact of drug policies on women and families. [ACLU](#).
- Lee, B. R., Bright, C., Svoboda, D. V., Fakunmoju, S., & Barth, R. P. (2011, March). Outcomes of group care of youth: a review of comparative studies. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 21(2), 177-189.
- Lorde, A. (1984). Sister outsider. New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group.
- Macallair, D., Males, M., Washburn, M., & Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. (2019, Dec) Closing San Francisco's juvenile hall: an analysis of the youth population. [Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice](#).
- Matier, P., & Ross, A. (2018, June 27). City closes youth corrections facility - residents keep running away. [San Francisco Chronicle](#).
- Morris, M. W. (2016). Pushout: the criminalization of Black girls in schools. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Moynihan, D. P. (1965, March). The negro family: the case for national action. Office of Policy Planning and Research, [United States Department of Labor](#).
- Manian, M. (2020). Immigration detention and coerced sterilization: history tragically repeats itself. [ACLU](#).
- Martinot, S. (2014). Toward the abolition of the prison system. *Socialism and Democracy*, 28(3).
- Melendrez, A. & Young Women's Freedom Center. (2019). Centering the lives of San Francisco System-involved women and TGNC people: a participatory and decolonizing model. [Young Women's Freedom Center](#).
- Miller, K., W. (2020). 2019 Statistical Report. [San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department](#).

- Muhammad, D. (2020, May 19). California's closure of DJJ is victory with significant challenges. [Juvenile Justice Information Exchange](#).
- Nanda, J. (2012). Blind discretion: girls of color & delinquency in the juvenile justice system. *UCLA Law Review*, 1502, 1529-1530.
- Newsom, G. (2020, March 24). Executive Order N-36-20. [Executive Department State of California](#).
- Office of Governor Gavin Newsom. (2020, March 24). Governor Newsom issues executive order on state juvenile facilities in response to Covid-19 outbreak. [CA.gov](#).
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2105). [Policy guidance: girls in the juvenile justice system](#).
- Perla, J. L. (2017). 2016 Statistical Report. [San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department](#).
- Perla, J. L. (2018). 2017 Statistical Report. [San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department](#).
- Perla, J. L. (2019). 2018 Statistical Report. [San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department](#).
- Poehlmann, J. (2005, Dec). Children's family environment and intellectual outcomes during maternal incarceration. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(5), 1275-1285.
- Puzzanchera, C., & Hockenberry, S. (2016). National disproportionate minority contact [Data set]. [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#).
- Rapely, T. (2007). *Doing conversation, discourse and document analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Redding, R., Fried, C., & Britner, P. (2000). Predictors of placement outcomes in treatment foster care: implications for foster parent selection and service delivery. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 9(4), 425-447.
- Rankin, C. (2020). *Just us: an American conversation*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press.
- Reichman, N. Corman, H., Dave, D. M., Kalil, A., & Schwartz-Soicher, O. (2020, November). Effects of welfare on parenting. [National Bureau of Economic Research](#).
- Reisner, S. L., Bailey, Zinzi., & Sevelius, J. (2014). Racial/ethnic disparities in history of incarceration, experience of victimization, and associated health indicators among transgender women in the U.S. *Women Health*, 54(8), 750-767.
- Ridolfi, L., Menart, R., & Villa, I. (2020, August). California youth face heightened racial and ethnic disparities in division on juvenile justice. Hayward Burns Institute. Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. [California Alliance of Youth and Community Justice](#).
- Roberts, D. (2002). *Shattered bonds: the color of child welfare*. New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books.

- Roberts, D. (1997). *Killing the black body: race, reproduction, and the meaning of liberty*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Rosenthal, L. L. (2019). Making history for justice reform: can the country end girls' incarceration. *Journal of prevention & intervention in the community*, 47(2), 125-137.
- Ryan, J. P., Marshall, J. M., Herz, D., & Hernandez, P. M. (2008, Sep). Juvenile delinquency in child welfare: investigating group home effects. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(9), 1088-1099.
- Ryan, J. P., & Testa, M. F. (2005, March). Child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency: investigating the role of placement and placement stability. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27(3), 227-249.
- Saar, S. M., Epstein, R., Rosenthal, L., Vafa, Y. (2015). The sexual abuse to prison pipeline. [Georgetown Law](#).
- Salmona, M., Lieber, E., Kaczynski. (2020). *Qualitative and mixed methods: data analysis using Dedoose*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sarri, R. C., Stroppfregen, E., & Ryan, J. P. (2016, Aug). Running away from child welfare placements: justice system entry risk. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 67, 191-197.
- Schell, E. E. (2015, May). Racialized rhetoric's of food politics: Black farmers, the case of Shirley Sherrod, and struggle of land equity and access. *Poroi*, (11)1, 1-22.
- Schwartz, J., & Steffensmeier, D. (2014, July). Stability and change in girl's delinquency and the gender gap: trends in violence and alcohol offending across multiple sources of evidence. *Social Problems*, 56(3), 494-525.
- Sherman, F., Mendel, R. A., & Irvine, A. (2013). *A guide to juvenile detention reform: making detention reform work for girls*. [Annie E Casey Foundation](#).
- Sickmund, M., Sladky, A., & Kang, W. (2017). [Easy access to juvenile court statistics: 1985-2014 \[Data set\]](#).
- Sickmund, M., & Puzanchera, C. (2014, December). Juvenile offenders and victims: 2014 national report. [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#).
- Sullivan, C., Sommer, S., & Moff, J. (2001). *Youth in the Margins: a report on the unmet needs of lesbian, gay, and transgender adolescents in foster care*. [Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund](#).
- Swavola, E., Riley, K., & Subramanian, R. (2017, August 17). Overlooked: women and jails in an era of reform. [Vera Institute of Justice](#).
- Tucker, J. & Palomino, J. (2019a, March 21). 3 SF supervisors pledge to close juvenile hall after Chronicle report. [San Francisco Chronicle](#).
- Tucker, J. & Palomino, J. (2019b, March 21). Vanishing violence - serious youth crime has fallen Drastically since the 1990's, leaving juvenile halls emptied. So why is California still Spending so much? [San Francisco Chronicle](#).

- Tucker, J. & Palomino, J. (2019c, March 21). Vanishing violence - empty cells, rising costs, Juvenile halls built for a rise in crime are now nearly deserted, but spending on them remains stunningly high. [San Francisco Chronicle](#).
- Tucker, J. & Palomino, J. (2019d, July 4). It's official: SF juvenile hall to close by the end of 2021. Chronicle report. [San Francisco Chronicle](#).
- Thompson, C. (2020, September 2). Former prisoners fighting California's Wildfires. [The Marshall Project](#).
- Unknown. (2020, October 2). SB-823 juvenile justice realignment: office of youth and community restoration. [California Legislative Information](#).
- Vale, L. J. (2013). Purging the poorest: public housing and the design politics of twice-cleared communities. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Villarosa, L. (2018, April 11). Why America's Black mothers and babies are in a life-or-death crisis. [The New York Times](#).
- Unknown. (2020, October 2). SB-823 juvenile justice realignment: office of youth and community restoration. [California Legislative Information](#).
- United Nations Human Rights. (1990, Sept 2). Convention of the rights of the child. [United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner](#).
- Ward, M. C. (1986). Poor women powerful men: America's great experiment in family planning. Boulder, CO: Westview Press Inc.
- Washburn, M., & Menart, R. (2020, April). A blueprint for reform: moving beyond California's failed youth correctional system. [Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice](#).
- Washburn, M., Menart, R. (2020, November). California's division of juvenile justice fails to protect youth amid COVID-19. [Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice](#).
- Zahn, M. A., Hawkins, S. R., Chiancone, J., & Whitworth, A. (2008, Oct). Girls study group: charting the way to delinquency prevention for girls. [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#).

**Freedom is** being able to live without worry of having your life stolen from the American carceral system.

**Freedom is** our birth right and being surrounded by love and understanding.

**Freedom is** no racial profiling because of how someone looks, dresses, or where they live.

**Freedom is** the right to access food, land without borders, clean water, ancestral history, and to feel free from harm.

**Freedom is** joy. Experiencing real joy.

**Freedom is** living without fear of state violence and oppression.

**Freedom is** being able to be yourself and live freely without judgement, criticism or profiling.

**Freedom is** truly investing in youth, no youth behind bars.

**Freedom is** when youth don't feel like they have to constantly be away of their surroundings.

**Freedom is** no apologies for the years of trauma that has been inflicted on us. Freedom is getting that off of us so we don't continue to pass it to your children, to our loved ones.

**Freedom is** when youth don't feel like they have the constant weight of oppression on your shoulders.

**Freedom is** the ability access generational wealth.

**Freedom is** the entitlement to be your full self, in all spaces free of harm. The ability to follow your dreams.

**Freedom is** the right to access your highest self on your own terms.

**Freedom is** not being followed by security when you walk in the store because you look like a shoplifter.

**Freedom is** the power to educate and equip all young folks with the tools and resources they need in order to be a powerful leader.