OYCR

SB 823: 2025 DJJ Realignment Report

July 2025

ASR

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Executive Summary

In 2020, the State of California enacted Senate Bill 823 (SB 823), creating a historic opportunity to fundamentally reenvision youth justice by shifting from state-level incarceration to locally driven, health-based approaches to healing and community reintegration. This legislation responded to long-standing critiques by advocates of the state-run youth justice system, offering a path to care closer to a youth's community.

> "[SB 823] is the moment we've been looking for... to make that change that we talk about."
> CBO Stakeholder Respondent, 2024

Stakeholders across the youth justice system, including the court, probation, community, board of supervisors, behavioral health providers, youth, and family, emphasized the value of the reform. They reinforced the benefits of youth remaining close to home, where they can maintain connections and further develop relationships with family, including their own children, trusted adults and support networks.

Many recognized that county-based care offers the potential for safer, more rehabilitative environments and continuity of care beyond commitment. However, perceptions were mixed, with some feeling the intent of the law has not been fully realized, as youth remain in carceral settings and counties face challenges accessing the kinds of centralized supports previously offered through the state.

The youth justice system is multifaceted, intersecting with education, child welfare, and public health systems. There are differing needs and resources across large-, medium-, and small-sized counties, as well as policies and characteristics unique to each. As a result, implementation of SB 823 has varied across the state. The reform launched under an accelerated timeline and counties perceived limitations in guidance and pre-planning. These challenges were further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a perceived lack of infrastructure across some counties to deliver the care envisioned under SB 823. Barriers continue to exist, both locally and across-systems, including inconsistent implementation, varying access to resources and providers, staffing shortages, facility suitability, and true individualization of programming. Furthermore, stakeholders emphasized that a true shift from punitive to healing requires more than a policy change, it requires cultural transformation.

Stakeholders Reported...

Reform Benefits

- Enables youth greater proximity to home, maintaining or further developing connections with family and support networks
- Offers a safer, more rehabilitative option through county-based care
- Establishes a structure grounded in a strength-based approach to positive youth development
- Enhances continuity of care through stable, trusting relationships

Reform Challenges

- Short timeline coinciding with COVID-19 pandemic and lack of pre-planning influenced counties' abilities to replicate services provided through the centralized DJJ system
- Inconsistent implementation across counties, with variations by county size, funding, staffing, facility type and size, local program availability, population characteristics, judicial policies and procedures, and access to resources/community providers

Despite the challenges, probation departments have and continue to reimagine their facilities and practices to provide care for youth who would have otherwise been committed to DJJ. These ongoing efforts include expanding visitation policies, repurposing spaces, creating new partnerships, and increasing or expanding the capacity of services and programs. Community-based organizations have developed opportunities to support youth, prioritizing culturally relevant, restorative, and healing modalities. Local court systems have collaborated with key partners to develop new processes and policies to support the rehabilitative process using a strengths-based approach.

July 2025 marks two years since the full closure of DJJ facilities across the state, and some counties are still in early phases of implementation. Since the enactment, key milestones have been achieved to advance the goals of SB 823. The Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) was developed and has progressed in its role of practice and policy technical assistance for the realigned youth justice system, including offering technical assistance, creating relationships, and sharing best practices throughout the state. Counties engaged in local planning, through juvenile justice coordinating councils (JJCCs), collaborative court committees, and community-led forums to prepare for the transition and responsibility of this youth population. Counties and community-based partners invested in developing and adapting programming to meet the complex needs of youth over longer periods of commitment and a broader age range.

Overall, despite the challenges encountered with the initial implementation of new policies on a statewide scale, all partners showed strong commitment and perseverance in achieving the best outcomes for their youth and communities. To fully actualize the intent of the reform, staffing, facilities, cross-sector and system coordination, programming, data systems, and more are continuing to be built out. Sustained investment across systems is essential to ensure that this shift in youth justice is sustainable, equitable, and centered on youth healing and accountability.

Message from OYCR Director

In 2020, California made an unprecedented commitment to the transformation of the youth justice system through the passage of Senate Bill 823. This legislation actualized what advocates, young people, researchers, and communities have known for a long time, that healing, accountability and positive youth development happen when youth are close to families and support networks that are supported by their local community-based systems which are carefully designed to meet their needs.

As we mark two years since the full closure of the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), I am proud to see the work that has been undertaken across California to implement the intent of SB823 by counties, communities, and the state. This transition has not been simple, as shifting care from the state government to the county government, along with all its stakeholders, is complex. It has not just been a physical shift, it has also simultaneously required a shift from a punishment-based lens to a health-based lens, which approaches youth who become justice-involved as young people that have experienced a social-emotional disruption in their adolescent development. Through the health-based lens, we acknowledge that youth need both accountability and care, connection, and restorative justice to move to a place of wholeness and repair to be welcomed back to their families and communities as contributing members of society.

System partnerships across the state have worked to build and adapt local infrastructure, formulate partnerships, and center youth and families along the justice continuum. OYCR has been proud to walk alongside them every step of the way providing technical assistance, grants, and to have hired staff with expertise in a variety of critical areas to lead state policy into the next five years of reform. The early phases of implementation have been shaped by learning and adapting, as many counties continue to face challenges in building out the infrastructure needed to fully support youth in secure treatment facilities and less restrictive programs. We see progress, and more importantly, we see commitment across the state that will continue to move this work forward. What unites us is a belief in this reform, that youth deserve the opportunity to thrive in environments that are designed for restoration.

The future is dependent upon our collective, sustained investment and partnership. On behalf of the Office of Youth and Community Restoration, we express our deepest gratitude to all of you who have moved through the last few years with us to achieve better outcomes for everyone.

Judge Katherine Lucero (Ret.), Director

Office of Youth and Community Restoration

Introduction

The enactment of Senate Bill 823 (SB 823) marked a pivotal shift in California's approach to youth justice, emphasizing accountability and healing as opposed to punishment. Situating practice and policy technical assistance to the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) within the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) instead of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), reflects a broader commitment to a health-based approach for all youth who are justice impacted, now including those adjudicated of the most serious offenses who would have previously been committed to DJJ. This approach seeks to enhance the potential of youth to heal and become contributing members of society, breaking the cycle of poverty, mental illness, addiction, and incarceration through focused interventions and support systems.

The closure of the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) on June 30, 2023, ended a 132-year history of state-run youth correctional facilities and transferred oversight to local jurisdictions. As many counties are still in early implementation stages of the reform, this report provides a landscape analysis on the progress made since the passing of SB 823, focusing on implementation between 2020 and 2024, informed by stakeholder perspectives across the juvenile justice system. It identifies promising practices, county- and state-wide challenges, and opportunities to strengthen the youth justice system for realigned youth.

This report provides robust and nuanced insights into the inherently complex and multifaceted nature of the juvenile justice system and its intersections with other systems in California. This document explores how SB 823 is situated in the historical context of the justice system as well as the components within the SB 823 modifications, from various stakeholders' perspectives. Readers may wish to utilize this as a reference guide, as each chapter and section are organized to support a focused review of the various facets of the legislation implementation and opportunities.

Research Process and Methods

The Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) contracted Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct an evaluation of the efficacy[1] of local programs for realigned youth,[2] following the passing of Senate Bill 823 (SB 823) and the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) state facilities closed, shifting responsibility to local jurisdictions.

ASR developed a framework informed by the expert knowledge of key strategic partners, insights from similar initiatives enacted in other states, and the voices of youth themselves.[3] This framework was grounded in the Developmental Theory of Positive Youth Development and informed by the Stepping Home Model.[4] The framework aimed to capture the desired process of the full cycle of services focused on restorative justice, rehabilitation, and successful reentry for realigned youth. Capturing the spirit of the SB 823 reform, the framework positions youth, family, and community at the center of the programmatic continuum, reflecting the shift from punitive to restorative (see How SB 823 is Taking Shape: A Closer Look at Realignment Implementation).

DJJ intakes ended, for most youth, on July 1, 2021, and the DJJ facility closed on June 30, 2023. As a result, the DJJ realignment is still in the infancy stages across counties. There are limited data for youth outcomes, and no clear, consistent reporting across counties on the available programming for realigned youth. While counties may collect youth outcome data locally, there is currently no centralized system or shared metrics in place to aggregate or analyze these outcomes statewide. In tandem, counties' judicial and probation policies and practices differ widely across the state, causing variation and inconsistency in youth experience and opportunities.

This report should be viewed as a baseline or formative assessment rather than a summative evaluation of efforts. Data are aggregated into a statewide summary of impact.[5] Results should be interpreted with the understanding that summary-level and statewide highlights will not directly represent each county's processes or outcomes. Additional resources that capture more individualized, county-level results include, but are not limited to, Probation Department Annual Reports, Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant (JJRBG county plans), AB 102, and Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) Facility and Grant Expenditure Reports.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-methods design, incorporating secondary data from state and local agencies and rich qualitative narratives from key stakeholders in the youth justice system.

Secondary Data Analysis

Pre-SB 823 Secondary Data: ASR analyzed secondary data from large public databases, such as the Department of Rehabilitation, to establish the context that prepared the ground for the SB 823 reform. These data describe youth justice involvement trends for juveniles (under age 18) between the years 2000 (or earliest available) and 2023. To explore the shift in the trajectory of the California youth justice

[1] Efficacy is defined as the ability to produce a desired or intended result. In this report, it signifies the progress made in enhancing the potential for the realigned youth population to receive the care, services, and support needed to heal and become contributing members of society.
[2] "Realigned youth" are defined by Welf. & Inst. Code § 1990 as youth eligible for commitment to the Division of Juvenile Justice prior to its closure. Formally, this refers to youth adjudicated of a Welf. & Inst. Code § 707(b) or 290.008 offense prior to age 18; OYCR was tasked with this report under Welf. & Inst. Code § 2200 (g)(1)
[3] Missouri Department of Social Services, Division of Youth Services
[4] Process developed by OYCR that provides guidance to counties and partnering entities to provide safe, supportive transitions for youth from SYTFs to their communities
[5] When applicable, some county-level characteristics are disclosed, such as a distinction between large, medium, and small counties, as well as contextual information provided by deidentified key informants.

system, ASR identified and reviewed relevant policies, state and local reports, and future plans and projections. Information was synthesized with a focus on policies and practices relevant to the key areas of the framework described above.

Post SB 823 Secondary Data: Secondary data was used to explore youth justice trends after SB 823. Sources included the consortium report on youth during the DJJ closure and AB 102 data on youth demographics, commitments, transfers to less restrictive programs (LRPs), transfers to adult court, and net widening.

Pre- and post-secondary data are not directly comparable. OYCR is currently exploring solutions.

Primary Data Analysis

ASR conducted primary data collection to capture cross-system changes and impact across a multifaceted system.[6]

Probation Survey: The probation survey (see Appendix 1) was developed in partnership with OYCR and Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) to collect the most recent county-level data about the SB 823 transition. The survey was open between November 2024 and February 2025. It garnered a high response rate (76%), capturing feedback from 44 Probation Departments and representing 15 large, 15 medium, and 14 small-sized counties (see Appendix 2).[7] To ensure accuracy, ASR held a focus group with the Chief Probation Officers, facilitated through CPOC, to review survey data and gather additional context.

Youth Survey: The youth survey (see Appendix 3) was developed in collaboration with the Youth Advisory Board. This survey was developed through the Positive Youth Development domains to gather input from youth with experience in a secure youth treatment facility (SYTF). The survey was open between January 2025 and February 2025 and was completed by 16 youth, all at least 18 years old. To provide additional context, ASR held a focus group with the Youth Advisory Board participants to review survey data.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Stakeholders: KIIs were facilitated in coordination with OYCR. Participants were selected using convenience and snowball sampling. Chief probation officers were asked to share contact information for additional stakeholders across the youth justice system. ASR used these contacts to invite additional stakeholders to participate. In total, 62 KIIs were conducted between November 2024 and February 2025. The court, boards of supervisors, probation, and CBO stakeholders represented the following regions: Central (23%), North (10%), Bay (34%), and South (34%).[8] A breakdown of the total number of participants by stakeholder type can be found below.

Stakeholder/Organization Type	Number of KII Participants
Court Stakeholders *(Judges, District Attorneys, Defenders)*	17
Community-based Organization Stakeholders *(Advocates and leadership from community-based organizations and alliances)*	17
Probation Stakeholders[9]	44
Board of Supervisor Stakeholders	4
Behavioral/Medical Health Stakeholders	7
Family Stakeholders	3

[6] All facets of the study directly interacting with youth (i.e., focus groups, surveys) were approved by the Applied Survey Research (ASR) Institutional Review Board (IRB) (IRB Protocol #: 2024-02).
[7] County size was determined based on Department of Finance Population Projections 2023 estimates (P-2B) for ages 13-25 (Large: pop. > 95,000, Medium: pop. 25,001-95,000, Small: pop. < 25,001).
[8] Based on OYCR regions by county map
[9] For a breakdown of probation department interview participants by role/job title, see Appendix 4

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Youth: To minimize over-interviewing justice-involved youth, ASR decided to substitute youth KIIs with interview transcripts provided by Social Changery. The transcripts reflected 21 youths who had SYTF or SYTF *and* DJJ experience.

Focus Groups: Focus groups were held following the conclusion of survey data collection to allow groups to reflect on the data and elevate positive practices and strategies. In March 2025, ASR facilitated three focus groups with 28 participants, including youth, probation officers, and community-based organization leaders.

LIMITATIONS

The SB 823 realignment was signed into law in September 2020. As a result, efforts are still in the initial stages of implementation and were hindered by the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To prepare for the DJJ realignment, state entities had to define or adapt roles and responsibilities and develop transition processes. Counties focused on developing infrastructures needed to support the realigned youth population by July 2021 (DJJ intake closure). Given differing needs and resources across large-, medium-, and small-sized counties, as well as policies and characteristics unique to each locale, it can be expected that strategies, programming, and metrics available for each county will vary. Additionally, with DJJ facility closures not finalized until June 30, 2023, the full implementation of local alternatives and care structures remained in development throughout this period.

Lastly, there were limited responses to the youth survey conducted for the purpose of this report. As a result, findings are not generalizable to the experience, perspective, or outcomes of all youth with SYTF and/or DJJ experience across California.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As local systems infrastructure and programming become solidified and data become standardized and publicly available, it may be beneficial to conduct a more direct examination of efficacy and outcomes for realigned youth. While this report strived to incorporate perspectives and insights from a broad and diverse group of juvenile justice stakeholders, future evaluations may also benefit from incorporating voices of victims and survivors of violent crimes.

Youth Justice Involvement Trends

> Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.
>
> Bryan Stevenson
> **Just Mercy, 2014**

Youth Justice Involvement Trends

The journey to Senate Bill 823 (SB 823) was driven by historical challenges, legislative measures, and research on adolescent development and healing approaches to restoration. The Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), previously referred to as the California Youth Authority, was responsible for overseeing California's 11 youth correctional facilities. Between 2007 and 2011, seven of the 11 facilities closed, leaving four facilities in use until 2023.[i] In 2023, all state facilities were closed, except the Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp.[10] The sections below summarize the historical landscape of justice-involved youth between 2000-2023 while the DJJ was still operating in California.

JUVENILE FELONY ARRESTS

Juvenile felony arrests have been declining, with an especially notable 92% net decrease between the highest peak in 2007 (66,191) and the lowest count in 2021 (9,132).[ii] Arrests were particularly low during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although arrests in 2023 (16,045) remained lower than pre-pandemic (16,288 in 2019).

Hispanic youth have comprised 53% of felony arrests each year since 2019. Additionally, more than one-quarter (26%) of juvenile felony arrests in 2023 were Black/African American youth. Hispanic youth comprise 50% of the statewide population, while Black/African American youth encompass only 5% of the statewide population.[iii]

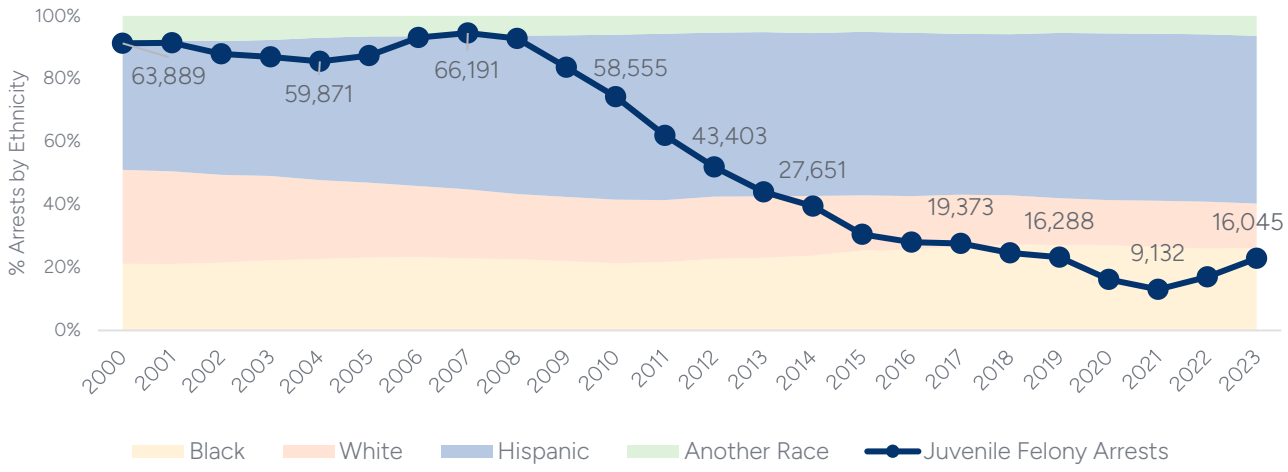
Between 2000 and 2023...

↓ Total juvenile felony arrests decreased by 75% (63,889 to 16,045)

↑ Hispanic and Black youth comprised a larger proportion of felony arrests (62% to 80%)

These data suggest that Black/African American youth are vastly overrepresented in juvenile felony arrests. The rate of Black/African American juvenile felony arrests was more than five times higher than expected based on statewide population proportions.

Figure 1. Total California Juvenile Felony Arrests (Line) and Percentage, by Ethnicity (Area) 2000-2023



Source: California Department of Justice, OpenJustice Data Portal.

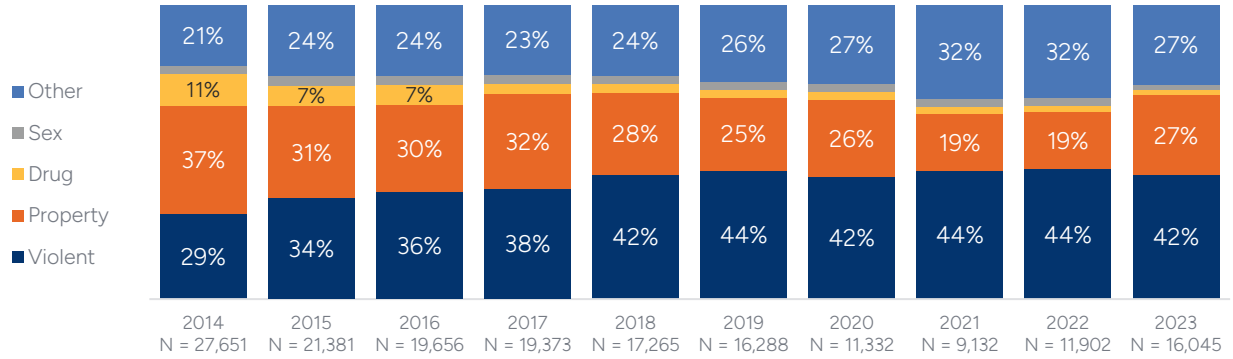
[10] SB 823, Section 1(d)

Additionally, as the total number of juvenile felony arrests decreased, the number of *violent* felony arrests decreased (6,775 in 2023 compared with a peak of 18,050 in 2007). However, violent offenses have comprised a larger proportion of arrests in recent years. In 2023, violent felony arrests comprised 42% of total juvenile felony arrests, compared with the lowest proportion of 25% in 2010.

Between 2000 and 2023...

↑ Violent offenses represented a larger proportion of felony arrests (26% to 42%)

Figure 2. Juvenile Felony Arrests, by Offense Type (2014-2023)



Source: California Department of Justice, OpenJustice Data Portal. Felony arrests by Offense type for juveniles (Under 18 years old). Other felony arrests includes offenses not listed separately, such as certain property crimes, fraud, forgery, and other non-violent or non-specific Penal Code violations.

REFERRALS TO JUVENILE PROBATION

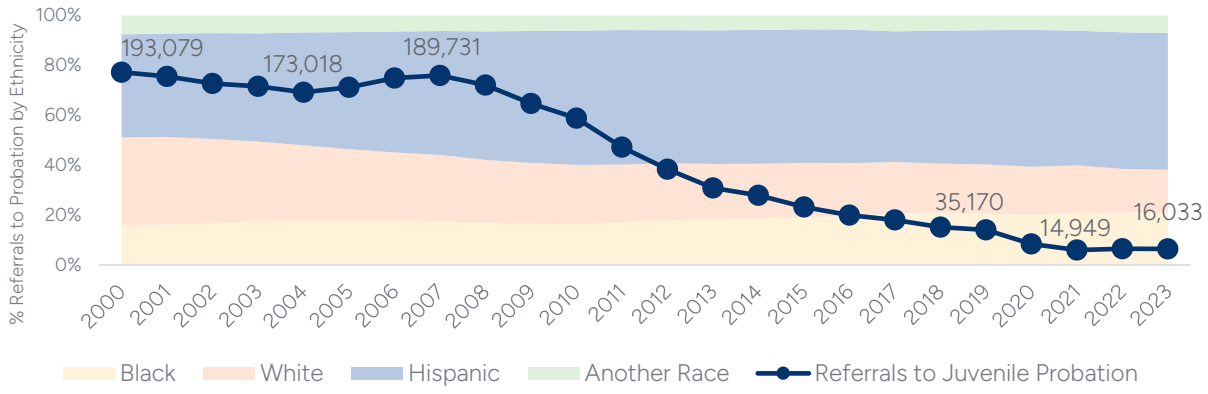
As total arrests have declined, the number of referrals to juvenile probation also declined substantially in the last 20 years. Referrals to probation peaked in 2007 at 189,731 and dropped 92% by 2023 (16,033). On average, Hispanic or Latino youth comprised half of referrals to probation each year, with 2022 and 2023 proportions at the highest (55%). Black youth comprised 19% of referrals, on average, between 2000 and 2023. Most recent data show increases for Black youth in 2022 and 2023 (21%). These data suggest that Black/African American youth are vastly overrepresented in referrals to probation relative to statewide population proportions (5%) and slightly underrepresented relative to total juvenile felony arrests (26% in 2023).

Between 2000 and 2023...

↓ Total referrals to probation decreased 92% (193,079 to 16,033)

↑ Hispanic and Black youth comprised a larger proportion of total referrals (57% to 76%)

Figure 3. California Juvenile Referrals to Probation (Line) and Percentage, by Ethnicity (Area) 2000-2023



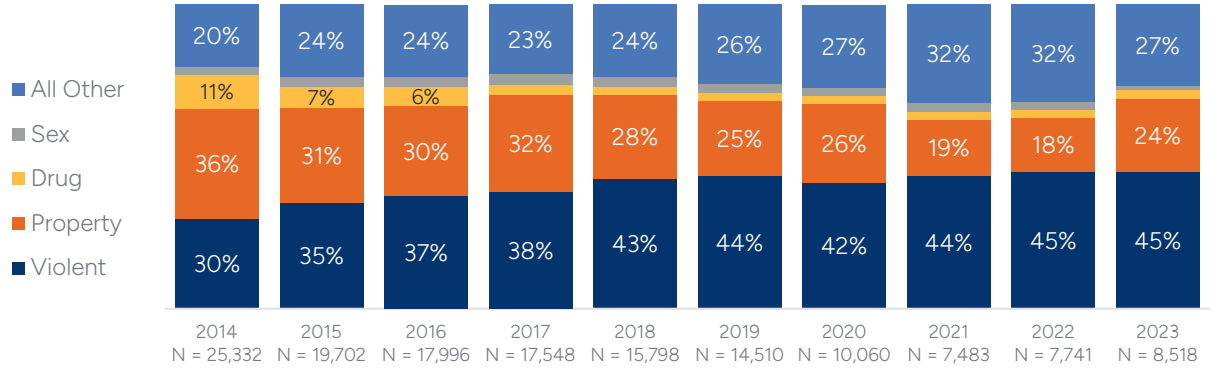
Source: California Department of Justice, OpenJustice Data Portal. Arrest Dispositions. Includes referrals to Juvenile probation for Felony, Misdemeanor, and Status offenses.

While the total number of referrals to probation are declining, **the proportion of referrals to juvenile probation for *felony* offenses has increased.** Between 2000 and 2009, felony referrals comprised about 31% of all referrals to probation. Between 2010 and 2019, felonies comprised an average of 36% of referrals. Since 2020, felonies were about half of all referrals (ranging from 48% to 53% in most recent data). Further, violent offenses comprise a larger portion of referrals to juvenile probation.

Between 2000 and 2023…

↑ Violent offenses comprised a larger proportion of felony referrals (27% to 45%)

Figure 4. Felony Referrals to Juvenile Probation, by Felony Offense Type (2014-2023)

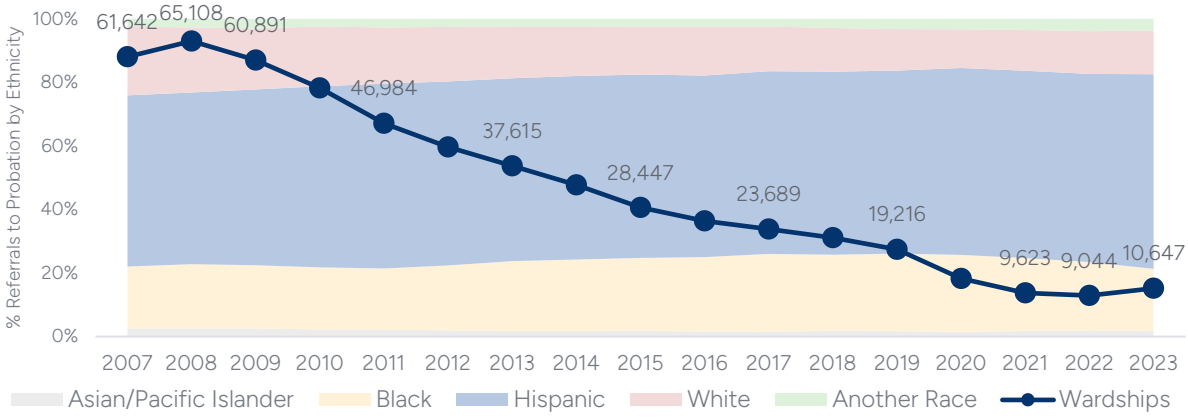


Source: California Department of Justice, OpenJustice Data Portal. Arrest Dispositions – Referrals to Juvenile probation among juvenile felony arrests.

ADJUDICATIONS

Adjudications refer to the juvenile court's formal decision that a youth committed the referred offense. Adjudicated youth are those on formal probation, including but not limited to, youth placed in a facility or incarcerated. Wardships for adjudicated youth have decreased by 84% since the peak in 2008 (65,108 to 10,647). On average, Hispanic youth comprise 57% of wardships, with the highest proportion in 2023 (61%). On average, Black youth represent one in five adjudications (22%). The peak adjudications for Black youth was 25% in 2017, which decreased slightly to 20% in 2023. On average, felony adjudications comprised about half (49%) of wardship dispositions between 2007 and 2023, although proportions have been increasing in recent years. Three out of five wardship adjudications were for felony offenses in 2021 (60%), 2022 (62%), and 2023 (63%).

Figure 5. Statewide Juvenile Court Adjudications (Line), by Race/Ethnicity (Area), 2007-2023



Source: California Department of Justice, OpenJustice Data Portal. Juvenile Court and Probation.

TRANSFERS TO ADULT COURT

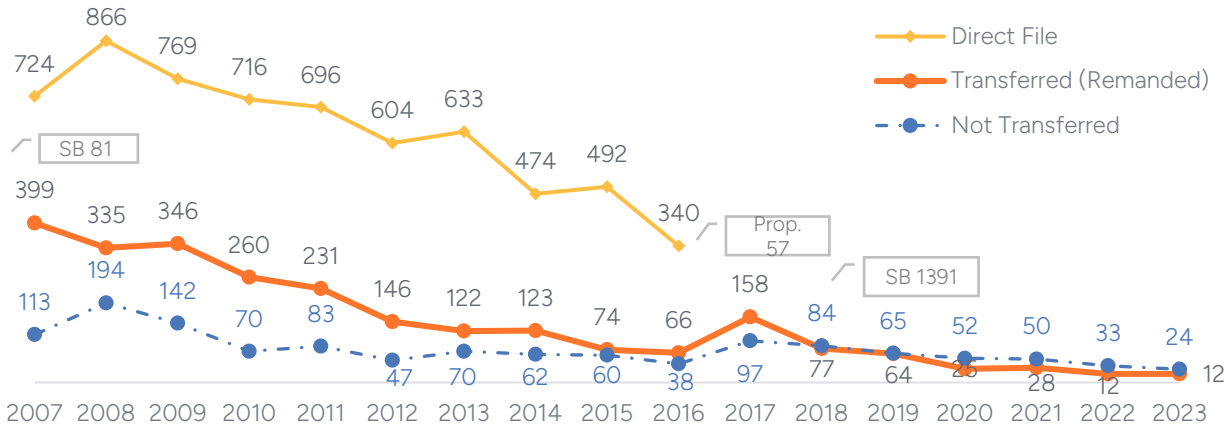
In some cases, juvenile courts may decide to transfer (or remand) youth to be tried in adult court. Reasons for transfer relate to the seriousness of the offense, the juvenile's age, their prior criminal record or behaviors, or other special circumstances.

Transfers to adult court have declined steadily since 2007 and remain particularly low. In 2007, there were 724 direct files, and another 399 youth were subsequently transferred to adult court. Direct files decreased to 340 in 2016 and were eliminated by Proposition 57 (2016). This likely contributed to a slight spike in cases transferred to adult court in 2017 (n = 158). In 2018, SB 1391 further reduced the population eligible for transfer hearings, ending the transfer of 14- and 15-year-olds to adult court. Transfers continued to decrease, with the most recent data showing only 12 transfers in 2022 and 2023, all of which were youths between the ages of 18-24 at the time of transfer, although their offenses were committed under the age of 18.

> **"I consider juvenile justice as the most important court. It really is where you stop children from entering the adult court system. There's a lot of things that we can do and have been doing to do that."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

The number of instances where a transfer hearing was held, and the youths were *not* transferred to adult court peaked in 2008 (n = 194) and steadily declined to 24 in 2023. Additionally, Welf. & Inst. Code § 707 (2023) increased the complexity of factors a judge would have to consider as well as the burden of proof necessary to transfer a case. Decreases in the number of hearings resulting in youth *not* transferred may be related to fewer hearings held and increased clarity on transfer requirements and eligibility (e.g., 84 not transferred in 2018 and 24 not transferred in 2023).

Figure 6. Direct Files and Transfers to Adult Court Between 2007 and 2023



Source: California Department of Justice, OpenJustice Data Portal. Juvenile Court and Probation.
Note: Direct files end after 2016, as Proposition 57 eliminated the authority for direct file petitions

Progression to a Restorative, Health-Based Approach

> [SB 823 is] the moment we've been looking for... to make that change that we talk about.
>
> CBO Stakeholder Respondent
> **2024**

Progression to a Restorative, Health-Based Approach

Over the past 35 years, the youth justice system has undergone a transformation. Through the collective efforts of advocates, researchers, probation departments, and communities, the focus of the youth justice system has shifted over time.

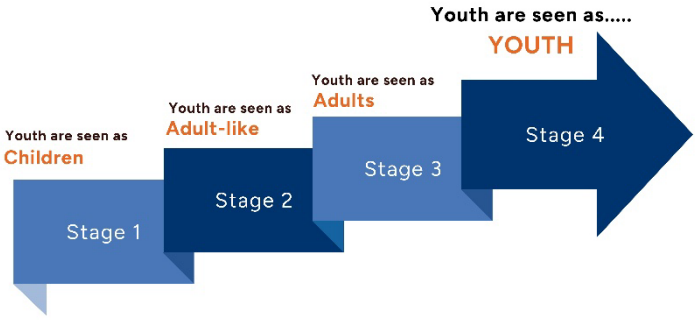
HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM: FROM PUNISHMENT TO RESTORATION

Since the establishment of the first juvenile court in 1899, youth justice has evolved through four major reform stages, laying the foundation for SB 823.[iv]

- **Stage 1 Rehabilitative Focus (1899-1960s):** The first stage encapsulated a rehabilitative focus, prioritizing treatment over punishment to support the welfare of youth. However, this phase was critiqued as overly informal, as youth were denied procedural rights granted to adults.

- **Stage 2 – Due Process (1960s-1980s):** In the second stage, the focus shifted to ensuring youth were protected under the due process clause of the 14th Amendment. Youth were granted rights such as legal counsel, formal notice of charges, and the ability to confront witnesses.

- **Stage 3 – Punitive Era (1980s-1990s):** The third stage was defined by stricter punishments and laws, rooted in the belief that youth (as young as 14) who commit adult crimes should be punished as adults. This resulted in an uptick of juvenile arrests and a growing reliance on incarceration.



- **Stage 4 – Science-Based Reform (2000s-present):** Emerging brain science and developmental research began to influence reform. Research showed that adolescence is a unique stage of development, and that youth differ from adults in behavior and decision-making. Research further demonstrated that harsh punishments were ineffective at reducing recidivism rates.[v] In response, the Supreme Court reformed youth sentencing, ruling that certain punishments are cruel and unusual under the Eighth Amendment.

WHAT SCIENCE TELLS US: ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROOTS OF JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

The scientific research that emerged in the early 2000s played a major role in reshaping youth justice. Research highlighted stark differences between adolescents and adults, and provided compelling evidence that youth are not simply "mini adults."[vi] The following presents key findings from neuroscience and developmental psychology showing how adolescent development and trauma shape behavior.

- **Adolescents are prone to impulsive and risky behaviors:** The area of the brain that drives thrill-seeking and risk-taking develops quicker than the area responsible for impulse control and regulation. This means that adolescents are naturally drawn to excitement and risky behaviors but often struggle with self-control and do not fully consider the long-term consequences of their actions.[vii,viii]

- **Adolescents are more sensitive to external influences:** Adolescence is a time of heightened brain plasticity, meaning the brain is especially sensitive to experiences and the environment.[ix] As a result, youth are more vulnerable to outside influences, such as peer pressure, trauma, and unstable environments. At the same time, this also makes adolescence a critical window for positive intervention and rehabilitation.

- **Trauma can interfere with healthy brain development:** Exposure to trauma in early childhood can impair the development of the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for regulating behavior and making good decisions. This can make it harder for youth to control impulses, increasing their risk of justice involvement.[x,xi]

The developmental vulnerabilities discussed above are often compounded by various social determinants of health and systemic challenges that increase the risk of justice involvement, including, but not limited to adverse childhood experiences and exclusionary school policies.[xii]

- **Trauma and systemic factors increase risk:** Research consistently correlates adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) with youth justice involvement. Youth and adult offenders are more likely to have experienced multiple ACEs. In one study, 97% of juvenile offenders experienced at least one ACE.[xiii] Similarly, an estimated 90% of incarcerated adults experienced at least one ACE.[xiv] The number and type of ACEs are linked to the types and severity of crimes and likelihood of recidivism.[xv]

- **School discipline contributes to justice involvement:** School practices such as zero-tolerance policies, school resource officers enforcing punitive discipline, and disciplinary measures for "willful defiance" result in increased suspensions and expulsions, especially for Black and Hispanic boys who are disproportionately impacted.[xvi] Research has shown that expulsions and suspensions between grades 7-12 were "turning points," which increased the likelihood of incarceration, even when accounting for other factors related to incarceration (e.g., type and level of offense).[xvii]

A RESTORATIVE PATH FORWARD

California has taken steps to shift away from punitive practices and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline discussed above. For example, AB 420, effective in 2015, prohibits schools from expelling kindergarten- to third-grade students for willful defiance. Many schools have also begun integrating restorative justice practices, such as conflict resolution and community building. These practices aim to help youth understand the impact of their actions rather than respond in a punitive manner.

"Community-based alternatives are the right way to keep communities safe without trapping young people in a flawed system."

- Nate Balis, Director of Juvenile Justice Strategy Group

Over time, research has increasingly pointed to the benefits of community-based alternatives to incarceration. Programs that allow youth to remain in their communities are more effective than carceral settings.[xviii] Benefits include lower re-offense rates, greater continuity in care, the ability to maintain ties to family and support networks, and reduced system costs.[xix]

"Too often, youth confinement succeeds only in damaging young people and diminishing their chances for a healthy, productive future."

- Liz Ryan, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

In contrast, incarceration has shown itself to be harmful.[xx] Locked facilities often lack the therapeutic environment needed for healing and restoration, and youth in these settings may experience further trauma. Without addressing the underlying needs that led to the offense, youth are more likely to cycle back into the system, facing high rates of re-arrest, new convictions, and diminished chances for success in adulthood.[xxi]

Taken together, the biological, cognitive, environmental, and social factors that influence youth behavior and the evidence of harm caused by punishment, suggested a need for a restorative, health-based approach. Such an approach centers healing, accountability, and support, not harm.

EVOLUTION OF LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

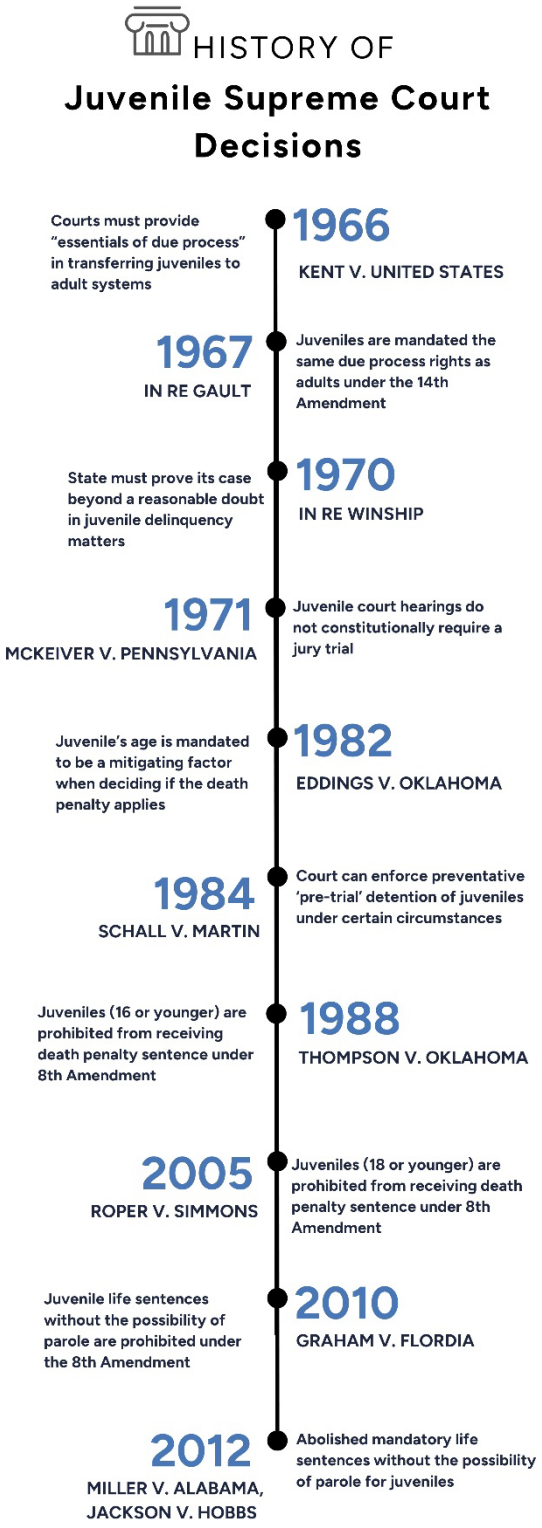
This shift toward a restorative, health-based youth justice system has been supported by a growing body of legal and legislative change. As the developmental science behind youth behavior gained traction, courts and lawmakers began to reshape policies around youth rehabilitation.

Supreme Court Rulings

Over the past two decades, U.S. Supreme Court rulings have increasingly recognized the developmental immaturity of youth and the constitutional need to treat them differently from adults. The Supreme Court reasoned harsh punishments for youth (e.g., death penalty) violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment, as youth are less culpable (i.e., accountable).

The Supreme Court's evolving understanding of youth development led to three key rulings that restricted the use of the harshest punishments under the Eighth Amendment:

- **2005 Roper v. Simmons:** Banned the death penalty for youth under 18. [11]
- **2010 Graham v. Florida:** Prohibited life without parole for non-homicide offenses. [12]
- **2012 Miller v. Alabama:** Extended that protection to homicide cases, ruling that mandatory life without parole for youth is unconstitutional.[13]



[11] Roper v. Simmons, 541 U.S. 1040 (2005)
[12] Graham v. Florida, U.S. Supreme Court, 560 U.S. (2010)
[13] Miller v. Alabama, U.S. Supreme Court, 567 U.S. (2012)

California's Legislative Shift Toward Restorative Care for All Youth

While national court decisions laid the groundwork for treating youth differently from adults, California has long taken a progressive approach to youth justice reform. Since the mid-1990s, the state has passed a series of legislative measures aimed at replacing punitive, adult-modeled systems with restorative, locally based care. The following marks key moments in this reform:

- **A turning point: Public exposure of state facility conditions:** In 2000, the California State Legislature held hearings where family members, advocates, and youth described the harsh realities of state-run juvenile detention centers. Their testimonies revealed patterns of misconduct and deep racial disparities, in which youth of color were disproportionately affected, and still are.[xxii] This transparency prompted legislative action and increased investment in local systems.

- **A shift toward local responsibility (Senate Bill 81):** SB 81, passed in 2007, marked a major shift by transferring responsibility for most justice-involved youth (all but those adjudicated as "serious offenders") from the state to county probation departments.[14] It also established the Youthful Offender Block Grant (YOBG) to help counties build local alternatives to incarceration. SB 81, which aimed to reduce the number of youth housed in state-run facilities, reflected a new belief: Counties are better positioned to support youth rehabilitation and reintegration.[xxiii]

Impact of Reform

California experienced a 92% drop in youth offending between 2007 and 2021 – a period marked by increased investment in local youth justice systems and alternatives to incarceration.[ii]

- **Evidence-based practices take hold:** Probation departments began to increasingly adopt evidence-based practices, including cognitive behavioral therapy, mentoring, and educational support for youth, as well as using validated risk and needs assessments to tailor case plans for youth. The focus shifted from incarceration to prevention and diversion.[xxiv]

During this period of reform, youth offending across California declined, with a 92% drop between 2007 and 2021. [xxv] While many factors contributed to this shift, policy reforms played a central role in reorienting the system toward prevention, community care, and developmental appropriateness. These changes helped lay the foundation for Senate Bill 823, which signaled a more unified commitment to a restorative approach for all youth, including those adjudicated of the most serious offenses.

[14] Note: serious/violent offenses such as burglary, murder, and assault; 707(b) or 290.008

Key Legislative Milestones in California's Youth Justice Reform

The policies below further illustrate California's step-by-step journey toward a more restorative youth justice system. These legislative milestones laid the groundwork for SB 823 and the system transformation underway.

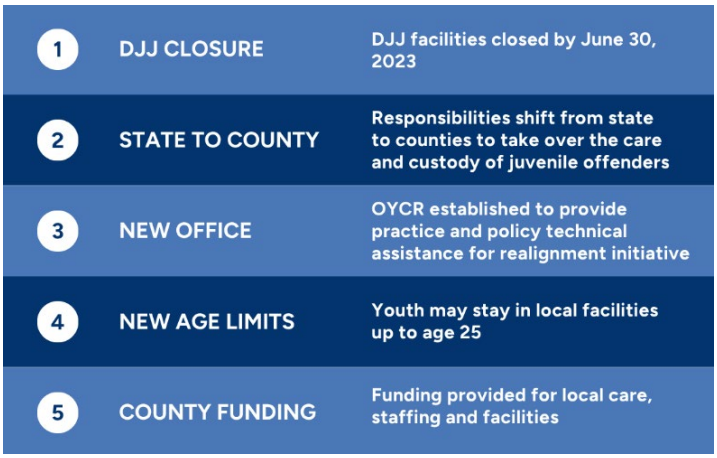
	Senate Bill 81 (2007): Mandated that only youth who committed the most serious offenses would be sent to state facilities. ✦ Aiming to transfer the responsibility of juvenile offenders from the state to counties
	Senate Bill 1021 (2013): Eliminated "time adds" for youth incarcerated at DJJ; transferred DJJ parole function to counties and lowered the maximum age of confinement to 23. ✦ Aiming to reduce the duration in which youth are incarcerated
	Senate Bill 9 (2013): Allowed juveniles who were sentenced in adult court to life without parole to petition for a new sentencing hearing, and potentially, a lesser sentence. ✦ Reflecting a shift toward more lenient measures
	Senate Bills 260 (2013-2014) & 261 (2015-2016): Provided early parole opportunities for those who were convicted as juveniles. ✦ Prioritizing rehabilitation over long-term incarceration
	Proposition 57 (2016): Ended prosecutors directly filing juvenile cases in adult court, assuring only judges could make this decision. ✦ Aiming to reduce the number of youths tried as adults and sent to adult prisons
	Senate Bill 439 (2018): Limited juvenile court jurisdiction to minors between 12 to 17, excluding younger children from the juvenile system. ✦ Emphasizing that younger children's needs were met through systems better designed to support them
	Senate Bill 1391 (2018): Prohibited the transfer of youth alleged to have committed a crime at 14- and 15-years of age from being transferred to adult court unless they were not apprehended prior to the end of juvenile court jurisdiction. ✦ Further reducing the number of youth tried as adults and sent to adult prisons.
	Senate Bill 823 (2020): shifted California's youth justice responsibilities from state to local jurisdictions, promoting community-based rehabilitation and reducing youth incarceration. ✦ Represents a shift toward a more rehabilitative and community-focused approach, aiming to prioritize accountability and healing

SB 823:
Youth Justice Realignment

> Today is the beginning of the end of juvenile imprisonment as we know it.
>
> Gavin Newsom
> **Governor of California, 2019**

Senate Bill 823: Youth Justice Realignment

Senate Bill (SB) 823 marked a major shift in California's approach to youth justice, reinforcing the importance of a restorative, community-based model for all youth. SB 823 was introduced in the California State Senate on January 10, 2020 and signed into law on September 30, 2020 by Governor Gavin Newsom. The legislation reflected years of research, policy reform, and community advocacy for more health-focused and locally based care for California's justice-involved and at risk of involvement youth.



SB 823 laid the groundwork to close state-run youth correctional facilities (i.e., DJJ facilities) and invest in county-level care and custody for youth who would have otherwise been sent to a state facility. The legislation was designed to keep youth adjudicated of serious offenses closer to home and support their rehabilitation through programs focused on accountability, healing, and successful reintegration. In addition, the legislation created the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) within California Health and Human Services Agency to provide practice and policy technical assistance, expanded juvenile court jurisdiction, raised the age limit for confinement in local facilities to 25, and allocated funding for local infrastructure and services.[15]

KEY SB 823 PROVISIONS

DJJ Closure and Facility Realignment

DJJ Closure

- **DJJ Intake Ceased:** As of July 1, 2021, DJJ intake closed for most youth. However, Welf. & Inst. Code 736.5(c) allowed for commitments up until the closure for youth who were otherwise eligible and for whom the district attorney had filed a motion for transfer to adult court. Starting July 1, 2021, counties became responsible for housing and rehabilitating youth who otherwise would have been committed to DJJ.[16]
- **Full Closure of DJJ Facilities:** On July 1, 2023, California closed all DJJ facilities, including N.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility, O.H. Close Youth Correctional Facility in Stockton and the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility in Camarillo. The Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp remains open. It serves young men ages 18-24 who receive training and certification in fire prevention under the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

[15] For a list of statutes include in SB 823, see Appendix 5
[16] Youth eligible for DJJ whose cases involved a motion for transfer after July 1, 2021, could still have been committed to DJJ until the state facilities closure. Counties were required to pay the state $125,000 for any youth committed to DJJ after July 1, 2021, until that youth turned 23.

Establishment of Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTFs)

SB 823 required counties to either establish secure youth treatment facilities (SYTFs) or contract with another county for these services. SYTFs are designed for youth adjudicated of offenses under Welf. & Inst. Code 707(b) who were 14 or older at the time of the offense.

- **SYTF Eligibility:** Youth are committed to a SYTF if the court determines an alternative is not appropriate, based on the severity of the offense, the harm caused, the youth's commitment history, the suitability of available programming at the SYTF, and community safety.

- **SYTF Rehabilitation Planning and Progress Reviews:** SYTF commitments require an individual rehabilitation plan (IRP), created by a multidisciplinary team and presented to the court within 30 days of adjudication. Youth participate in a progress review hearing every six months. At each review, judges may take up to six months off the youth's baseline commitment every six months or approve a step-down to a less restrictive setting, if a motion is filed by probation or the youth.

Establishment of OYCR

SB 823 established the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR), situated within the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS). OYCR provides practice and policy technical assistance for the realignment initiative, youth justice in California, and the data collection process.

OYCR Responsibilities

1. Report on youth outcomes
2. Recommend policies that will improve youth outcomes and provide programs to support justice involved youth
3. Identify and recommend best practices for restorative practices
4. Provide technical assistance as needed to widen diversion opportunities for various populations of youth that are justice involved
5. Protect the rights of youth that are justice involved through the integration of an Ombudsperson

Extended Jurisdiction and Local Confinement

As part of the shift to local care under SB 823, the law expanded the length of juvenile court jurisdiction, and the amount of time youth may remain in county facilities.

Under SB 823, juvenile courts can retain jurisdiction over certain youth for longer periods:

- Up to age 23 for youth adjudicated for offenses under Welf. & Inst. Code § 707(b).

- Up to age 25 for youth adjudicated under Welf. & Inst. Code § 707(b) who, in criminal court, could have received a sentence of seven years or more. [17]

Youth whose cases originated in juvenile court may remain in SYTFs until the age of 25. However, under Welf. & Inst. Code § 208.5, probation departments may petition the court to transfer youth ages 19 or older to an adult facility. Youth adjudicated under Welf. & Inst. Code § 707(b) and placed in post-disposition programs are otherwise eligible to remain in SYTFs through age 25.

[17] Welf. & Inst. Code § 607

PREPARATION FOR TRANSITION

To support the realignment of youth justice under SB 823, California provided both one-time and ongoing funding to help counties build infrastructure, develop programs, and prepare for the return of youth from DJJ. The total amount available between FY 2020-21 through FY 2023-24 was $276,730,015.[18] This funding was distributed across all 58 counties based on distinct funding formulas, and all counties received varying amounts. Across all funding sources noted below, the median dollars distributed across the 58 counties before July 1, 2023, was $1,848,079 (range: $500,000 to $56,225,578 total across the three fiscal years) to prepare for the SYTF youth population. Funding was used for facility updates (e.g., painting, resurfacing flooring, updating HVAC and electrical systems) and creating recreation areas and outdoor visiting spaces. In addition, Fresno and Sonoma Counties received a combined total of $2 million to create regional hubs focused on sexual behavior treatment to serve youth from various counties.

Funding Source	Time	Amount	Purpose/Focus
Youth Programs and Facilities Grant (YPFG) Program [xxvi]	2021 (one-time)	A total of **$9.6M** to 37 counties[19]	➤ Infrastructure improvements ➤ Development of regional hubs for youth requiring sexual behavior treatment
General Fund, AB 178 [xxvii]	2022 (one-time)	A total of **$100M** to 44 counties	➤ Facility modernization ➤ Create space for programs (e.g., family engagement, treatment, education, vocation, and recreation) ➤ Enhance security infrastructure
Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant (JJRBG)[20]	Began FY 2021-22 (ongoing)	Minimum of **$250,000** to each county	➤ Support counties in caring for youth previously eligible for DJJ ➤ Create a subcommittee of the multiagency Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC)

The JJRBG provides ongoing funding to counties to support the development and implementation of the local realignment plans, which must be created and updated by a subcommittee of the county's multiagency Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC).[21] The plan indicates the use of funding as determined by the county's JJCC. This will differ per county. The funding formula used for this grant is based on: (1) juvenile population, 20% of formula based on county's distribution of youth ages 10-17, (2) DJJ usage, 30% of formula based on each county's DJJ population as of December 2018, June 2019 and December 2019, and (3) estimated 707(b) population, 50% of formula based on county's local population who have committed certain violent and felony crimes as reported in Juvenile Court and Probation Statistical System (JCPSS) to be updated annually.[xxviii]

[18] Includes funding available from FYs 21-23 through AB 178, JJRBG, and YPFG funds
[19] Distributed to 37 applicant counties and 2 regional hubs. Average allocation varied by county size: $167K (small), $152K (medium), $356K (large).
[20] To receive funding, counties are required to create a subcommittee of a Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, chaired by a chief probation officer with representation from the district attorney's office, public defender's office, department of social services, department of mental health, county office of education or a school district, the local court, and no fewer than three community members.
[21] OYCR has a statutory role in reviewing county plans and assisting with the adjustment of the funding formula as outlined in Welf. & Inst. Code 1991

TRANSITION FROM STATE TO COUNTY RESPONSIBILITY

With the passage of SB 823, **responsibility for housing and rehabilitating youth shifted from the state to California's 58 counties**. The transition required counties to assume custody of youth who would have otherwise been committed to DJJ, as well as prepare to receive youth returning from DJJ facilities.

As shown in the timeline below, counties had nine months to prepare to receive youth who would have otherwise been transferred to DJJ and an additional 24 months to prepare for the return of youth from DJJ facilities.

During this period, counties were responsible for:[22]

- **Creating plans to transition youth** from DJJ to local SYTFs with limited disruptions in services;
- **Reassessing existing services** to determine their capacity to provide care and treatment for all youth, including youth up to age 25, females and gender expansive youth, and those participating in serious mental health and sexual behavior treatment programs;
- **Developing, expanding, or partnering** to provide the services needed for this population of youth;
- **Creating SYTFs** to house youth considering long-term commitments; and
- **Convening a Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council** to oversee implementation of the realignment at the local level. This council includes representation from probation, mental health, education, and community-based organizations.

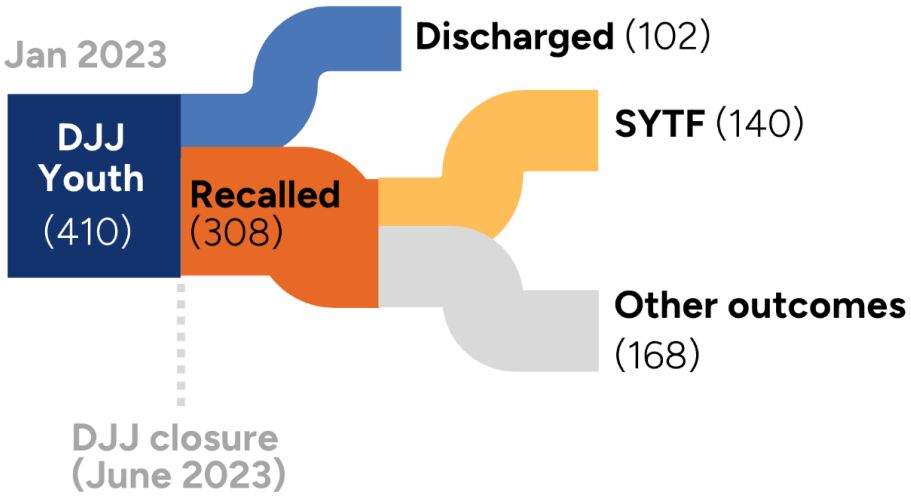
[22] This list is intended to provide a general overview for the purposes of context. This is not meant to be reflective of all responsibilities of counties after SB 823 enactment

YOUTH PLACEMENT FOLLOWING DJJ CLOSURE

At the time of DJJ intake closure in July 2021, there were 652 youth in DJJ facilities.[xxix] As depicted in the graphic, as of January 2023, 410 youth remained under the jurisdiction of DJJ. Within this group, 91 youth (22%) were specialized populations, including those with specialized mental health treatment needs, youth in a sexual behavior treatment program, and/or female youth.[xxx]

By the time the last state facilities closed in June 2023, 102 of the 410 youth (25%) were discharged by DJJ, and 308 (75%) were recalled by their counties. Of the 308 youth who were recalled, 140 (34%) were committed to SYTFs and 168 had other outcomes, such as committed to another facility (e.g., LRP, Pine Grove,[23] county jail), placed on community supervision, or dismissed after being recalled.

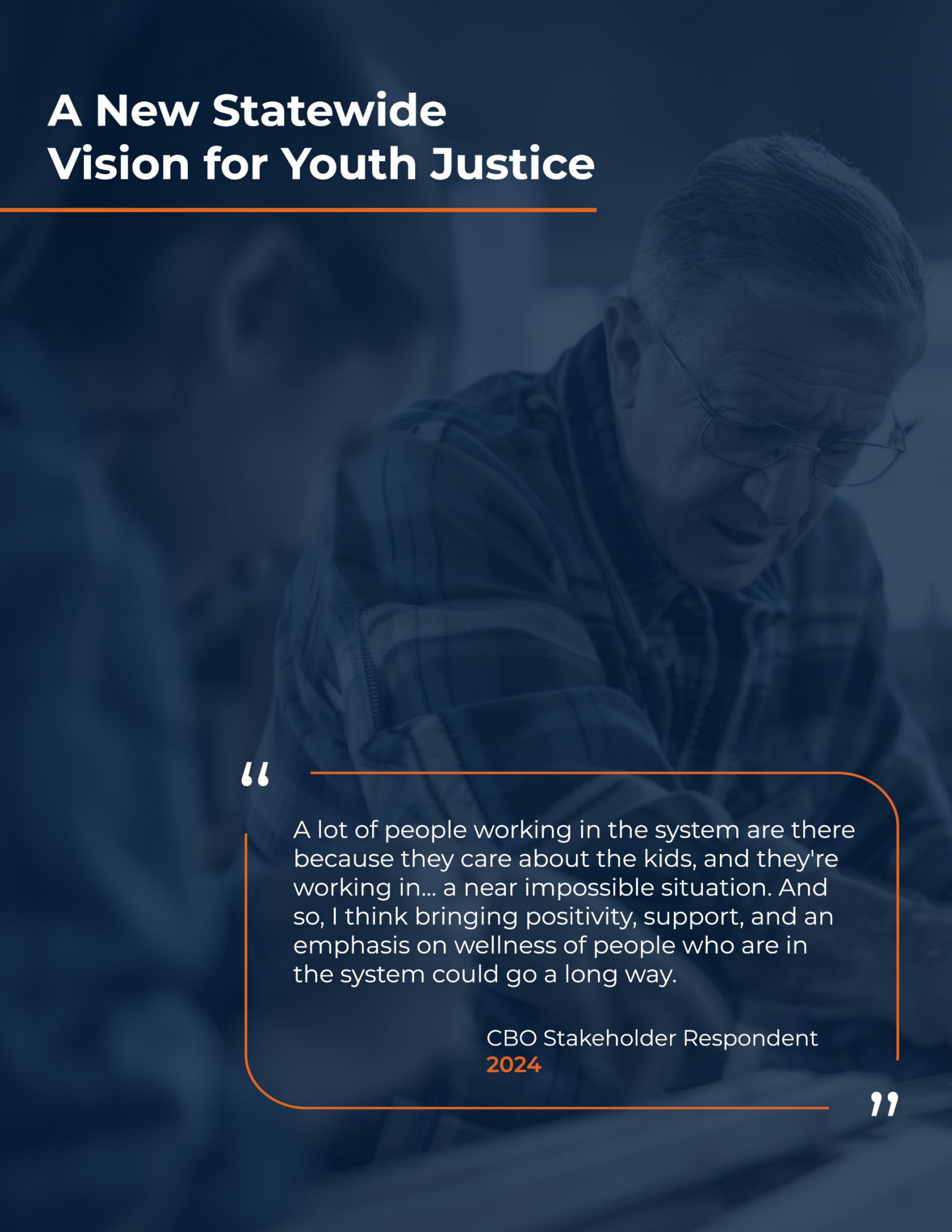
Youth Placements Following DJJ Closure in 2023



Source: County Probation Consortium Partnering for Youth Realignment DJJ Transition Planning Summary of Youth Information.

[23] State-run (CDCR) youth conservation camp run through Amador County

A New Statewide Vision for Youth Justice



> A lot of people working in the system are there because they care about the kids, and they're working in... a near impossible situation. And so, I think bringing positivity, support, and an emphasis on wellness of people who are in the system could go a long way.
>
> CBO Stakeholder Respondent
> **2024**

A New Statewide Vision for Youth Justice

California has taken steps over the last two decades toward a more rehabilitative, local approach to youth justice. This movement, led by community advocates, researchers, and probation departments, has continued to evolve. The passing of SB 823 reaffirmed California's commitment to the transformation of youth justice by guiding the reform toward a health-based approach rooted in positive youth development. This approach is now used for all of California's youth who are justice-involved, regardless of the severity of their offense.

At its core, SB 823 affirms that young people are best served close to families, in their local communities and through evidence-based and promising practices to improve youth outcomes and public safety. The graphic below describes the vision of SB 823, using language from the statute.[24]

To realize this new vision for youth justice, coordination across all levels of the youth justice system is critical. It requires intentional alignment between local and state agencies, service providers, County Offices of Education, behavioral health providers, community organizations, along with the youth and their families. As implementation continues to unfold, so does the development of strategic partnerships, funding streams, dissemination of information, centering of youth voice, and changes in policy and practice.

[24] Terminology described in SB 823, Chapter 337, section 1.

PRACTICE, POLICY, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) is a new office situated within the California Health and Human Services Agency. The information included in this section provides an overview of OYCR's efforts since its establishment in 2021.[25] For a detailed overview of all OYCR divisions and efforts, please refer to the annual reports.[xxxi]

OYCR Mission

A commitment to restorative youth justice.

OYCR promotes trauma-responsive, culturally informed, gender honoring, and developmentally appropriate services for youth involved in the juvenile justice system that support the youths' successful transition into adulthood.

OYCR Vision

A shift to how California approaches youth justice.

The OYCR vision of youth justice is one that is framed by accountability and healing rather than punishment and has been driven by on-the-ground advocates, researchers, and probation departments, along with policy, funding, and practice changes, working together to make this new vision of youth justice a reality.

> **"OYCR is investing in a lot of the right things…[and] they have strong priorities. This was the right path for us."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

[25] Overview of efforts primarily between 2021-2024

Building Knowledge and Capacity for Support

Through technical assistance, conducting research, writing policy briefs, hosting webinars, and convening stakeholders through the Youth Justice Summit, OYCR is working to support a more coordinated, informed, and equitable system.

Technical Assistance (TA)

OYCR offers TA in key areas such as mentoring, courtroom practices, facility design, and services for LGBTQ2S+ youth. These areas of focus are developed in collaboration with state and national experts. OYCR's technical assistance aims to help counties adopt practices that will improve outcomes for system-involved youth.

Supporting Credible Messenger Mentoring

Focus: Expand mentoring by people with lived experiences to support healing and accountability for justice-involved youth.

Support Provided: Regional convenings, webinars, statewide learning community, and training protocols.

Partners: Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement (CM3).

Reach: Statewide.

Improving Courtroom Practices

Focus: Strengthen courtroom practices for youth in SYTFs.

Support Provided: Technical assistance on DA transfer decisions, post-adjudication hearings, IRP development, victim/family/ youth voice, and LRPs.

Partners: Prosecutors Alliance, Pacific Juvenile Defender Association, Los Angeles County Public Defenders, and the DA.

Reach: Statewide.

Supporting EEPP Implementation

Focus: Support counties in selecting and implementing evidence-based and emerging practices (EEPP) and programs for justice-involved youth.

Support Provided: County-level assessments, toolkit, training video, technical assistance.

Partners: RAND Corporation, OYCR, CCJBH, UCCI, CABs.[26]

Reach: Statewide.

Facility Planning and Design Support

Focus: Reimagine probation spaces using trauma-informed, therapeutic design.

Support Provided: Site visits, best practices research, webinars, and design guidance for short- and long-term changes to SYTFs and LRPs.

Partners: MASS Design.

Reach: Statewide.

Reducing Use of Force in Youth Facilities

Focus: Support counties in shifting away from pepper spray / chemical agents toward evidence-based de-escalation techniques.

Support Provided: A national examination of practices to eliminate or reduce chemical agents, promising practices, and an Oleoresin Capsicum / Pepper Spray Reduction Plan.

Partners: OYCR-led.

Reach: Statewide.

Gender-Expansive Services for LGBTQ2S+ Youth

Focus: Equip justice professionals with tools to support LGBTQ2S+ youth.

Support Provided: Two TA resources focused on practical strategies for supporting LGBTQ2S+ youth in the justice system and creating safety plans.

Partners: National SOGIE Center.

Reach: Statewide.

[26] CCJBH: Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health; UCCI: University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute; CAB: Community Advisory Board

Evidence and Guidance Through Briefs and Reports

OYCR has commissioned and produced reports and technical assistance briefs to inform policy, guide county implementation, and elevate youth voices.

Applied Survey Research: 2025 Progress Report

Focus: Evaluate the impact of realignment.

Highlights: Close to 100 stakeholder interviews and focus groups, along with surveys; findings presented to the Governor and legislature.

Forward Change: Education and Workforce Development for Youth in Secure Facilities

Focus: Improve education and workforce options for youth in SYTF.

Highlights: Two reports (one forthcoming) focused on expanding higher education pathways, strengthening school reentry, and preventing system involvement.

OYCR's briefs and reports aim to help counties navigate complex issues, strengthen programs, and align with best practices.

Social Changery: Centering Youth Voices in Justice Reform

Focus: Uplift youth perspectives through storytelling and advocacy.

Highlights: Report co-developed with justice-involved youth, emphasizing healing and restorative justice.[xxxii]

UCLA Step-Down Technical Assistance Brief Series

Focus: Guide successful transitions from SYTFs.

Highlights: Provides guidance to support the adoption of the Stepping Home Model and Standards of Excellence; provides shared language and best practices for counties.

OYCR Legal and Policy Briefs

Focus: Provide youth justice stakeholders with clear guidance on complex legal and procedural topics.

Highlights: Five- brief series that covers ICWA[27] best practices; criminal history reporting and employment obstacles; record sealing; and transfer hearing criteria.

2024 Youth Justice Summit

In November 2024, OYCR hosted the inaugural Youth Justice Summit, convening with over 300 attendees for two days of interactive sessions, workshops, awards, and networking focused on youth justice transformation. The event featured 21 sessions on topics including behavioral health, education, race equity, and the youth voice, which was facilitated by youth themselves. The summit received positive feedback, with 89% of participants rating their experience as "excellent" or "good." Participants valued the inclusion of youth voices, the collaborative atmosphere, and actionable insights shared throughout the conference.

Participants gather for the 2024 Youth Justice Summit.

[27] ICWA: Indian Child Welfare Act

Webinars and Training Series

OYCR has collaborated with partners to offer webinars and trainings on best practices and frontline research.[28] Series have consisted of probation, behavioral health, substance use, judicial training, and youth justice action webinar series (Appendix 6).

- **Youth justice action webinar series:** OYCR's monthly webinar series shares practices and trends that reflect the shifting landscape of juvenile justice with the aim of improving outcomes for children, families, and youth. Topics have included: Credible Messengers and mentoring, victims and the justice system, youth engagement, and aligning practice with adolescent development research. In 2024, the webinars reached 1,600 youth justice stakeholders with an average of 137 participants per session. The webinars received high ratings for their value (84%) and relevance (94%). Each webinar is available on the OYCR website for future viewing.

Investing in Equity and Special Population Supports

Through collaborations, funding, and technical assistance, OYCR has taken steps to support youth who have been historically underserved, disproportionately impacted by the justice system, or have complex needs. This includes efforts to support girls and gender expansive youth, youth with disabilities, Native American youth, and youth requiring specialized treatment programs. The initiatives are aimed at reducing disparities and ensuring all youth have access to meaningful opportunities for growth and success.

Girls/Gender-Expansive Youth

Goal: End girls' incarceration.

Why This Matters: While girls represent a small share of youth in custody, they still face inequities, including over-representation of Latina and Black girls. A high share, 67%, of girls' arrests were for misdemeanors and low-level offenses.[xxxiii]

OYCR Response: Partnered with Vera Institute of Justice to launch *Ending Girls' Incarceration in California Action Network* in four counties.

Support Provided: Probation departments were provided up to $375k for years 1-3. Community-based Organizations (CBO) were provided up to $1M per county for diversion services.

Reach: Four counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego).

Impact: The Santa Clara County pilot site (with Vera before SB 823) showed a 60% decrease in girls' detention admissions, and 2022 marked a full year with zero girls in their long-term placement facility.

> **"The work to transform California's youth justice system has been ongoing for decades, and we are meeting this movement with a historic investment to reform and redesign how we approach justice for girls and gender-expansive youth."**
>
> *- Katherine Lucero, Director of OYCR, 2024*

[28] Many webinars qualify for Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) and Minimum Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) credits.

Youth with Disabilities

Goal: Ensure youth with disabilities receive support and accommodations to succeed during and after system involvement.

Why This Matters: Youth with disabilities are overrepresented among justice-involved youth, 65-70% of whom have intellectual or learning disabilities.[xxxiv] Without accommodation, many face barriers to success.

> **"All young people, regardless of ability or circumstance, deserve to go to work."**
>
> *- Joe Xavier, DOR Director, 2024*

OYCR Response: Partnered with the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) to provide individualized support plans through Title IV grant funding.

Support Provided: Each county receives a Developmental Navigator who identifies eligible youth and coordinates warm handoffs to DOR for support and services like education and workforce preparation.

Reach: Nine counties (Contra Costa, Imperial, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, Sacramento, San Benito, San Mateo, Solano).

Impact: 77 youth have received services as of May 31, 2025.

Native American Youth

Goal: Improve outcomes for Native youth by ensuring equitable support, strengthening partnerships, and raising awareness of tribal justice issues.

Why This Matters: Native American youth face severe overrepresentation and systemic barriers.[xxxv] In one California county, 40% of system-involved youth were Native American, yet comprised only 2% of the population. Complexities between tribal and county courts, inconsistent ICWA implementation, and legal barriers often limit tribal involvement.

OYCR Response: Relationship-building, policy alignment, and coordination with tribal courts and state/federal agencies.

Support Provided:

- **Partnerships**: OYCR met with tribal courts (e.g., Trinidad Rancheria, Intertribal Court of Southern California), tribal councils, community organizations, and state offices (e.g., Department of Social Services Office of Tribal Affairs) to strengthen relationships and explore collaboration opportunities.
- **Knowledge Sharing**: OYCR engaged in presentations and forums with tribal courts, organizations (e.g., Tribal Justice Collaborative), and justice stakeholders to provide updates and foster alignment.
- **Tribal Policy Engagement:** OYCR collaborated with state and tribal leaders to improve justice outcomes and ICWA implementation for Native youth (e.g., ICWA State Plan Workgroup participation, outreach to Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs).

Impact: Emerging. Focus remains on trust-building, increasing tribal inclusion, and improving alignment across systems.

Youth Who Have Committed Sexual Offenses

Goal: Expand access to specialized treatment through regional collaboration and professional training.

Why This Matters: Youth who have committed sexual offenses have specific treatment needs that not all counties can provide locally.

Statewide/OYCR Response: Through YPFG (Youth Programs and Facilities Grant) funding (not specific to OYCR), counties were encouraged to develop regional treatment hubs. A total of $2 million was awarded to Fresno and Sonoma counties to establish hubs to serve youth across county lines. OYCR supplemented these efforts by partnering with the California Sexual Offender Management Board to deliver statewide trainings on treatment and supervision best practices for adolescents with problematic sexual behaviors.

Impact: In 2022, 74% of counties reported plans to contract with neighboring counties or enter regional agreements to provide sexual behavior treatment, according to the JJRBG County Plan Summary Report.

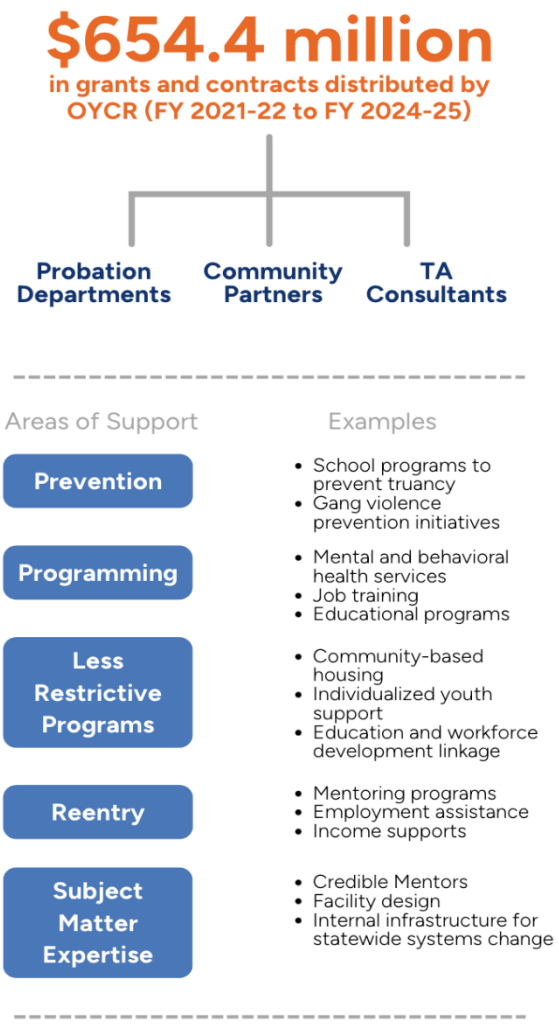
Expanding Local Capacity Through OYCR Funding

OYCR distributed an estimated $654.4 million in grant and contract funding to support the transformation of California's juvenile justice system between fiscal years 2021-22 and 2024-25.[29] Funds were directed to county probation departments, community partners, and TA consultants through technical assistance and direct funding to strengthen prevention, intervention, reentry and SYTF support.

Grant programs included the Juvenile Justice Realignment Grant (JJRBG), Less Restrictive Programs, CBO Capacity Building Initiative (CBI), Justice Serving Network (JSN), Intensive Transitional Services, Ending Girls Incarceration (EGI), Youth Employment Initiative, and Title II Formula Grants.

"Transforming the state's youth justice system...requires substantial coordination and alignment between government and a diverse array of partners, especially our community-based organizations. This investment [CBI] is a recognition of the key role these organizations play in supporting our young people."

- Katherine Lucero, Director of OYCR, 2023



[29] Additional program administration and oversight of state juvenile justice grant programs began in FY2024-25 through the transfer of Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) and Youthful Offender Block Grant (YOBG) as well as the Juvenile Reentry Grant (JRG). However, while OYCR administers these two grants, they are part of OYCRs overall budget, and the funds do not flow through OYCR.

COLLABORATION AMONG LOCAL AND STATE AGENCIES

To develop a cohesive, youth-centered system of care, strong collaboration is needed across local and state agencies and systems. Effective implementation requires aligned vision, shared responsibility, and coordinated efforts across probation, behavioral health, education, the courts, the state, and community-based organizations. To move toward this type of collaboration, OYCR and probation departments have developed and strengthened partnerships across the youth justice system.

Building a Collaborative Infrastructure

To support a more coordinated youth justice system, OYCR participates in and facilitates advisory boards, workgroups, and local councils that bring together probation, education, behavioral health, CBOs, and other stakeholders. These collaborations are focused on identifying barriers, developing strategies, strengthening cross-system partnerships, and ensuring policies and programs are responsive to youths' diverse needs.

Workgroups and committees are facilitated by OYCR as part of their mission to support the realigned youth justice system

Education Advisory Board

- **Who**: Juvenile Probation Departments, County Offices of Education, and other stakeholders.
- **What**: Meets monthly to identify barriers that justice-involved youth face in accessing higher education and career opportunities, and to develop strategies for overcoming these barriers.

State Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (SACJJDP)

- **Who**: OYCR Executive Steering Committee on behalf of the Governor. Serves as California's federally required State Advisory Group, as mandated by the Juvenile Justice Reauthorization Act of 2018, which requires states receiving Title II funds to establish a committee to advise on Title II activities.
- **What**: Participates in the review of California's Title II three-year plan and provides recommendations to ensure compliance.

Restorative Justice Advisory Committee

- **Who:** Nine community-based organizations, one county probation department, and the Youth and Prosecutor's Alliance.
- **What:** Meets monthly to align efforts of probation departments, behavioral health, and CBOs to promote individual and institutional accountability through healing practices.

CBO Capacity Building Workgroup

- **Who:** Group of nine state leaders who work for or with CBOs.
- **What:** Focuses on strengthening CBOs' ability to serve justice-involved youth and their families by identifying capacity gaps and providing TA, training, and a community of learning to build and strengthen stability and knowledge for the 8 CBOs awarded $500K over two years; Advises the Sierra Foundation in implementing The Center's CBO Capacity Development Project.

Child Welfare Council Youth Justice Committee

- **Who:** A diverse group (probation chiefs, behavioral health professionals, judges, attorneys, youth advocates, individuals with lived experiences, and educators) led by three co-chairs and as a subcommittee of the California Child Welfare Council.
- **What:** Provides technical assistance and meets quarterly to advance alternatives to incarceration, expand educational resources, build CBO capacity, and support the development of the Stepping Home model with UCLA; One of their first priorities was identifying a recommended approach to step-downs for youth in SYTFs.

Juvenile Justice Commissions (JJC) and Juvenile Justice Coordinating Councils (JJCC)

- **Who:** JJC and JJCC are local bodies required by JJRBG funding to monitor youth justice practices and advise on the development and implementation of county-level youth justice plans.
- **What:** OYCR staff have participated in 330 local commissions and committee meetings, including JJCs, JJCCs, and SB 823 Realignment subcommittees, to stay informed and strengthen partnerships.

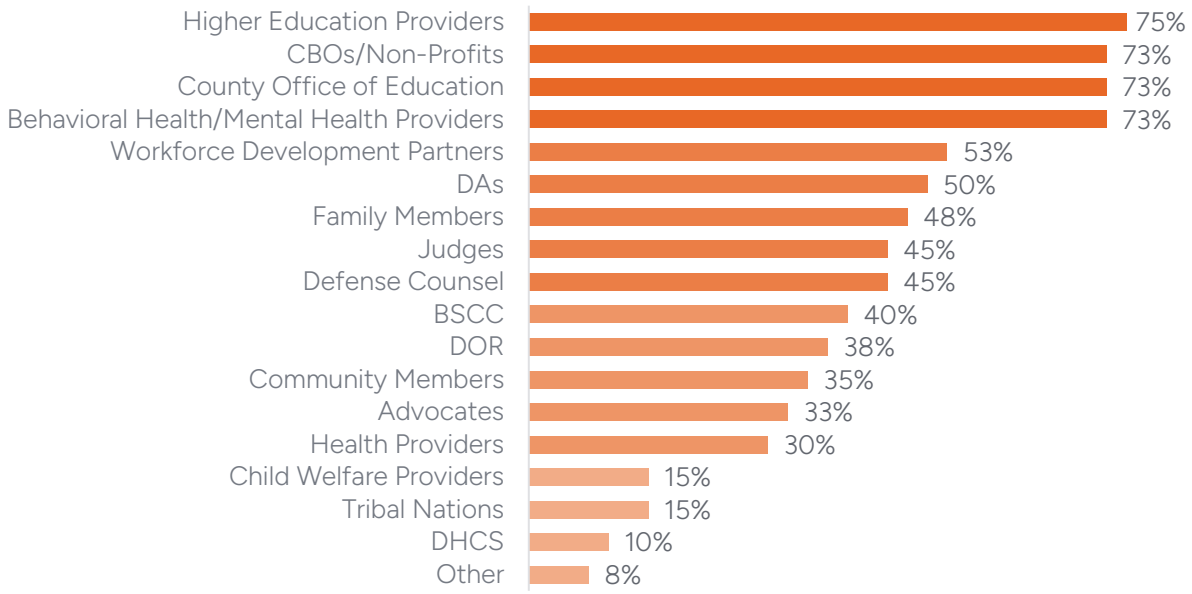
> **When I think about who was at the table for JJCC, it was really people who could offer alternatives for folks who are incarcerated, whether it's an experience or it was an effort to reduce sentencing timelines to give people hope.**
>
> *- Board of Supervisor Respondent, 2024*

Local, County-Based Partnerships

To support the SYTF youth population locally, counties strengthened existing and/or developed new partnerships. Most county probation departments completing the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment agreed that they strengthened collaboration with youth justice system stakeholders (92%, n = 34/37).[30] As seen in the figure below, counties commonly strengthened relationships with higher education providers, CBOs, County Offices of Education, and behavioral health/mental health.

92% of responding counties strengthened collaboration with systems stakeholders to support service delivery

Figure 7. Percentage of Counties who Strengthened Partnerships with Juvenile Justice Systems Stakeholders



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey (N = 40).

All counties developed a subcommittee within their multiagency juvenile justice coordinating council.[31] The subcommittee, chaired or co-chaired by the county chief probation officer, includes members from the district attorney's office, public defender's office, social services, mental health, education, the court, and the community.

Stakeholders described coming together to discuss the overall transition plan for the implementation of the DJJ realignment reform. Many stakeholders referenced the value of the collaborative input that the subcommittees provide, though some had varying opinions about the usefulness and/or inclusiveness of these committees. Participation in the committees will vary year by year due to transitions and changes in involvement. In 2024, while all counties had developed a subcommittee, five of them were not fully formed.[xxxvi]

[30] Interpret with caution, as some counties may have already had strong relationships with these providers and agencies prior to realignment. Reported increases may reflect additional collaboration efforts with existing partners rather than entirely new relationships.
[31] Under Welf. & Inst. Code § 1995F, Section 749.22

CENTERING YOUTH VOICE

Youth voice is central to the development of a responsive youth justice system. Local and state agencies are working to center young people's voices in policy and practices, programming and design, and leadership councils like the Youth Advisory Board designed for consistent feedback.

OYCR Youth Advisory Board

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB), developed within OYCR's Systems Change and Equity Division, provides a platform for youth with lived experiences to shape youth justice policy and practice.

"There are a few things that give me hope for California's youth justice transformation. One, youths who are systems-involved today are guiding change."

- Formerly Justice-Involved Youth, Voices of Youth Justice: I am Not an Outlier

Purpose and activities:

- YAB aims to advance a truly rehabilitative youth justice system that centers the youth voice.
- YAB currently includes 25 young people who meet weekly, with one meeting per month open to the public for questions.

Guiding values:

- YAB operates with a commitment to integrity, innovation, respect, uplift, and empathy, creating a culture of trust and collaboration that empowers young people to shape policies and practices.

Contributions:

- Helped shape projects such as the Youth Dignity Guide, the Social Changery report, the Stepping Home Model briefs, and the development of this report's interview questions.[xxxvii]
- Led workshops for OYCR staff and programmed a track at the Youth Justice Summit
- Participated and presented at national conferences.

Photos obtained from OYCR Instagram, 2024

Ombuds Division

The OYCR Ombuds Division operates independently to provide youth in custody, their families, staff, and members of the public with an impartial channel to raise concerns about if youth's rights have been violated or ignored, or concerns about the condition of the facility and to resolve them where possible.

> **"There's more light…on the practices of what happens in these facilities because of the confidentiality and the privacy rights of youth in the juvenile system…so I'm really excited about the Ombuds Office. I hope it continues to grow, and their capacity continues to grow."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Purpose and Activities

- Investigates complaints as an impartial investigator in local facilities and ensures that youth understand their rights and that these rights are upheld. [32]
- Conducts annual site visits to county-run facilities.
- Provides a direct channel for youth and families to raise concerns, accessible via toll-free phone (with English and Spanish options), email, and mail.[33]
- Hosts trainings for probation, public defenders, child welfare, and advocacy groups about youth rights.

Expanded Authority Under New Bills

Since the passage of SB 823, three bills have expanded the authority and impact of the Ombuds Division.

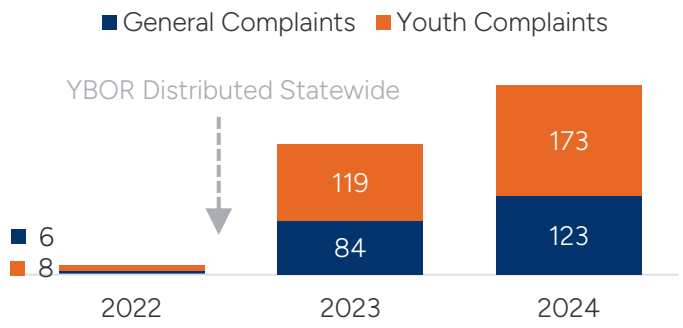
- SB 187 provided the Ombuds Division the legal right to access youth facilities and records within 48 hours of receiving notice, strengthening its ability to respond quickly and investigate concerns.
- AB 2417 established the Youth Bill of Rights (YBOR; see Appendix 7), ensuring youth know their rights while in custody. The YBOR is available in Spanish and English, with ongoing translation efforts in effect (four additional languages).
- AB 505 provided the Ombuds Division access to youth case files without court approval or advance notice, access to youth and facilities with no advance notice, and the ability to take notes and make audio or video recordings. It also mandated annual site visits of all juvenile facilities at least once a year.

Contributions

The Ombuds Division visited every facility statewide, with the YBOR now displayed in each. In addition, the division handled 203 complaints in 2023 (84 general and 119 youth) and 296 complaints (123 general and 119 youth) in 2024, reflecting increased youth awareness and engagement. Common complaint themes from the complaints reported to the Ombuds Division included staffing, conditions of confinement and abuse/excessive force (for more details see Appendix 8). [34] Three themes arose regarding youth in SYTFs: (1) not being able to see siblings for multiple years, (2) lack of access to college courses and vocational programs, (3) lack of developmentally inappropriate commissary/incentive options.[35, xxxviii]

[32] Facilities include juvenile halls, SYTFs, camps, and ranches
[33] This toll-free line was implemented in August of 2022
[34] Complaints are reflective of all youth in juvenile correctional facilities across California, not just the SYTF population
[35] Data provided anecdotally by OYCR ombudsperson division

Figure 8. Number of Youth and General Population Complaints Reported to the Ombuds Division[36]



Source: OYCR Ombuds Division data request

Complaint increases may be related, in part, to the statewide distribution of the YBOR and increase in annual site visits, as youth became more aware of their rights.

Local Efforts to Prioritize Youth Voice and Perspective

Youth voice and participation are central to enhancing transparency and guiding the California youth justice system to better outcomes. Many court and probation stakeholders mentioned ways their counties involved youth in leadership opportunities to ensure their voices and perspectives were heard. Two counties seek regular feedback to gauge how youth are doing, using climate surveys to track trends and changes over time. Additional examples from interviews and focus groups include:

Youth Advisory Committees

Six counties leverage Youth Advisory Boards/Councils where youth gather to discuss what is working well, identify areas they would like to change, and events they wish to host, and raise concerns to probation on behalf of all youth. In these counties, youth are nominated by staff and/or peers and go through an application process. Typically, two young people per unit and/or placement are selected for a term.[37] One county mentioned having three separate councils, one for those in juvenile hall, one for those in SYTF units, and one for those in an LRP as the needs of these groups may vary.

- Impact: Stakeholders shared that youth advocated for more personalized touches, which resulted in changes to the design of a facility, upgraded mattresses, and more. Additionally, one county noted the Youth Advisory Council hosts a car show every summer, which has continued to be an engaging activity for youth and the community alike.

Youth Leadership Initiatives

Five counties shared examples of youth stepping into leadership roles, such as facilitating programs, interning, and designing curriculum. Examples include:

- Youth facilitate unit orientations and the culture they wish to develop and protect.
- Youth collaborated with CBO program facilitators to develop a peer mentorship program within their facility.
- Youth participate as custody interns and are trained in public speaking. They have presented to teacher unions and businesses, and at conferences.
- Youth student interns are developing curriculum with a local university on compassion, empathy, forgiveness, nonviolent communication, and cognitive distortions.

[36] Basic print-out of YBOR was sent to all juvenile facilities in 2023. Printed materials were distributed in 2024.
[37] Units are within a juvenile facility; placement can include LRPs

- Youth on probation are **hired as interns** to assist with high school course work, maintain parks, and help in the library.
- Youth developed and **submitted a proposal** to probation for a guide dog training program which was subsequently implemented successfully.

> **This kid, he trained his dog … and he was so in love with the dog … A family was coming to adopt him, and he was so broken hearted, but he now had the tools to deal with it. He wrote this wonderful letter to the family… and I'm telling you, a year ago, no way that would have happened.**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

CONTINUED POLICY MOMENTUM SINCE SB 823

The following bills indicate a continued evolution since SB 823 toward a system that prioritizes transparency, youth rights, and educational access.

	Senate Bill 92 (2021): Mandated the closure of DJJ and required courts to set baseline and maximum terms of confinement and approve IRPs ✦ **Returning youth to county care with court approval over IRPs**
	Senate Bill 132 (2021): Created the California Institute on Law, Neuroscience, and Education, an interdisciplinary, multi-campus collaboration integrating bench science with law and policy ✦ Empowering literacy and learning for California's children and youth
	Assembly Bill 2417 (2022): Expanded the Youth Bill of Rights to youth in any juvenile facility, not just DJJ ✦ **Creating age-appropriate resources to understand youth rights in all juvenile facilities**
	Assembly Bill 2361 (2022): Required by courts to find clear and convincing evidence that a youth is not amenable to rehabilitation under the local court's jurisdiction ✦ **Providing more youth with access to county-funded rehabilitative services**
	Assembly Bill 169 (2024): Shifted responsibility to OYCR to implement the Federal Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018 ✦ **Centralizing and streamlining efforts for consistent and equitable treatment of youth**
	Assembly Bill 2176 (2024): Required OYCR to develop an annual report on chronic absenteeism rates in juvenile court schools and required OYCR to investigate and provide technical assistance if the school has a rate of more than 15% ✦ **Reducing barriers that prevent students from attending juvenile court schools**

Youth Justice Involvement Trends Post SB 823

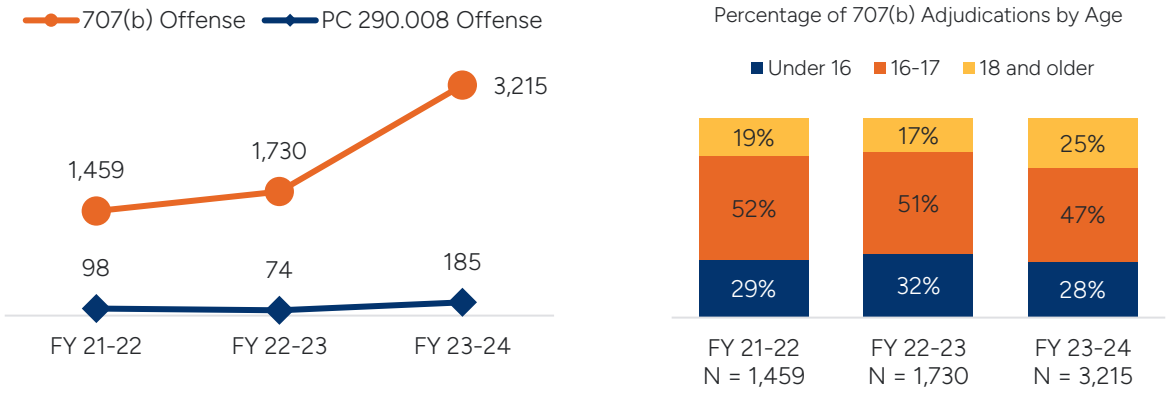
> If we don't catch people before they come into the system, then I think it's our responsibility to make sure they only touch it once.
>
> Board of Supervisor Stakeholder Respondent, 2024

Youth Justice Involvement Trends Post SB 823

POST-SB 823 ADJUDICATIONS

According to counties' AB 102 data submissions, the total number of adjudications for 707(b) and PC 290.008 offenses has increased, post-SB 823. Youth under the age of 16 comprise about 30% of adjudications, while youth ages 16-17 make up about half of adjudications each year. There was a slight increase among adjudications for those ages 18 and older who were adjudicated within the juvenile-justice system in FY 2023-24 (25%) compared with FY 2021-22 (19%) and FY 2022-23 (17%). COVID-19 related disruptions may complicate interpretation of increase. County-level reforms also impact statewide totals. For instance, one large county's 707(b) adjudications were 15% of the total in FY 2021-22, and 40% of in FY 2023-24. As a result, this county's age composition may impact changes in statewide proportions and may not represent patterns across all counties.

Figure 9. Post-SB 823 Adjudications, by Offense and Age (AB 102 Reports)



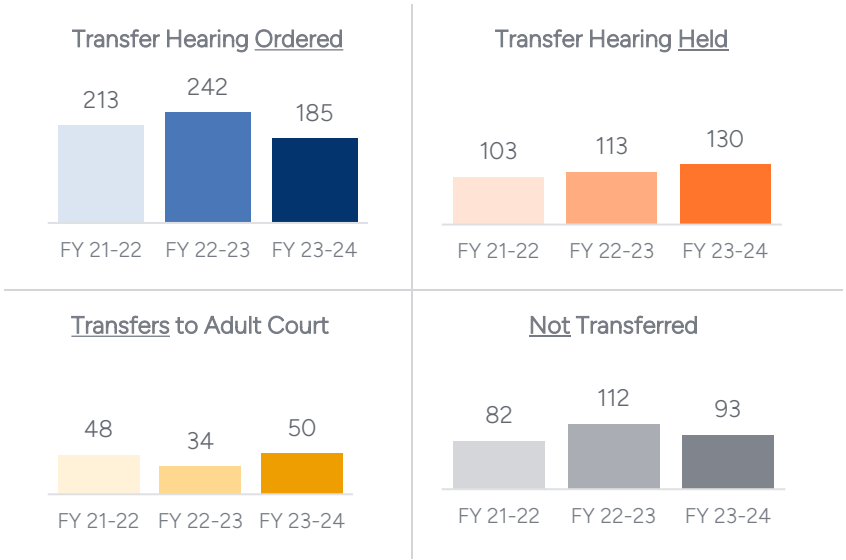
Source: AB 102 data by county (B1 and B2).
Note: Interpret counts with caution. Trends represent statewide totals. Patterns may not be consistent across all counties. Comparisons between FY 2021-22 and FY 2023-24 may also be difficult due to COVID-related disruptions.

POST-SB 823 TRANSFERS TO ADULT COURT

Counties also report on post-SB 823 in their AB 102 reports for all youth through the age of 25.[38] Since FY 2021-22, an average of 213 youth had a transfer hearing ordered, and on average, 113 transfer hearings were held. The total number of youth transferred to adult court has fluctuated slightly, with an increase from 34 transfers in FY 2022-23 to 50 in 2023-24. However, these patterns should be interpreted with caution as many counties were in early transition periods during FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23 and the global COVID-19 pandemic had a prolonged impact on court operations. County judicial reforms also impact how cases are handled. For example, one large county's adult transfer hearings comprised an average of 9% of statewide hearings each fiscal year. Additionally, this county's transfers to adult court increased from 4% of the statewide total in FY 2021-22 to 14% in FY 2023-24. Thus, statewide patterns may be disproportionately attributed to certain counties and are not consistent across the state.

[38]AB 102 data may also include a small number of youth over the age of 25 who had a transfer hearing. Preliminary reasons why patterns may not match historical reports of transfers to adult court include the inclusion of 18–25-year-olds in AB 102 (which may exacerbate the likelihood of transfer hearings and transfers), as well as the transition from calendar year to fiscal year. Additional insights from counties completing the AB 102 reports may identify additional differences.

Figure 10. Post-SB 823 Transfers to Adult Court (AB 102 Reports)



Counts reflect *statewide* totals within each fiscal year. Patterns may not be consistent across all counties. Comparisons should not be made between each category as counts do not reflect the path of individual cases.

AB 102 totals also do not align with historical DOJ counts (reported in calendar years). See OYCR AB 102 report (forthcoming) for additional analyses and insights.

Source: AB 102 data by county (D1, D2a, D2b, and D2c).
Note: Represents statewide totals. Patterns may not be consistent across all counties. Counts in each category are not intended to be a direct subsample of each stage of the transfer process as each case may not reach all stages within the same fiscal year.

Stakeholder Perspective: Transfers to Adult Court

Probation and court stakeholders shared that they are witnessing increases in adult court transfers in some of their counties. Stakeholders cited possible contributing factors such as:

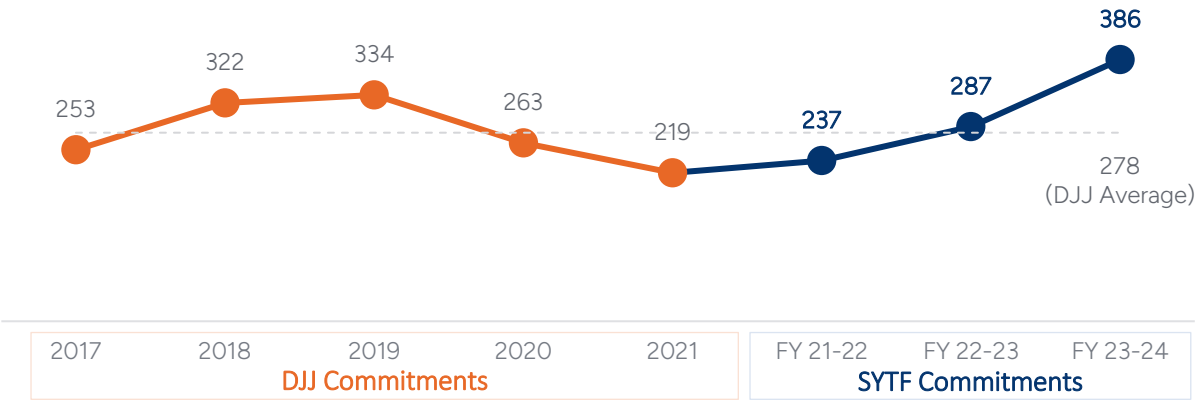
- **Closure of DJJ:** The decision to transfer youth to adult court may be impacted by the DJJ no longer being an option for the most serious, violent offenses.
- **Available local alternatives:** Transfers may be more likely when the court perceives no viable local alternatives. According to one stakeholder, district attorneys may be more likely to file for a transfer hearing if they perceive there to be no local alternatives.[39]
- **Youth preference:** According to stakeholders, some youth who are over 18 reportedly did not want to remain in juvenile court or return to juvenile hall, in part because they view the programming as too juvenile. Instead, they preferred to be transferred to adult court.

SYTF COMMITMENTS

The figure below shows total DJJ commitments and SYTF commitments following the closure of DJJ, statewide. Between 2017 and 2021, there were an average of 278 DJJ commitments, with a peak in 2019 (334) and a decline in 2020 and 2021, likely due to decarceration efforts related to COVID-19. The transition period showed a gradual increase in SYTF commitments in FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23, which may show a post-COVID rebound as well as emerging sites and practices within counties. However, there were 386 SYTF commitments reported for FY 2023-24, which is 16% more than the 2019 DJJ commitments (pre-COVID peak).

[39] This reflects a stakeholder's opinion. While DAs can file for a transfer hearing, the judge is responsible for the final determination.

Figure 11. DJJ and SYTF Commitment Comparison CY 2016 through FY 2023-24



Source: DJJ Commitment Reports (Total DJJ Commitments) and AB 102 data by county (A).
Note: FY 2022-23 total equals SYTF commitments minus the total number recalled and committed to STYF due to DJJ closure (140). DJJ commitments and SYTF commitments are an imperfect, but best available, comparison. DJJ commitments were reported in calendar years, while SYTF commitments are counted by fiscal year. Interpret with caution.

Further, 37 of California's 58 counties reported at least one DJJ commitment in 2019 and/or SYTF commitment in FY 2023-24.[40] Among them, 41% had fewer youth commitments, and 11% had the same number of commitments between these two points in time. About half of the counties had more youth SYTF commitments compared with DJJ commitments. More specifically, 24% had a net increase of 1-4 youth, 11% increased by 5-9 youth, and 14% had 10 or more youth compared with their 2019 DJJ commitments.

Because data for each stage of a youth's adjudication and disposition process are limited, a summary of total DJJ commitments by calendar year, compared with total SYTF commitments by fiscal year, offers a preliminary option to identify and monitor net widening. However, it is important to note that an exploration of all stages of the arrest, diversion, adjudication, and disposition process will give a more thorough picture of net widening. The next section includes insights into net widening from key informants and county stakeholders.

NET WIDENING

"Net widening" occurs when more youth become incarcerated in SYTFs than would have been incarcerated in DJJ prior to DJJ's closure.[xxxix] Net widening results from policy change (particularly alternative/diversion strategies) having the opposite effect (e.g., more youth subjected to the juvenile justice system) and/or the new strategies do not reach their intended populations (e.g., youth with more serious offenses). Instead, youth with lower-level offenses would see greater system involvement.

Because SYTFs were meant to replace DJJ, advocates point out that youth populations should be approximately the same. Advocates remain concerned that as counties develop SYTFs, some youth may face years in a secure facility when they may have received a lesser disposition before DJJ's closure.[xl]

Stakeholder Perspective: Net Widening

Some stakeholders raised concerns that more youth are committed to SYTFs than would have been placed in DJJ prior to its closure. For example, one county reported that they historically had two or three youth at DJJ but currently have approximately 20 youth in their SYTF. Another court stakeholder shared

[40] These two data points were used for comparison to identify a pre-COVID baseline and the most recent AB 102 data following the transition period as youth were recalled from DJJ to counties.

that while they typically had about 50 youth at DJJ, they now have 80 youth in their SYTF, suggesting to them a substantial rise in secure treatment placements. They cited possible contributing factors such as:

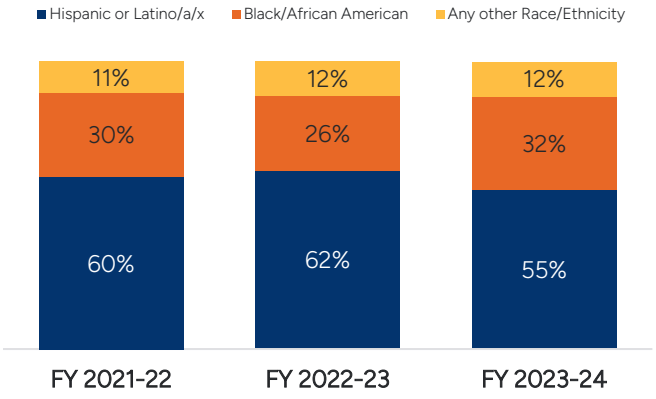
- **SYTFs may be perceived as less harsh than DJJ**: Stakeholders mentioned that SYTFs may be seen as more lenient than DJJ, in part because youth remain closer to home and can be transitioned to less restrictive, step-down placements.
- **Being closer to home may make SYTFs seem more acceptable:** Because youth are in their "own backyard" and closer to family, SYTF placements may be perceived as more palatable. One court stakeholder noted that the defense had challenged only one SYTF commitment, compared to historically challenging every DJJ commitment.
- **Increased court confidence in SYTFs:** Others mentioned that the courts have a lot of confidence in SYTF programming, making them more inclined to use these placements.

RACIAL IDENTITIES OF YOUTH COMMITTED TO SYTFS

At least one Court Stakeholder respondent raised concerns about the role of racism/disproportionate treatment of youth of color in the justice system historically and into the present. Further elaborating on this point, a CBO Stakeholder respondent described how the perpetual system involvement of youth of color at disproportionate rates feels like a consistent attack on youth and their futures.

Statewide arrest data and county-level AB 102 data further support these anecdotes as nine out of 10 youth committed to a SYTF between FY 2021-22 and FY 2023-24 identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x or Black/African American. The proportion of youth committed to a SYTF who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x decreased slightly between FY 2021-22 (60%) and FY 2023-24 (55%).

Figure 12. Racial Identities of Youth Committed to SYTF



Source: AB 102 Data by County (A)

The proportion of youth committed to a SYTF who were Black/African American increased slightly between FY 2021-22 (30%) and the most recent data (32%). White/Caucasian youth comprised about half of the "Any other Race/Ethnicity" category in FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23, and 65% of "Any other Race/Ethnicity" in FY 2023-24.[41] The proportion of White/Caucasian youth increased 36% between FY 2021-22 and FY 2023-24 (from 14 to 31).

Black and Hispanic youth are disproportionately represented at all stages of system involvement. Research shows that Hispanic/Latine(x) and Black individuals are disproportionately stopped by police, relative to population proportions.[xli]

[41] White/Caucasian, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Native/Indigenous, Multi-racial, other, or unknown ethnicities are grouped together to maintain confidentiality for groups whose totals statewide were < 12.

Overall Perceptions of DJJ Realignment

> “I’m absolutely proud and I get emotional thinking of us finally closing down very horrible facilities, very harmful facilities.”
>
> CBO Stakeholder Respondent, **2024**

Overall Perceptions of DJJ Realignment

Over the last few decades, there has been a focus on rehabilitative care that aligned with the goals of SB 823, as evidenced by decreasing arrest rates as well as the programming and collaborations in place prior to SB 823. With the enactment of this new legislation, there was hope for a more restorative and developmentally appropriate approach for all youth in California, including those who had committed the most serious offenses.

BENEFITS OF THE REFORM

Most stakeholders reiterated that SB 823 created new opportunities to improve the quality of care for youth. Proximity to home enabled youth to maintain connections and relationships with family/supportive adults, their own children, and their local communities. The closure of state-run facilities caused an emotional response from some CBO stakeholders and advocates who reflected on the end of an era marked by a system widely criticized for its violence, punitive culture, and lasting trauma inflicted on California's young people.

> **"I'm absolutely proud and I get emotional thinking of us finally closing down very horrible facilities, very harmful facilities."**
>
> *- CBO Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Many shared the belief that county-based care can provide a safer, more rehabilitative option, which was especially true of most stakeholders who witnessed the conditions of DJJ firsthand. Stakeholders saw the potential for improved programming with the smaller numbers of youth, where individualized and therapeutic approaches could be used to meet youth's needs across a continuum focused on healing and the least restrictive options possible. Many felt the legislation embedded a structure that prioritized a strength-based approach to rehabilitation efforts, including individual rehabilitation plans (IRPs), time-off commitments in progress review hearings, and less restrictive placements (LRPs). Probation stakeholders were reenvisioning what was possible in their youth facilities, repurposing spaces, expanding visitation policies, and offering programming that they witnessed positively impact the youth.

> **"This is the legislation working right. We would never have had this opportunity, and this kid would have never had this before."**
>
> *- Probation Stakeholder Respondent, 2024 (watching youth creatively engaged in the music studio)*

Overall, this reform provides youth with the potential for greater continuity of care, as relationships with providers and mentors built throughout a youth's commitment can continue post-release. Stakeholders witnessed more partners at the table to support this youth population and saw the value in opportunities for local strategic partnerships, noting participation in JJCCs/JCCs, town halls, and court collaboration committees.

CHALLENGES WITH IMPLEMENTATION

However, as with any large shift in complex systems, there was a **wide range of challenges** that affected implementation, especially in the initial stages.

Initial Challenges

Stakeholders described a lack of resources, insufficient time and funding, unclear guidance, and inadequate infrastructure with limited capacity for a smooth transition. As early as 2020, Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) raised many of these concerns in a press release.

Within all stakeholder groups, respondents described **unclear guidance** regarding regulations on how to implement the transition. Some described challenges in understanding how funding was to be distributed to adequately prepare for the influx of youth and their more complex needs. Others, such as CBO and court stakeholders, highlighted tensions regarding the interpretation of the legislation's intent for community-based care, reinforcing that using juvenile halls as SYTFs does not meet the rehabilitative, therapeutic intent of the law.

Almost all stakeholders explained that the transition timeline felt unrealistic, resulting in a rushed and abrupt transition with **little time to create or implement plans and programming**. COVID-19 coincided with the transition, compounding planning challenges and staffing shortages. Almost all stakeholders acknowledged that by the time of DJJ intake closure, counties were not adequately equipped to provide the same type of **specialized services** as DJJ, such as intensive mental health services, sexual behavior treatment programs, substance abuse programs, and gang intervention services.

> **"It wasn't enough time for us to develop a program. This was during a pandemic, and so, we would have to develop the programming, develop the facilities for the programming to take place in, train the people to do the programming, contract with the people who have proprietary rights over the particular programming… all that stuff had to be done, and we simply did not have enough time."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Court and probation stakeholders further described challenges for **youth returning to their counties from DJJ**. Returning youth were accustomed to a highly structured environment, with longstanding programs and the ability to move freely around DJJ facilities. The lack of equivalent programming and confinement to a smaller space was often met with resistance. Stakeholders described that some returning youth had substance use issues, maladaptive behaviors, and a level of sophistication that counties were not accustomed to or prepared for, including concerns about potential negative influence on younger youth.

Persistent and Overarching Challenges

With the decentralization of the DJJ system and shifts in authority at both state and local levels, stakeholders from all groups described a lack of clear accountability for oversight and outcomes of youth. Further, implementation efforts varied widely by county. Local systems of care vary across parameters such as county size, funding, staffing, facility type and size, local program availability, population characteristics, judicial policies and procedures, and access to resources/community providers. Thus, implementations were inconsistent, causing many stakeholders to voice concern about the equity of

opportunity for youth across facilities and locales. The early stages of preparation, decision-making, and implementation posed challenges that stakeholders are still working to overcome.

SHARED COMMITMENT TO LONG-TERM VISION

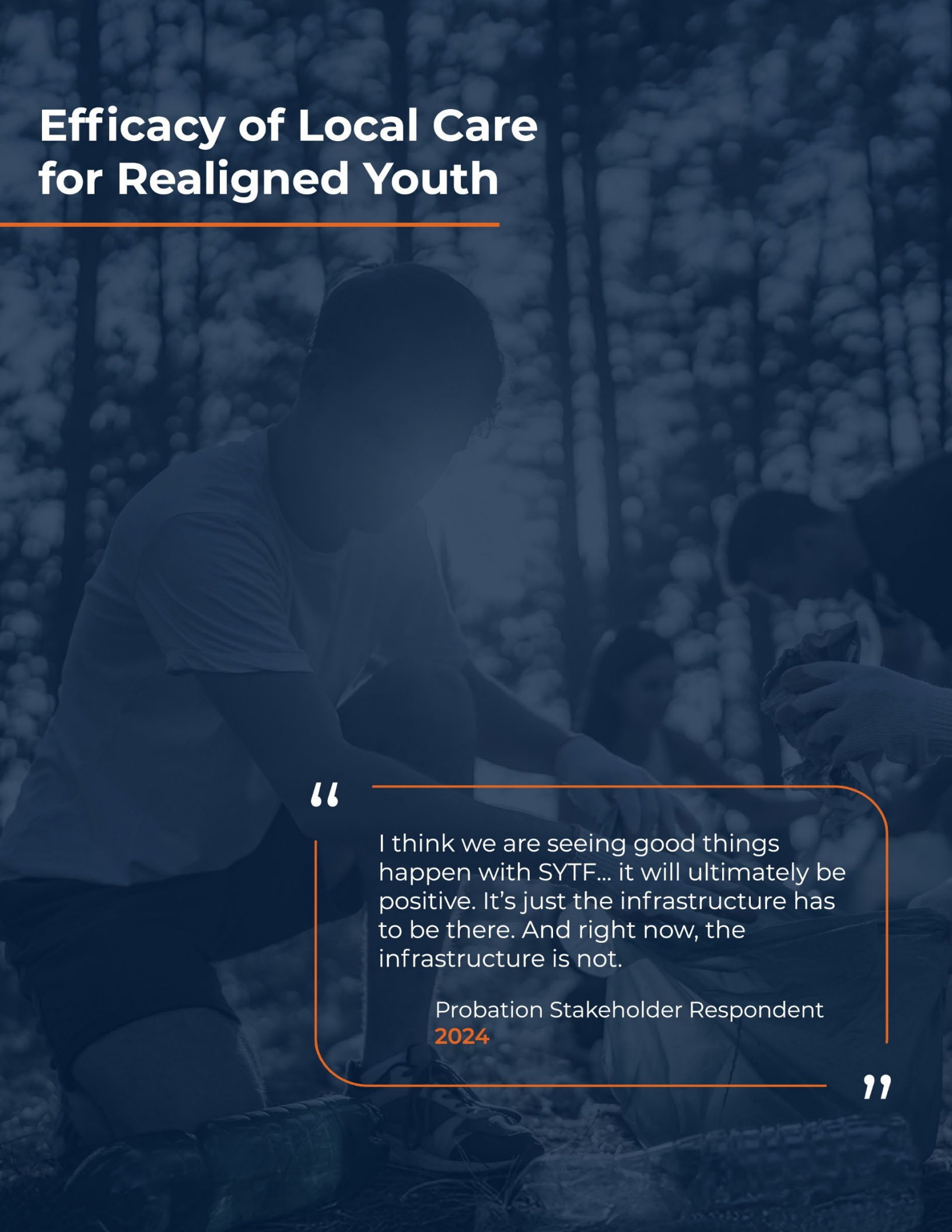
Many emphasized that a new way of thinking is required to actualize the intention for a SYTF system of care, a deeper transformation in mindset and culture to shift to healing-based approaches. As one CBO stakeholder and advocate described, we still operate under a retributive mindset of "harm-for-harm, and that's really complicated to undo." Stakeholders conveyed that this shift is not automatic and requires time and intentionality.

> **"The challenge is a culture shift… we're talking about decades."**
>
> *- CBO Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

While many described the DJJ realignment as "learning to fly a plane while building it," stakeholders are seeing progress across the state as infrastructure develops. For some, this progress is not fast enough. Many emphasized just how crucial care is for youth at this pivotal junction in their lives, affecting their life trajectory. All stakeholder groups echoed this sentiment, describing a dedication to push forward to ensure youth get what they need despite barriers.

This short overview of the initial perceptions, strengths, and challenges of the DJJ realignment underscores the monumental efforts required for cross-agency, multisystemic change. While many viewed the legislation as necessary to community-based models of care, at the same time, concerns emerged about the intent of the law being fully realized as youth remain in county-run carceral settings without access to the resources and programming available through a centralized system. Yet, despite the differences in opinion across groups and individuals, all stakeholders expressed a common desire to provide youth with opportunities to help them heal and return to their communities with the potential for a better future, ending the cyclical loop back into the system.

Efficacy of Local Care for Realigned Youth



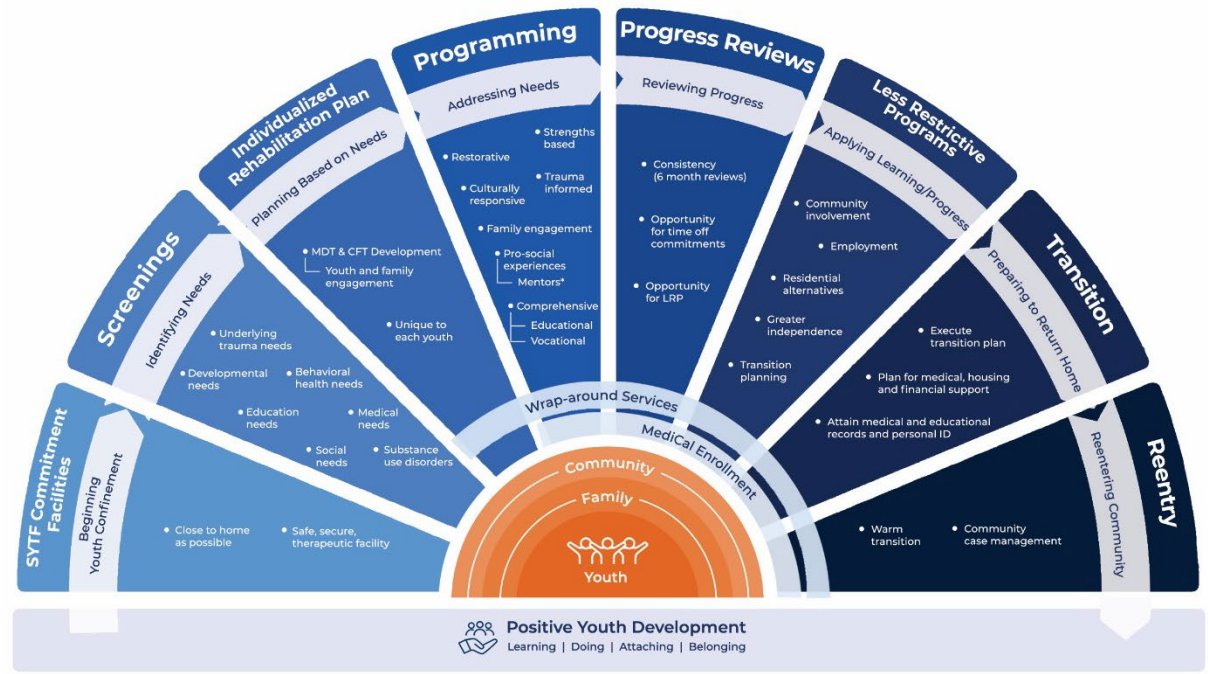
> "I think we are seeing good things happen with SYTF... it will ultimately be positive. It's just the infrastructure has to be there. And right now, the infrastructure is not."
>
> Probation Stakeholder Respondent
> **2024**

Efficacy of Local Care for Realigned Youth

The framework used throughout this report is grounded in the Developmental Theory of Positive Youth Development and informed by the Stepping Home Model to capture the desired process of the full cycle of services focused on restorative justice, rehabilitation, and successful reentry for realigned youth. The model, developed by OYCR in partnership with UCLA, outlines a comprehensive process for all youth that starts at the beginning of a youth's confinement in a SYTF and continues through their safe and successful transition back to their communities as thriving, successful young adults. The model transitions the youth out of the SYTF and gradually increases involvement in their community until they are successfully home without supervision from county oversight committees (see Appendix 9).

The framework begins with the stage of SYTF commitment, when a youth would technically be considered a realigned youth.[42] While these steps generally fall along a continuum, as depicted in the graphic below, they may overlap or occur simultaneously. The graphic describes the ideals for each stage, though implementation may vary by individual and county (for a horizontal orientation and closer view of the image, see Appendix 10).

Steps Along the Continuum for SYTF Commitments



The following sections provide a closer look at specific steps along the realigned system (for more detail on the process prior to commitment, please refer to Appendix 11).[43] Drawing from stakeholder interviews, focus groups, surveys and youth voice, each subsection summarizes county progress and practices, stakeholder perspective, challenges, and positive practices and strategies related to SYTF facilities, screenings, individual rehabilitation plans (IRPs), programming, progress review hearings, less restrictive programs (LRPs), and transition and reentry support.

[42] Post-adjudication
[43] For an understanding of the development of the framework, refer to the methodology section of this report

SECURE YOUTH TREATMENT FACILITIES

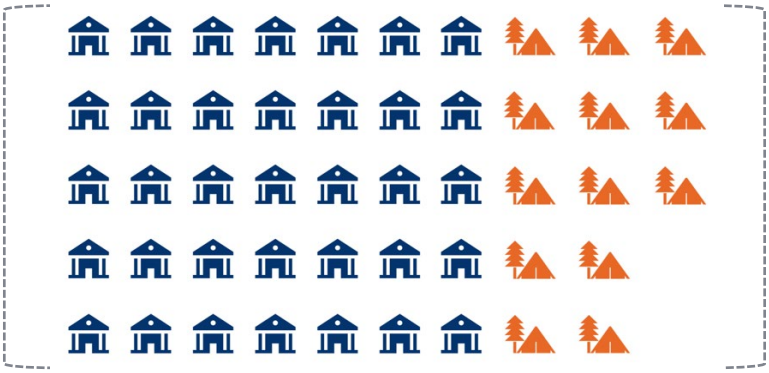
With the passage of SB 823, California committed to shifting responsibility for youth to local jurisdictions with the intention of providing restorative care close to youths' families and communities. Section 1(e) of SB 823 describes the intent to end the practice of placing youth in custodial or confinement facilities. The Stepping Home Model reinforces the need for safe, secure, and therapeutic facilities by promoting a culture and environment of dignity and respect. This section describes the progress made in creating housing for youth in SYTFs, noting inherent challenges with the current SYTF model. It further explores staffing and family visitation and engagement practices for SYTFs, as well as youth experiences and perspectives within SYTFs.

Progress Across the State

To meet realignment requirements, counties were tasked with developing SYTFs for youth who would have previously been committed to DJJ. These housing units could be either stand-alone facilities or units within existing county facilities (e.g., juvenile halls, camps, or ranches). Some counties operate their own SYTFs while some contract with other counties. As of January 2025, 37 counties in California operate 48 SYTFs (see Appendix 12). The SYTF in Yuba County is operated through a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) with Colusa and Sutter. Most SYTFs are in juvenile halls (n = 35) and in camps (n = 13).

Breakdown of SYTF Facility Locations

73% of SYTFs are in local juvenile halls



27% are in camps

Source: 2024 BSCC SYTF Applications List provided by OYCR[44]

[44] Senate Bill 92 (Chapter 18, Statutes of 2021) requires counties proposing to establish a secure youth treatment facility (SYTF) to notify the Board of State and Community Corrections of the operation of the facility in a format designated by the Board

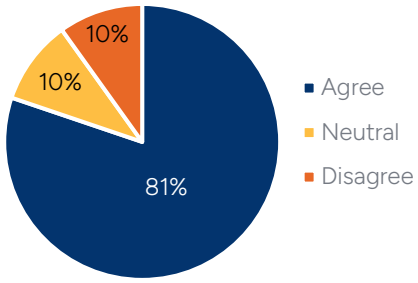
Facility Modifications

To support counties' infrastructure-related modification needs for the realignment, the State provided $110 million of funding for the secure treatment placements.[45] The amount provided to each county varied and was based on designated funding formulas.

According to the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey, 25 of the 31 responding counties (81%) reported making changes to their facilities to accommodate realigned youth populations (Figure 13).

Examples of modifications made to county facilities as reported in the YPFG expenditure report include:[xlii]

Figure 13. Modified facilities to serve realigned populations



Source: 2024 Post-Realignment Survey (N = 31). Excludes 13 missing or "N/A" responses. May exceed 100% due to rounding.

- **Homelike features**: Painted, restored floors, added storage for personal items, shifted from double occupancy to single occupancy beds, and added privacy stalls.
- **Security upgrades**: Security fencing, railings, cameras, and body scanners. As two probation stakeholders expressed, "[we added] increased security fencing around both of our facilities, so that the more secure the perimeter is, the more movement we can have inside."
- **Personalized touches:** New mattresses, sheets/pillows, journals, desks, video games, and laptops.
- **Transportation**: Vans for youth and family transport.
- **Facility maintenance:** Updated HVAC systems, electrical work, and weatherproofing.
- **Programming equipment:** Purchased programming equipment (e.g., musical instruments, welding materials, virtual simulation, solar training equipment), built greenhouses, outdoor kitchens, and recreation areas, and added exercise equipment.[46]

Overall, counties described physical facility upgrades to separate units by age, gender, severity of offense, and pre-post adjudication. Others described splitting wings/floors of the facilities to create tiers of most to least secure.

> **"You don't know how much paint makes a difference until you have it."**
>
> *- Probation Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

In reenvisioning space use for longer term care, probation and court stakeholders described repurposing rooms or adding additional spaces, including music studios, garden areas, chicken coops, higher education rooms with separate cubicles, common spaces with couches and televisions, automotive garages, basketball and volleyball courts, exercise areas, de-escalation rooms, sensory rooms, and aquaponic systems. Others described allowing youth to design murals on the facility walls. Some described offering or working toward

[45] Funding was provided by the state through AB178 and YPFG to address infrastructure-related needs
[46] Reported by large and medium counties

furloughs, where youth could access work or school in the community, thus **expanding access to opportunities** despite spatial limitations in facilities.

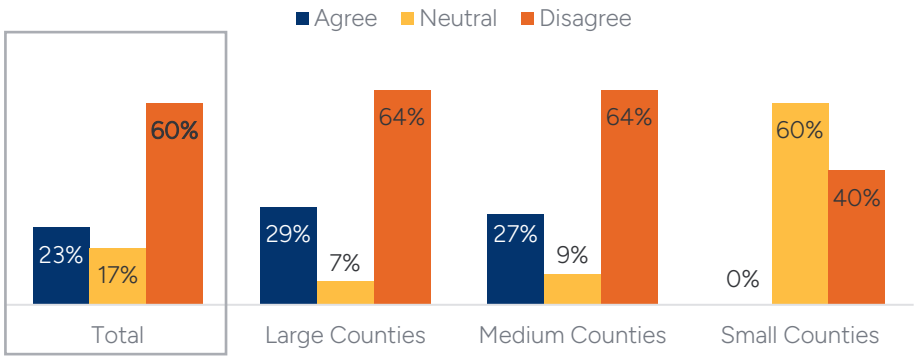
Others discussed policy changes, such as allowing youth to **personalize their rooms**, place items on their walls, and have their own furniture, such as a desk and a dresser. Some youth received more freedom of movement to interact, play games, and develop relationships. One county was starting a barter system, so youth could make purchases by gaining points/tokens. Despite the adaptations some counties were able to make, others have greater limitations. Due to space, resources, and staffing constraints, some youth do most of their programming in the same area as their living spaces.

Challenges with SYTF Facilities

Of the counties that responded to the 2024 Post-Realignment Survey, 60% said the awarded resources were not sufficient to implement all necessary facility changes (Figure 14). Small counties had higher rates of "neutral" responses. This may be due, in part, to their greater likelihood of contracting with other county facilities for SYTF, smaller facilities which limit expansion possibilities, and/or that they may receive less funding per funding formulas used in grant distributions.

Figure 14. Perceptions of Facility Funding Adequacy, Total and by County Size

60% of responding counties disagreed that funding was sufficient to implement necessary facility changes.



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments (N = 31).

Overall, despite modifications and efforts to lessen the carceral feel of the juvenile halls, stakeholders across all groups emphasized that **juvenile halls are inadequate for SYTF commitments**, as they were originally built for short-term detention rather than long-term stays. In interviews, 73% of probation stakeholders (16 out of 22) reinforced the sentiment that these facilities were **never intended for long-term use**, but due to lack of resources, time, and/or alternatives, they expressed having no other option than to convert existing juvenile halls to have SYTF units and/or dedicated beds. Despite this, CBO and court stakeholders voiced concerns, emphasizing that the intent of the law was for **community-based alternatives to confinement**. They felt that this was a missed opportunity for truly rehabilitative care outside of carceral settings.

Most probation stakeholders emphasized that juvenile halls were never intended for long-term stays, making it difficult to provide a rehabilitative environment.

Many juvenile halls in use today were built or expanded between 1997-2007, when $450 million was allocated to increase facility capacity in anticipation of a rise in youth crime that ultimately did not occur.[xliii] As a result, much of the infrastructure reflects a punitive era, standing in contrast to the intent outlined in Welf. & Inst. Code § 851, which states that a juvenile hall "shall be a safe and supportive

homelike environment." Despite efforts to create more therapeutic spaces, stakeholders noted that the physical structure and design of many facilities **continue to feel carceral** rather than rehabilitative and supportive.

Stakeholders provided further insight into the infrastructure-related challenges and limitations with SYTF facilities:

- **Architectural and design constraints limit capacity for redesign:** Probation and court stakeholders noted that the layout and architectural structure of many juvenile halls make major redesigns physically or financially unfeasible, making it nearly impossible to truly change the feeling of a carceral setting.

- **Inability to separate youth by need:** Many probation stakeholders noted concerns about their inability to group youth of different ages or offense severities in different units due to structural and space limitations, including concerns about the potential for negative peer influence or safety concerns. One board of supervisor stakeholder expressed his discomfort with the variation of ages in a shared space, noting that there is a big difference in development between a 13- and 25-year-old.

- **Space limitations restrict flexibility and programming:** CBO, court, and probation stakeholders described how many facilities lack sufficient room for diverse programming and activities, outdoor space, and freedom of movement, which are key components of a rehabilitative environment and youth development.

Compliance Issues Highlight Facility Limitations and Challenges

All SYTFs must comply with Title 15 and Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations, which set standards for facility operations, safety, and environment under the oversight of the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC).

As of February 2024, the BSCC cited violations in six facilities across two counties, largely related to: (1) staffing shortfalls which led to issues with room confinement, and access to youth programming and physical exercise; (2) lack of policy and procedures established for the SYTF population; and (3) missing orientation materials for the SYTF population.

Of concern to many across the state, Los Angeles's Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall and Central Juvenile Halls were ultimately closed due to being "unsuitable for housing youth" following the drug-overdose death of an 18-year-old in May 2023. The uniqueness of LA was described by one court stakeholder who explained, "LA is an aberration. We're just so big. And so, LA almost has to be dealt with separately…."

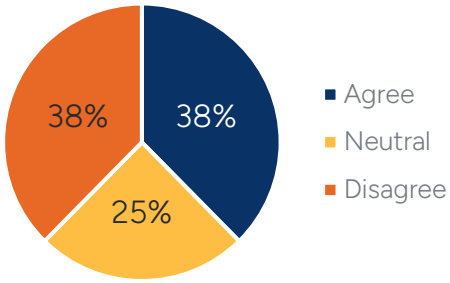
Youth Perspectives on Local SYTFs

Youth feedback largely aligned with the findings from the stakeholder interviews, which highlighted strides in converting old carceral spaces to long-term therapeutic facilities despite the persisting barriers. Welf. & Inst. Code § 851 states that a juvenile hall "shall be a safe and supportive homelike environment." Youths were asked about their sense of safety and comfort in SYTF facilities. Responses highlighted the range of youth experiences, including variations due to factors such as the timing of commitment and location of the facility.[47]

- In the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey, youth were asked whether their SYTF felt *safe and homelike*. Responses were mixed: 38% of youth agreed their SYTF felt safe and homelike (n = 6/16), 38% disagreed, and 25% were neutral.[48] One youth described, "For many of us, it's safer inside juvey than at home."
- In a survey conducted by the Center for Improving Youth Justice (n = 68), 75% of youth in SYTFs across four counties said they did not fear for their safety in the facilities, which is slightly more than 73% nationally.[xliv]
- In focus groups and interviews, some described their environment as stable, supportive, and safer than at home or at DJJ. Others raised serious concerns about poor conditions, lack of privacy, and gang activity that made the environment feel unsafe or stressful, further highlighting variability in youth experiences by county and by facility.

Youth participants shared mixed opinions on the comfort and safety of SYTFs.

Figure 15. SYTF Facility Felt Safe and Homelike



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16. May exceed 100% due to rounding.

"The hall provided everything I needed. Food, school, a roof over my head. I was in a situation where I was told I could change. I was in an environment where people would ask, 'How are you this week? Is there anything you wanna talk about?'" *- Youth Interview Respondent, 2024*	**"There was no structure and routine in my life. In the hall there is, and it has helped me to put stability back in my life."** *- Youth Interview Respondent, 2024*	**"I would do eating, workout, sleep, school all in one space. That was not normal... It's challenging because it is a jail."** *- Youth Focus Group Respondent, 2025*

Description of "Safe and Homelike"

In focus groups, youth were asked how they defined a safe and homelike environment within the context of their SYTF. Youth noted homelike touches, like carpets, sensory rooms, and engaging activities that helped to soften the institution's feel. One youth described his amazement that some facilities provided youth access to things like gaming systems. Others described the structure and predictability as

[47] Infrastructure, programming, and partnerships are in a state of evolution. Youth experience will vary dependent upon timing of SYTF commitment

[48] This question combines two distinct concepts (safety and comfort) into a single item as is stated in the Welf. & Inst. Code, which limits the ability to determine whether youth were reacting more to one aspect than the other.

comforting, especially knowing their routine and what to expect. Overall, youth explained that, above all, trusting relationships were most important. When staff were supportive and respectful, young people felt safer. In places where staff retaliated or young people did not feel respected, the environment felt unsafe.

SYTF Staffing

Probation stakeholders reinforced how critical adequate staffing levels are to provide youth supervision, facilitate and expand programming opportunities, and offer youth access to community-based activities. After the passing of SB 823, probation stakeholders explained the shift in range of the youth population required staff for separation requirements of youth by age, gender, severity of offense, and pre- and post-adjudication. To comply with Title 15 standards, minimum staff-to-youth ratios must be adhered to. As youth are in facilities for longer periods of time and up until the age of 25, staff are also needed to support key operations such as transporting youth to appointments, court hearings, furloughs, and step-downs. Thus, as more programs and rooms are in operation, more staff are required.

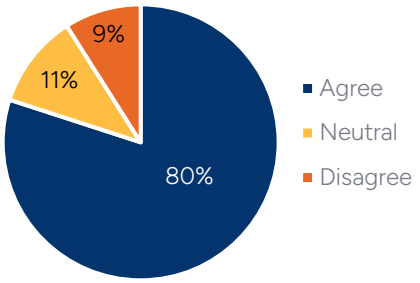
4 out of 5 responding counties adjusted staffing/HR to serve SB-823 realigned youth.

Challenges with Staffing

According to the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey, 80% of counties (n = 28/35) reported making staffing and/or human resource modifications to serve SB 823 realigned populations. Most participating counties felt the resources awarded were not adequate to implement necessary staffing and human resources modifications.

As shown in Figure 17, only 17% of counties agreed that the awarded funding was sufficient. Overall, small counties were the least likely to feel adequately resourced, while medium counties had the highest rate of disagreement (64%).

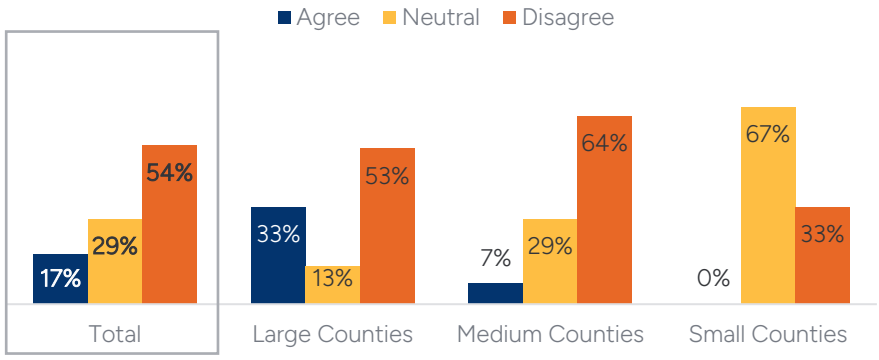
Figure 16. Modified staffing/HR to serve realigned populations



Source: 2024 Post-Realignment Survey (N = 35). Excludes nine missing or "N/A" responses.

Figure 17. Perceptions of Staffing Funding Adequacy, Total and by County Size

Only 17% of responding counties agreed funding was sufficient to meet staffing needs.



Source: 2024 Post-Realignment Survey (N = 35).

> **"I wish they had more staff, more program providers…they were already stretched thin."**
>
> *- Youth Interview Respondent, 2024*

However, stakeholders explained that funding was only a fraction of a wider issue with **chronic staffing shortages**. Reasons included difficulties recruiting qualified staff (commonly due to negative perceptions of probation careers over time and lack of promotional opportunities), high rates of turnover, long processing times, as well as COVID-19 and natural disasters like wildfires (in rural Northern California), and shrinking staffing pools.[xlv] Despite the Center for Improving Youth Justice showing that 81% of the 113 California probation staff surveyed across four counties were satisfied with their jobs, they had slightly higher reports of **feeling burned out** "always", "sometimes", or "often" (69%), compared with the national average (66%).[xlvi]

Progress Across the State

Some probation stakeholders explained how the SB 823 realignment sparked a **shift in the mentality of their workforce**. They explained that staff trained in a more "traditional way" have started transferring to other fields or roles outside of juvenile facilities. This shift is crucial to a truly restorative approach, where consistency and alignment in vision are essential. CBOs and advocates, behavioral health providers, and court stakeholders affirmed how essential it is to have staff working with youth **who want to be there**. Many probation stakeholders described having backgrounds in social services and often had lived experience themselves, drawing them to this field, and specifically, to working with youth. The impact of having this type of background was noted by court stakeholders. As one explained,

- "Our juvenile director and assistant director are both social workers…so we are moving in that direction to really embrace the fact that our juvenile justice youth are the same youth that are in our dependency court. It's all the same youth. It's all the same challenges."

Stakeholders emphasized the need for a workforce that: (1) has a desire to work with youth with complex needs in this capacity, (2) believes in rehabilitation, (3) understands adolescent development, and (4) provides trauma-informed care through culturally responsive practices. According to the 2024 JJRBG County Plan Summary Report, counties typically provided staff training in trauma-informed care and culturally responsive practices (n = 35).[lii] One CBO stakeholder with lived experience noted being asked by a probation department to train probation staff on the process of healing for youth with complex trauma. This stakeholder reinforced the importance of staff having the tools to understand the cultures the youth come from, learning from others who have gone on their own healing journeys, and to avoid what they perceive in counties to be a "one-size-fits-all" clinical approach.

> **"You don't need to be black, brown, or formerly incarcerated to make a connection with these kids…but having somebody who at least understands how you're doing the math in your head… it's helpful."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Probation stakeholders described **shifts in roles and responsibilities** to support the intent of the law and the realigned youth population, including: (1) educational liaisons, (2) developmental navigators, and (3) probation case managers specifically for youth in SYTFs.

Staffing-Related Impacts

- **Opportunity impacts:** Probation stakeholders noted how staffing shortages affect aspects such as variation of programming, use of multiple units or classrooms simultaneously, and transportation support. One county said they faced barriers even when attempting alternative solutions. Specifically, they had a greater need for staff to provide transportation, as more youth were stepping down and requiring transportation to work and attend college. They attempted to contract with a CBO for transportation services to fill this gap, but the cost of liability insurance made it unfeasible for their county.

  Another probation stakeholder from a large county also described how staffing challenges impact their ability to support smaller counties who may have greater challenges. This stakeholder explained, "I feel fortunate to have the physical space, but **I can't in good conscience take on youth from other counties knowing that I'm understaffed** and have a responsibility to [my] county."

Operational Impacts of Staffing Shortages

Staffing shortages have led to operational challenges impacting STYF safety and programming availability, including:

- High levels of mandatory overtime
- Frequent sick callouts
- Reduced security in some counties has been linked to an increase in contraband entering facilities
- Fewer staff available for programming, transportation (e.g., to furloughs and appointments), and other services

- **Safety impacts**: CBO stakeholders and advocates shared concerns for youth safety in some of the counties' STYF facilities, citing allegations of staff misconduct, retaliation against youth who file complaints, and other unsafe conditions. These concerns are supported by criminal filings at some halls, such as Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.[xlvii] Youth perspectives are discussed in the next section.

  Probation stakeholders also described concern for staff safety, noting youth assaults on staff, especially by older youth. Overall, according to the Center for Improving Youth Justice survey, 79% of California probation staff felt safe in facilities, which is comparable to the national average.[xlviii] However, in the same survey, the staff mentioned aspects of the job that make them feel unsafe, including lack of training, insufficient equipment, and overcrowding. Probation stakeholders interviewed for this report reinforced that additional training opportunities for staff in gang intervention, de-escalation techniques, and working with older youth would be beneficial. Some probation stakeholders also shared safety and supervision challenges as probation staff are sometimes younger than the youth in SYTFs, which can create challenges with authority, relationship-building, and supervision.

Youth Perspectives on Dynamics and Relationships in SYTFs[49]

> **"[My PO] believed in me, even though I was in juvenile hall. There should be more people that believe in kids."**
>
> *- Youth Interview Respondent, 2024*

Overall, youth echoed the impact on opportunities caused by staffing shortages. There were mixed responses regarding their relationships with staff.[50] Youth reinforced the impact of **positive staff relationships** throughout their SYTF commitments. They valued staff who were supportive, respectful, and genuinely cared, listened, and advocated on their behalf. Youth noted that when staff treated them with **dignity and compassion**, it helped build trust and made the facilities feel safer and more homelike.

In contrast, this experience varied depending on the county and facility. Some youth described examples of staff being **dismissive or dehumanizing**, reinforcing a punitive rather than rehabilitative environment. Some youth reported experiencing retaliation when they spoke up, creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust. As one youth stated:

- "When you go into the system you are talked to a certain way, treated a certain way and there's nothing you can say or do because you're in their territory … Sometimes people come in wanting to help the kids but when they come in and treat them like that or talk to them like that it doesn't help."

Relationships with staff, providers, families, and support networks are a critical piece of the DJJ reform. The visitation and communication policies for youth in SYTFs to connect with support networks outside of facilities are described in the next section.

Visitations and Family Engagement Within SYTFs

Visitation programs and policies vary by county. Differences in procedures, visiting hours and days, visitor restrictions, visitation areas, and security requirements for entering a facility can result in varied experiences for both youth and their visitors.

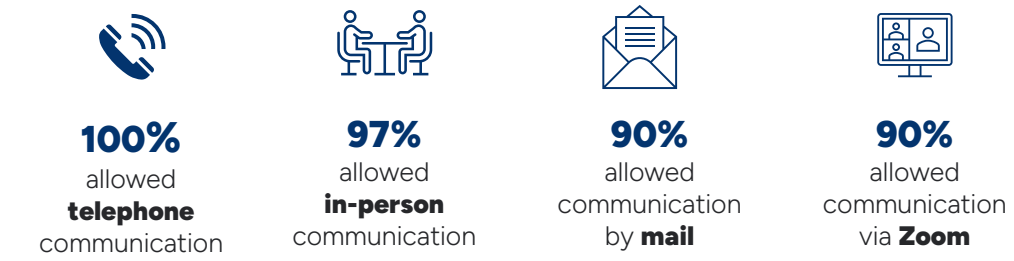
Responding probation departments provided various communication and visitation options for youth to stay connected with their support systems.

Since the passing of SB 823, youth are now in facilities for longer sentences, causing some counties to explore ways to update policies and expand visitation opportunities (e.g., timing, visitor types, transportation support). Court and probation stakeholders described challenges with in-person visits that support networks may navigate. Despite youth now being "local," access can still be a hurdle. For instance, the distance to facilities (especially in geographically large counties), narrow visiting hours, conflicting work and/or family obligations, and travel costs/public transportation constraints may reduce support persons' ability to visit youth. Additionally, fractured relationships between the youth and their families add a compounding complexity to coordinating and encouraging visitation.

Most counties responding to the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment survey reported offering youth multiple ways to stay in touch with support networks, following an established vetting process. As shown in Figure 18, nearly all allowed telephone and in-person communication, and 90% offered mail and Zoom access.[51]

[49] Youth perspective encompasses interview, survey, and focus group respondents
[50] Variation would exist by county, facility, and individual staff members
[51] Data represents types permitted but does not specify restrictions, including frequency, duration, and/or relation to youth

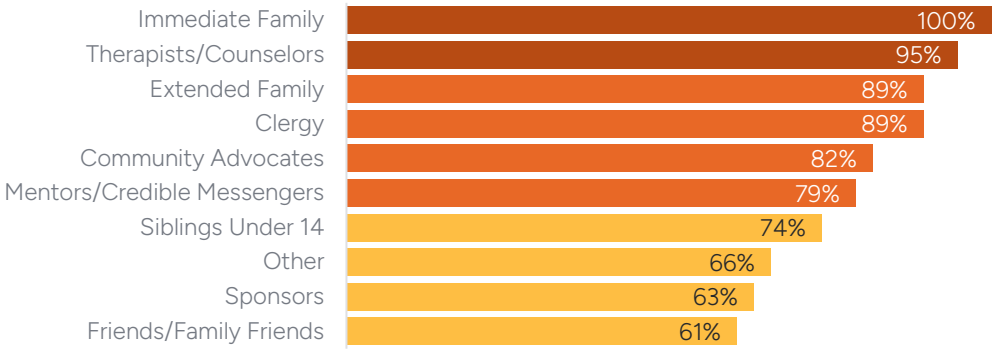
Figure 18. Communication Options for Youth in SYTFs



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments. N = 39

All responding counties allowed visits from immediate family, and nearly all (95%) permitted therapists or counselors. Most allowed extended family, clergy, community advocates, and mentors. Over half of counties permitted visits from siblings under 14, sponsors, friends, and loved ones.[52]

Figure 19. Types of Visitors Permitted in SYTFs



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments. N = 38.

With the passing of SB 823, probation stakeholders described how older youth are in a different life stage, and thus, they had to adapt protocols to allow for meaningful/private visits with romantic partners, significant others, spouses, and children. Some even reflected on adopting policies to allow for marriage ceremonies, graduations, and to allow youth to be present for the birth of their children.

Additionally, CBO, court, and probation stakeholders reinforced a new adaptation to many counties' visitor restrictions, permitting individuals who were previously justice-involved to enter facilities. As seen in the figure above, **79% (30/38) allowed mentors/credible messengers** into facilities to work alongside youth.[53] Across all stakeholder groups, mentors with lived experience were highlighted for their positive impact on the youth, which was reinforced by one probation stakeholder below.

> **"[The legislation] has pushed us to do things we've never done before. For example, lived experience mentors. It was unheard of to have people with felonies come into our facilities. Well, that's not the case anymore. And we've really seen the positive impact that these mentors can have on the lives of these youth in custody."**
>
> *- Probation Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

[52] Data represents groups permitted but does not provide detail on frequency of opportunity for visitation by county. List of visitors replicated from OYCR: Youth Dignity Guide

[53] Variation will exist by county in frequency and duration of visit; some respondents may have interpreted the question as mentors and/or mentors with lived experience as is implied by credible messengers

Family Engagement

All stakeholders emphasized that maintaining strong ties with supportive adults and family was critical for youth **well-being and motivation** during SYTF commitments. This aligns with one of the key goals of SB 823: keeping youth close to family and supportive networks. Court stakeholders reinforced this, seeing greater success when youth had contact with family and support networks, especially through family therapy and reunification counseling. However, **this reality is not experienced by all**. Court stakeholders described challenges with the family wanting to be involved and/or how their involvement could become a barrier to youth progress. One court stakeholder explained, "The parents may be dealing with their own issues."

> **"The kids that don't get visits, it affects them negatively. The kids that get support, it's helpful."**
>
> *- Probation Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

The value of visitations was clear. As one probation stakeholder explained, "The kids that don't get visits, it affects them negatively. The kids that get support…it's helpful. Kids are here for long periods of time, and being away from family for years is very difficult…making that **family engagement a priority** and incorporating into day to day…it's been a good thing for the kids." Research supports this sentiment: youth who receive visits are less likely to engage in misconduct throughout the duration of their commitments and exhibit more positive mental health and behavioral changes.[xlix, l, li] Court and probation stakeholders described some of the broader efforts to promote family engagements and visitations, such as offering flexible visitation times, transportation assistance, and more welcoming environments as shown below.

Examples of county efforts to strengthen family engagement

Flexible visitation times (e.g., weekends and evenings)

Transportation support for families and/or gas money

Designated event spaces (e.g., outdoor areas for potlucks and celebrations)

Family-friendly environments to make visitations feel more comfortable

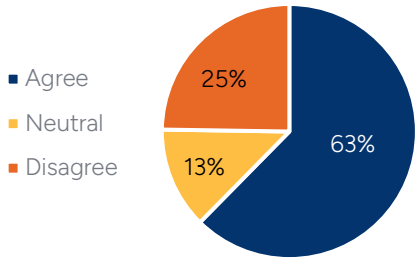
Family events 25 counties host structured family engagement events[lii]

Youth Perspectives of Relationships

Youth emphasized that having supportive adults, such as probation officers, mentors, and program staff, was one of the most impactful aspects of their experience. Caring individuals who showed their support and belief in the youth's potential **exerted a powerful influence**, especially those with lived experience.

Most youth identified a trusted individual in SYTF.

Figure 20. Youth who Have Someone to Trust or Look Up to in SYTF



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16

Youth also said they felt more **valued and supported** when staff engaged with them beyond rule enforcement. One youth described an example of a PO who was "always down to chop it up," playing board games with them and bringing new games to try. Survey responses offer a snapshot of how common these connections may be: When asked whether they had someone they could trust or look up to in their STYF, 63% of youth agreed (10/16), yet more than one-third were neutral or disagreed.

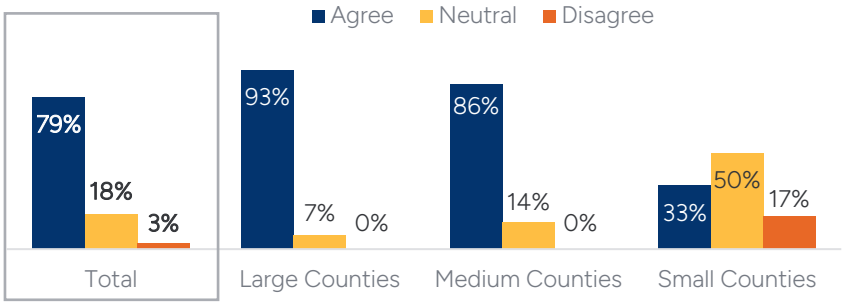
Peer connections also played a significant role in youth feeling supported. Peer mentorship opportunities were highly valued, especially those that allowed individuals with lived experiences to **connect with their peers**. Other helpful support persons included spiritual advisors, mentors who offered support after release, and mentors in structured programs that helped with **life skills and personal growth** (for a more detailed discussion of mentorship and counseling programs, please refer to the Local SYTF Programming section).

Benefit of Local SYTF Commitments

Despite challenges with staffing, modifications, and facility structures, counties largely agreed on the benefit of local SYTFs. In the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey, 79% of counties agreed that **local SYTF programs positively impacted** youths' reentry into their communities (Figure 21).

While nearly all large- and medium-sized county participants agreed that local SYTFs promote successful reentry, responses from small counties were more mixed. Half of the small county participants were "neutral" (n = 3/6), and one small county disagreed. These county differences may reflect variations in resources and access to community providers, as well as the level of required investment to support programming (including specialized programming, programming for very small populations, and that evidence-based programs meet the minimum number of participant required, and/or reliance on contracting with another county (which may be several hours away from the youth's "local" area).

Figure 21. County Agreement That SYTFs Support Youth Reentry, Overall and by County Size



79% of responding counties agreed that local SYTFs positively support youth reentry.

Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey. N = 34 (14 large, 14 medium, and six small counties).

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into practices or strategies working well for the youth in their county. While many impactful programs and practices were shared, this section does not list all programs or label any as a "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability in different areas of the state. Some of the practices/strategies identified and verified through focus groups included:

Visitations and Family Engagement

- **Family visitation:** Both youth and families valued flexibility in visitation times, such as evenings and weekends, to accommodate working families. Some probation stakeholders described the logistical support they were using to reduce the burden on families. For example, three probation departments explained that they purchased a van to transport families to the facility, and one mentioned reimbursing families for the cost of gas.

Staffing

- **Staff training:** Probation stakeholders described providing opportunities for staff to examine their own biases and beliefs through training programs like Thinking 4 Change and Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS). CBO stakeholders reinforced the value of staff training on adolescent development and building a deep understanding of trauma's impact on youth behavior.

Key Takeaways

After the enactment of SB 823, counties worked to modify facilities and/or contract with other counties to house realigned youth. Despite the effort that went into modifications and improvements, many stakeholders emphasized that juvenile halls remain carceral settings. This was described as undermining the therapeutic intention of the law, though with the accelerated timeline, variation in resources, and lack of alternative options locally, probation stakeholders did not see other adequate options. Youth echoed the jail-like feel of facilities but described the homelike touches (e.g., carpet and sensory rooms) as appreciated and relationships with staff as having the greatest impact on their experience.

Various facility infrastructure and limitations exist, with staffing shortages further straining program expansion and separation of youth by age or severity of offense across units, especially for small-sized counties. To support longer durations of stay, some counties expanded visitation options and policies (e.g., increased visiting hours, transportation, and allowing access to more people). However, challenges persist for family and support network visitation, including distance, family/work obligations, and fractured relationships. (**Resources:** The Stepping Home Model; Youth Dignity Guide)

> "There are lots of things in our past that led up to us being locked up. Many of these circumstances were beyond our control. I am a product of my environment."
>
> Youth Interview Respondent, 2024
> **Formerly at an SYTF**

SCREENINGS AND ASSESSMENTS

Counties use screenings and assessments to identify behavioral and physical health issues youth may be experiencing and inform treatment options via an individualized rehabilitation plan (IRP). Youth receive screenings throughout the stages of the youth justice system, beginning with pre-adjudication, where diversion efforts can be considered through referrals to appropriate community agencies. Youth should receive an initial screening, risk assessment, and follow-up assessments.[liii] The Stepping Home Model encourages partners to include professional neuro-psychosocial assessments for youth committed to SYTFs to identify trauma, developmental, behavioral, educational, medical, social, and substance use needs.[liv] An estimated 70% of youth in the juvenile system have one or more behavioral health conditions (e.g., substance use, mental health challenges), compared to 9-22% of youth in the general population.[lv] Early identification can help inform case management and provide timely intervention and treatment.

Progress Across the State

Counties use a variety of risk and needs assessment tools for risk, needs, and well-being. For example, the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS) is a supervision model that focuses on identifying a young person's underlying motivations for behavior. OYCR provided training for counties on the use of this tool, and 12 are currently using it. In addition, according to the 2024 JJRBG County Plan Summary Report, 43 counties reported conducting mental and physical health assessments, including the following tools:[lvi]

- Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2)
- Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) screening tools
- Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) – used by 22 counties to assess re-offending risk

With counties using a variety of screening tools and approaches, youth outcomes are not currently able to be compared or tracked across counties and systems. Efforts are underway to ensure more consistency through BH-CONNECT (please refer to side panel). [54]

Efforts to Improve Screening Consistency

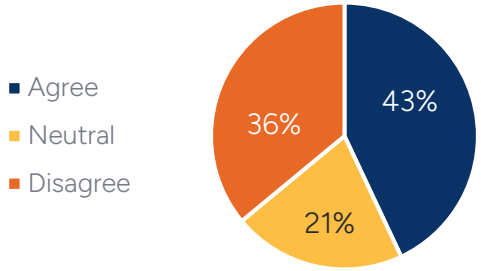
One of the Cal-Aim BH-CONNECT initiatives focuses on working to align administration of the CANS tool to ensure juvenile probation agencies are administering the same CANS tool in the same way. The goal is to establish and streamline a system where outcomes can be tracked across systems.

[54] BH-CONNECT is the Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Network of Equitable Care and Treatment Initiative, which aims to increase access to MediCal members living with significant behavioral health need.

Youth Perspectives on Screening

Youth survey respondents were asked if the screening tools used in their counties accurately identified their needs and helped them connect with the services to meet those needs. As shown in the figure below, 43% (n = 6/14) agreed that the screening tools were effective in identifying and meeting their needs by linking them to services, while more than one-third (36%, n = 5/14) disagreed.

Figure 22. Screening Tools Identify Needs and Help Meet Them Through Linkage to Services



Less than half of the surveyed youth found screenings helpful, one-third disagreed, and one in five were neutral.

Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 14

Youth focus group participants provided additional insights into their experiences with screenings. Many felt as if the **experiences with screenings and assessments were dehumanizing** and reported the following concerns:

- **Timing**: Assessments occur during transition periods, when youth are in a foreign environment, and typically have heightened levels of anxiety, stress, and feeling "on edge."
- **Distrust:** Assessments are conducted with unfamiliar individuals (especially the initial assessment). Youth felt that they were expected to be vulnerable and "pour out their whole life to a person who felt like a wall," only to be judged and told who they are and what they need.
- **Feeling labeled:** Once something was written about them, youth felt it became a lasting label, "like law", no matter how biased or inaccurate.
- **Lack of youth input:** Youth reported that some assessments do not include their voice directly.

> **Those validated tools cause harm...**
> **if we are really going to do an individualized rehabilitation plan...**
> **young people need to have the pathway to play a role in their own lives.**
>
> *- Youth Focus Group Respondent, 2025*

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into practices or strategies working well for the youth in their county. While many impactful programs and practices were shared, this section does not list all programs or label any as a "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability in different areas of the state. Some practices/strategies identified included:

Assessment tools for long-term placements:

- **R-PACT:** The standard PACT assessment was designed to assess the short-term risk of re-offending. Some probation departments have started using the Residential PACT (R-PACT) through the Noble Software Group to address the limitations of the PACT. Probation respondents explained that R-PACT is a more effective tool for youth who are in SYTF for the long term.
    - **Youth voice:** Youth focus group participants emphasized the importance of coupling their voice with assessments. Youth experienced with the R-PACT tool explained that it captured staff perspective, with staff answering questions on their behalf every six months. As a result, it did but did not capture youths' personal experiences.

Key Takeaways

Counties use a range of screenings and assessments to identify youth needs and inform IRPs. While tools like MAYSI-2, CANS, and PACT are commonly used, the lack of standardization across tools and methods of administration results in making it difficult to track outcomes across counties. Youth feedback revealed mixed experiences, where some young people found the screenings and assessments helpful while others found them to be dehumanizing, and often, lacking their input. Statewide initiatives, such as BH-CONNECT, aim to improve screening consistency across counties and systems. (**Resource**: The Stepping Home Model)

INDIVIDUALIZED REHABILITATION PLANS (IRP)

Within 30 days of a youth's commitment, the court must develop and approve a youth's individualized rehabilitation plan (IRP) to outline individual programming and services to best meet the needs of youth, with consideration of healing, trauma-informed, and developmentally appropriate treatments. Every six months, a progress review hearing is scheduled to review the IRP and determine the level of progress made. This plan should be created with the support of a multidisciplinary team (MDT), including family as well as behavioral health, education, and other treatment providers.[lvii] The child and family team (CFT) process can also be used to center the voice of youth and families with the belief that they have the capacity to resolve many of their challenges with the right support. This approach is reinforced by the Stepping Home Model, which encourages whole person case plan development utilizing family and community support teams that address both the youth's physical health as well as treatments and supportive services.

The integration of IRPs across counties is a process shaped by local capacity, available resources, and cross-coordination, with strategies continuing to evolve. This section will describe the mixed perceptions of IRP helpfulness, highlighting both lessons learned and stakeholder perspectives.

Progress Across the State

Counties vary in their approaches to developing IRPs. Though **cross-coordination across stakeholders is prioritized,** the providers involved will vary by county, as will the oversight of their creation. Collaboration can include mental health professionals, educators, probation staff, family, youth, and other community partners. Some counties involve mentors with lived experiences and peer advocates. Others schedule pre-MDT meetings, so the voices of the public defender and DA are considered before the development process begins. According to the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey, 36 out of 38 counties offered MDT, and 32 out of 38 counties offered CFTs in the development of the IRP. This indicates that some counties are offering both.

To guide the development of IRPs, counties mentioned using internal templates that they revise over time as they **learn through trial and error**. For instance, one county shared that they were on their fourth version. Others described a desire for a statewide template that can be used and adapted as needed for county standards. Overall, many court and probation stakeholders felt the IRPs were **beneficial in theory**, but in practice, can feel like a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Court stakeholders valued the **collaboration and structure** they provide. This is especially true when the youth are engaged, and their support systems are present. The creation of this plan enables families to be involved and courts to hold providers accountable for the treatment youth need.

Challenges

Lack of individualization: Despite the intended goal of individualized IRPs, barriers to more personalized plans include:
(1) limited access to providers for diverse and varied programming, (2) insufficient funding to provide programming based on each youth's interests or needs, (3) staffing shortages to facilitate programs and transport youth, and (4) small economies of scale.

> **"[They're] very formulaic plans with checkboxes or whatever that don't really meaningfully meet the unique needs of each youth."**
>
> - *Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Barriers specific to economies of scale relate to high costs (especially for more specialized programming), vast variation in youth need and interest, providers' willingness to offer programs for a small number of youth, and requirements for group-based approaches within many evidence-based modalities. As one board of supervisor's stakeholder explained:

- "The ratios are so challenging because the number of kids is so small, which is excellent. That's what we want, but contracting for high intensity services in addition to providing the physical infrastructure is certainly not cost efficient, but absolutely necessary."

Lack of family involvement: While family involvement is encouraged, some court and probation stakeholders noted challenges with family dynamics and inclusion in the process, explaining that some families either decline to participate or youth (especially older youth) do not want their family involved.

Youth Perspectives on IRPs

Youth echoed much of what the stakeholders described above, where there were both benefits and limitations in their experience with IRPs. In a statewide survey among youth in SYTFs (n = 68) by the Center for Improving Youth Justice, 94% said their **treatment plan helped them understand** what is required to reach their goals, which is much higher than the national average of 64%. [lviii] Likewise, in the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey, some youth agreed that IRPs were useful tools for setting goals, tracking progress, and potentially being used to reduce sentences. However, other youth respondents felt that IRPs were overly broad and did not adequately reflect their individual needs.

> **"I honestly felt that IRP is not really individual because many kids in here have the same IRP goals in their rehab plan."**
>
> - *Youth Respondent, 2024*

Youth shared a common sentiment that their **input felt overlooked**, making the process feel more like a formality rather than a truly personalized, beneficial approach. These youth felt that they were not able to include key personal goals (like specific majors, types of employment, and family reunification opportunities) in their IRPs due to a lack of access and ability to provide input.

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into practices or strategies that were working well for the youth in their county. While many impactful programs and practices were shared, this section does not list all programs or label any as a "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability in different areas of the state. Some of the practices/strategies identified included:

- **Youth voice in IRP development:** Youth consistently emphasized wanting to have more of a say in shaping their plans and path. Giving youth a meaningful role in the development of their IRP allows them to feel ownership and that the IRP reflects their personal goals and aspirations. As one court stakeholder noted, "They frequently have ideas about what would be beneficial to them that are really critical."

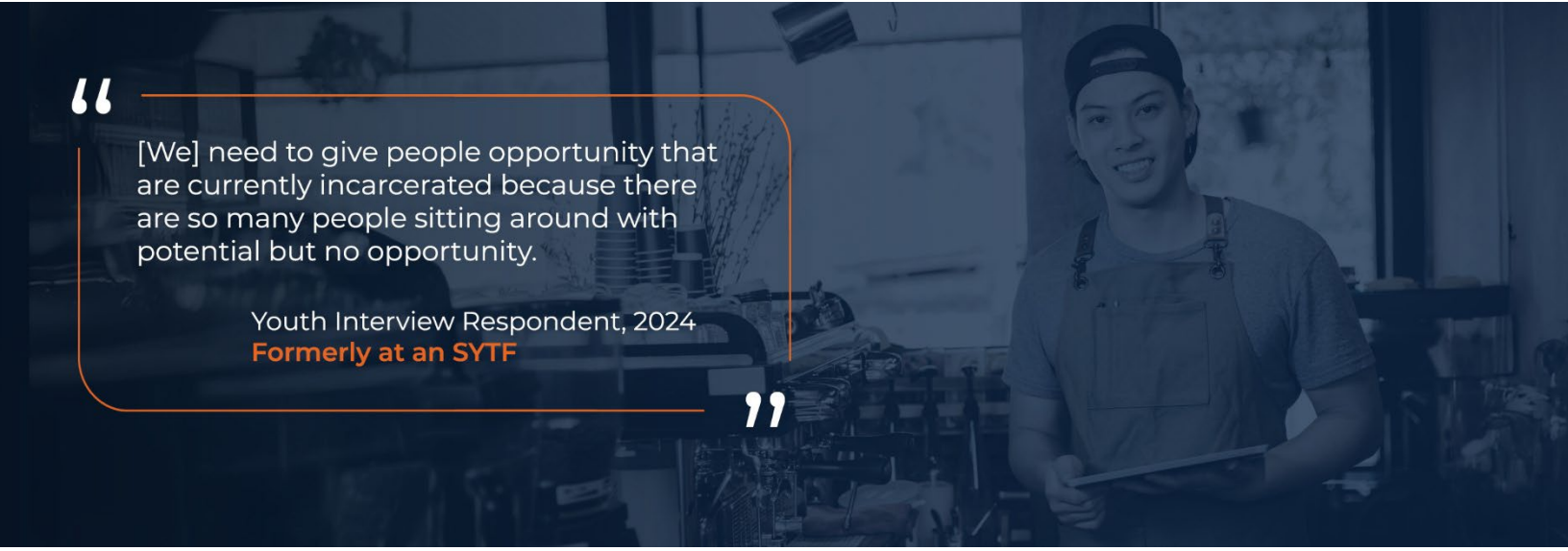
> **"Youth need to feel heard and involved in the decisions that affect their lives...give them a chance to take ownership of their growth."**
>
> *- Youth Respondent, 2024*

- **Behavioral health provider oversight:** One probation stakeholder mentioned the benefit of having a behavioral health professional responsible for guiding IRP development.
- **Expansion of multidisciplinary team:** Many stakeholders emphasized the importance of involving families (if possible). Probation and CBO stakeholders also saw the value of mentors with lived experience and peer advocates as additional support advocates for youth.
- **Flexibility within IRPs to tailor plans to youth needs:** Court and CBO stakeholders emphasized the importance of flexibility to truly tailor the plan to each youth and adapt as necessary.
- **SMART goals for greater objectivity:** One focus group participant noted beginning to incorporate SMART goals (i.e., goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) into the youth's IRPs to promote shared accountability and reduce the subjectivity of youth progress.

Key Takeaways

IRPs are intended to provide a tailored guide to a youth's goals and services. While solidification of the development process is still underway in many counties, multiple stakeholders, including youth, described the plans as feeling formulaic. There is room for continued improvement with the individualization of the plans as counties and partnering entities continue to expand opportunities and consistently involve youth input. However, certain barriers to individualization and variation in opportunities, such as evidence-based programs and specialized treatment models' requirements for a minimum number of participants, must be addressed systematically. (Resource: The Stepping Home Model)

> **"I think it's really important that there's some accountability attached to not just the youth who's supposed to do things, but the providers and other people at the table who are supposed to deliver."**
>
> *- Youth Respondent, 2024*



LOCAL SYTF PROGRAMMING

Programming and services play a central role in the rehabilitative mission of local juvenile justice systems for youth in SYTFs. The Stepping Home Model reinforces restorative, strengths-based programming that promotes youth accountability and healing, fosters positive peer connections and mentorship, and supports healthy development. Adequate programming and access to treatment and services require coordinated efforts across systems, such as education, child welfare, and public health. Counties must provide mental health, educational, vocational, substance use, recreational, and family engagement services, as well as services to support adolescent development.[lix] Programming will vary based on facilitators, curriculum, frequency, duration, onsite/offsite access, resources, and more. However, probation stakeholders shared that they prioritize evidence-based practices for youth to access what has been proven to work. OYCR has provided counties access to evidence-based youth justice practices through the California Juvenile Justice Toolkit, developed in collaboration with the RAND Corporation, and encourages counties to also consider incorporating promising and emerging practices that spark youth interest. As statewide data for youth successes or program completions are limited, this overview of programming is based on survey responses from county probation departments and key informant stakeholder insights.

Progress Across the State

As a result of SB 823, counties had to expand and adapt their programming to meet the needs of a new population. This included responding to three major shifts:

- **Serving older populations:** With youth now in facilities up to age 25, programming needed to adapt to include age-appropriate education, vocational training, and life skills development.
- **Longer length of stay:** Youth can remain in SYTFs for up to seven years, prompting the need for longer-term programming than was previously offered in juvenile halls before the realignment (programs that were meant to span 3-6 months on average).
- **Local responsibility for treatment:** With the closure of DJJ, counties became responsible for providing access to specialized treatment services locally, including serious mental health support and other specialized programs (e.g., for sexual behavior treatment, substance use, gang intervention).[55]

[55] Specialized programming challenges will be identified in greater detail at the end of this section

Most counties responding to the 2024 Post-Realignment Survey (85%, n = 29/34) agreed that their county **increased the number and/or capacity of programs and services offered** to serve SB 823 realigned populations. However, small counties were least likely to agree (50%, n = 3/6) compared to medium (92%) and large-sized (93%) counties. This may be due to small counties' reliance on contracts with other counties or the large investment required for certain programs, while others may not have received any youth for SYTF commitments. This would affect their need to preemptively increase certain programs and services offered, especially when considering the intention of individualization for youth. [56]

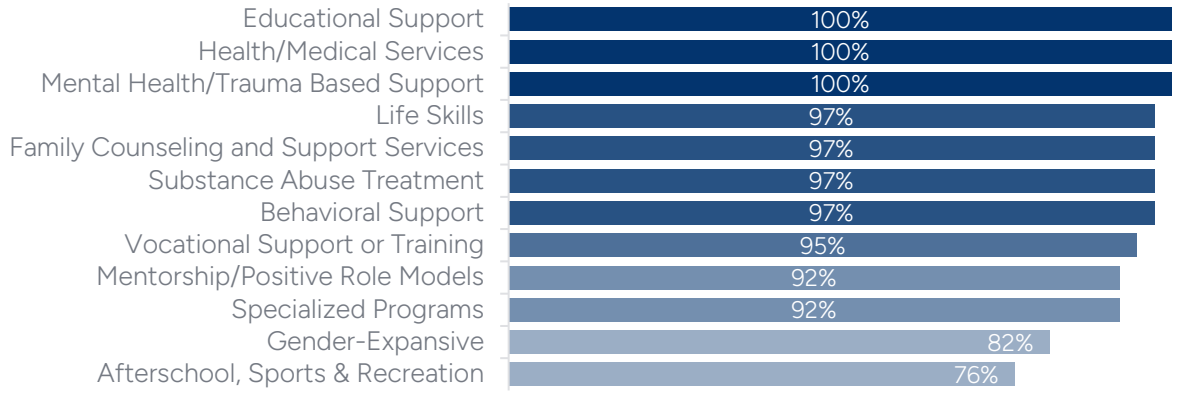
85% of responding counties increased capacity and/or number of programs and services to serve SB-823 realigned youth.

Probation departments described whether they added and/or increased capacity for each service offered since SB-823 implementation. Among them, 95% (n = 36/38) increased capacity for one or more service(s) and 66% (n = 25/38) added at least one new service for SYTF youth. Participants commonly:

- **Increased capacity** for educational (84%), behavioral (76%), and case management (71%) supports.
- **Added vocational support** (32%), employment support (32%), or Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) (24%).

All responding counties said they provide educational support, health/medical services, and mental health or trauma-based support in SYTF, LRP, and/or post-discharge (Figure 23).[57] Nearly all participants offered life skills, family counseling, substance abuse treatment, behavioral support, and vocational support. However, programming needs vary by county. Not all counties have youth in a SYTF, and those that do may only have a few youth with unique needs or interests. Services, program quality, and youth experiences will vary significantly by county. According to probation stakeholders, some counties may offer services as formal programs within their county, through contracts with other programs/counties, or have accommodations for individualized treatment if group-based programming is not an option.[58]

Figure 23. Percentage of Counties Offering Each Service at Any Point in the System



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments. N = 38. Depicts percentage of responding counties that offer each service at one or more point in the system (in a SYTF, in an LRP, and/or post-discharge).

[56] Among the small counties responding to the Realignment Survey, 57% (8/14) contract with a SYTF in another county, 21% partner with other counties to provide programming, and 36% plan to contract with other counties "if needed."
[57] The six counties that did not respond were small counties that solely contracted with other counties or only had plans to contract, with no current program in place.
[58] Caution should be used when reviewing programs offered by counties, as quantity is not a measure of quality, nor is more always desired by the youth. One probation stakeholder emphasized how youth do not always want to feel 'programmed,' and appreciate space to rest and relax.

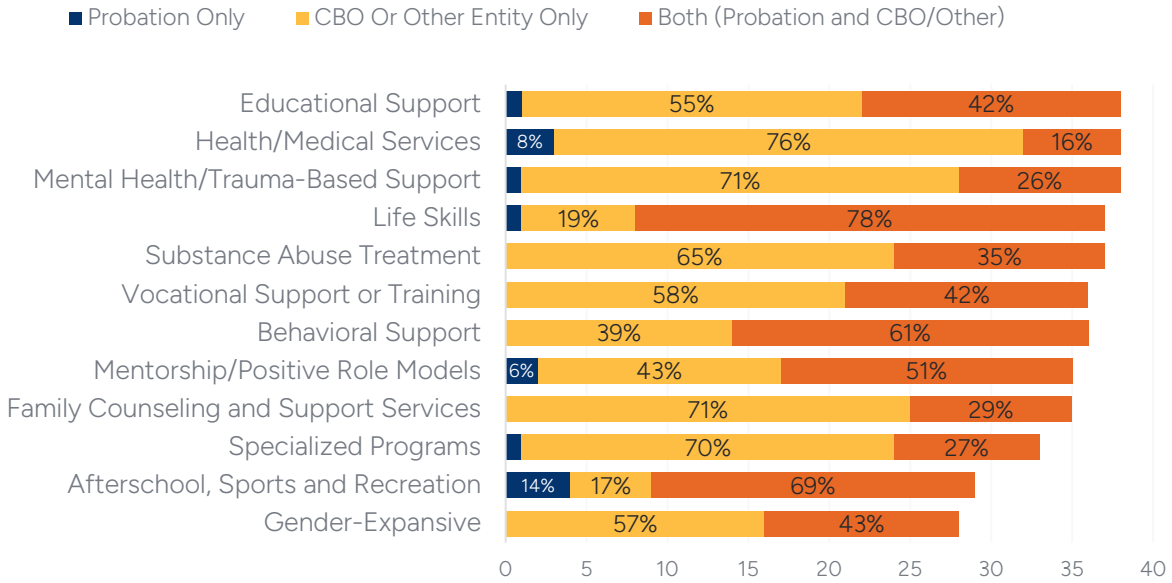
County Partnerships for Service Delivery

Many of the responding counties collaborated with CBOs or other entities to provide services.[59] In most instances, services were offered externally or by both probation *and* another partner. Among the counties offering each service, health/medical care (76%), mental health/trauma-based support (71%), family counseling and support (71%), and specialized programs (70%) were typically provided by CBOs or other entities only, underscoring the important role of these organizations in treatment for youth. Participants who offer life skills support and afterschool/recreation activities typically described these services as provided by *both* Probation and a CBO or other entity (78% and 69% respectively).

> **"I'm seeing young people be involved…and respond to the folks they're working with in a way I haven't seen before."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

In some counties, probation stakeholders explained that due to a lack of access to service providers, probation staff may lead certain programs. CBOs and behavioral health stakeholders voiced concern with this reliance on staff for reasons shown in the challenges section below.

Figure 24. County Service Delivery Models: Probation Only, CBO/Other Entity Only, or Both



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments (N = 38). The length of each bar represents the total number of counties reporting that SYTF youth have access to each service. The denominator for each category's percentages is the number of counties providing that service, not the total number of responding counties.

Stakeholders described an overall sense that programming and partnerships are expanding to align with the complex and differing needs of youth. However, in the very early stages of realignment, CBO, court, and probation stakeholders reinforced that they were learning as they went and had to consistently adapt. Many noted that youth were repeating programs, since the programming curriculum previously only had to span 3-6 months for short-term care. Some counties reported trying to find ways to engage youth despite barriers. This included encouraging youth to be mentors for programs if they had to repeat them due to limitations in options or expansion possibilities with the curriculum. Others included youth in the development of opportunities. One youth described:

[59] Responses could refer to one of many services or programs offered per category

- "I entered the secure track program the day it was officially created [as] a law…I spent three years inside of the SYTF facility, where I slowly got older and less and less opportunities were available to me because the services that were offered did not meet my age and developmental needs. However, I was able to work with my probation department in a linear relationship where we created/drafted up the first program in the state of California, where I was able to graduate with my AA while inside the juvenile hall."

As counties continue to balance a need for more individualized approaches with practical considerations (e.g., staffing, funding/resources, available partnerships), stakeholders described the positive impact of local programming. Youth have earned degrees, certifications, and job placements, and some have even launched their own businesses. Several have become leaders and mentors themselves, contributing to the development of peer support programs. Some youth have had deep personal growth, building coping tools, strengthening family connections, taking accountability, and recognizing their worth and potential (see specific examples in Youth Outcomes).

"I think the programs she is in are absolutely amazing. And I don't think she would be doing as well as she is without them."

- Family Respondent, 2024

While these successes are promising, stakeholders also highlighted challenges that they are still working to overcome locally to sustain and expand the impact of programming.

Challenges with Programming

Limited access to specialized programming: At the time of DJJ closure, 26% of youth had specialized needs, including 10% with serious mental health needs and 12% requiring sexual behavior treatment.[lx] Probation stakeholders shared that, when they first learned about SB 823, they were concerned about adequate care across systems for specialized populations (i.e., youth requiring sexual behavior or substance use treatment, gang-involved youth, youth with serious mental health concerns, and girls).

Specialized Programming Needs:

- Sexual behaviors
- Substance use
- Gang involvement
- Serious mental health concerns
- Girls

These concerns have persisted throughout implementation. Probation, court, and behavioral health stakeholders noted ongoing challenges with: (1) access to and quality of community-programs/hospitals, (2) limited provider availability to deliver specialized programming, especially considering economies of scale and modality of programming offered, (3) healthcare system barriers in which youth (ages 18-25) are considered juveniles in custody, meaning they cannot go to a children's hospital or are they eligible for adult hospitals, (4) the extensive cost of specialized programming. Further information on specialized programming is provided in the Health and Well-being Challenges section.

"DJJ had access to resources that counties don't have. Youth are not getting the help I want them to have."

- Probation Stakeholder Respondent, 2024

The closure of DJJ facilities removed access to state-provided programs for sexual behavior treatment and resources for youth with acute and serious mental health symptoms. Despite the fact that action is being taken to address these gaps, with this state-level resource no longer available, some counties are struggling to provide options for specialized care locally.

Gaps in CBO capacity and collaboration: Many counties collaborate with CBOs and providers to deliver programming, but CBO stakeholders identified several barriers. One major issue is limited capacity. Many CBOs are not able to take on contracts due to staffing shortages. Even with capacity, navigating the contracting process can be difficult. Stakeholders cited challenges with requests for proposals (RFPs) such as funding caps, long delays between contract award and payment, and other complex contract requirements. Compounding these issues, CBOs are often required to prove their effectiveness and qualify as evidence-based to obtain a contract. Not all CBOs have outcomes data, with some noting barriers to fund research and evaluation. CBOs also reported challenges entering facilities, due to rules which prevent access to staff members with justice system records. Finally, despite the counties expanding partnerships, some CBOs still felt excluded or overlooked.

Expertise required for program facilitation: CBOs and behavioral health providers expressed concern about the lack of providers for youth with high needs and/or the counties whose probation staff facilitate programs and treatment services. Behavioral health providers noted that many youth face complex trauma and reinforced that trauma-informed expertise is critical when working with these youth. Behavioral health stakeholders also described challenges recruiting clinicians statewide, such as:

- "We have a hard enough time finding workforce for the mild to moderate, let alone, into these deeper levels. And why would a clinician want to work in this deeper level when they can get paid doing it, you know, for a mild-to-moderate population. There's no incentives, and these are tough, tough jobs."

CBO stakeholders reiterated concerns with probation being both an authoritative figure for youth and facilitating their treatment services, which require youth vulnerability. Meanwhile, some probation stakeholders noted that access to providers able to deliver the required programming is limited, so probation may be the only option in some counties. Further exploration of mental health support barriers can be found in Challenges in Providing Programming for Health and Well-Being.

> **"...this youth who had been in therapy for his whole life...[was] like, I'm sick of therapy.... I was like, I get it. But the psychologist wants to try something different. The providers came back and said... the model doesn't permit it... you can't do it for one person in the juvenile hall."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Challenges with offering individualized and diverse programming: Stakeholders reported gaps in vocational, mentorship, and culturally-responsive programs needed to meet individual youth needs. These gaps are due to a variety of reasons. Many counties face difficulties individualizing programming due to small economies of scale. In addition, some evidence-based programs require a group-based component which may not be viable in counties with small numbers of youth, limiting access to key supports. Even

counties with funding available reported struggling to find enough qualified staff, educators, and CBO partners to meet service demands. In some cases, probation departments must manage multiple contracts across providers which can limit the ability to tailor programs. Further compounding these issues, facilities were reported to lack adequate space which limits programming options.

Resource disparities for smaller counties: Board of supervisors, court, and probation stakeholders reported that smaller counties face disproportionate challenges with resource allocations based on youth population. With fewer youth in their facilities, smaller counties receive less funding. Yet, they are held to the same programming and facility upkeep/modification expectations.

Small counties are also expected to provide specialized and diverse services even when only one or two youth need them. As described earlier, this is a challenge due to small economies of scale, provider availability especially in more rural counties, and programs that require a specific number of participants.

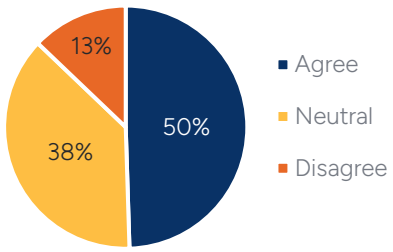
> **"My hope was that the state was going to provide the resources instead of pushing it directly to the counties to take full responsibility. And while…there are support resources for bigger counties…it's a very different position for small counties. Because … what the state is asking us to do is to provide this level of service for one or two kids… what ends up happening in small counties is…that one or two kids…get fairly isolated despite all the efforts to get them into treatment."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Youth Perspectives on Programming[60]

Youth who completed the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey (n = 16) were asked how interested and motivated they were in the programming and activities offered within their SYTF. Youth expanded upon their experiences in focus groups.

Half of the surveyed youth (8/16) agreed that they felt motivated or interested: More than one-third were "neutral" (38%, 6/16), and two youth disagreed. Youth shared that academic and vocational training, such as college preparation, apprenticeship programs, and Rising Scholars were most beneficial. Others highlighted programs that provide real-life context, emotional support, and community engagement, such as therapeutic and behavior-focused programs, including the Youth Offender program, anger replacement therapy (ART), and dog guide training programs.

Figure 25. Youth Motivation and Interest in SYTF Programming



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16

Several factors may have contributed to mixed youth motivation: Some youth felt that programs were not truly rehabilitative and were implemented more as a formality rather than an opportunity for growth. Others said there is a shortage of programming, resources, and staff. One youth explained that while SYTF offers programming, there is no staff to run the programs because they are "already stretched thin." Some youth felt programs did not offer practical or useful skills, particularly for mental health, emotional well-being, and/or life skills (e.g., financial literacy).

Some youth experienced benefits and growth from programming: While some youth felt they did not acquire any significant new skills or knowledge, many agreed they benefited from the programs. When

[60] Youth perspectives are a combination of survey, interview, and focus group responses synthesized

asked how participation in services affected how they viewed themselves and their future, several youth shared that programming fostered confidence, pride, and hope for the future. As one youth explained, "They all make me feel great about my future because they give me more and more opportunities to be successful through life. I feel like everything that is offered in my SYTF program is very beneficial."

Youth also reported developing important life and social skills such as coping strategies and emotional regulation, communication, public speaking, self-control, and understanding non-verbal skills. One youth stated, "They make me feel like I have learned some type of skills, so I at least know something for when I get out."

> **"These programs have really boosted my confidence and made me feel more capable… Most importantly, they've made me realize that there are opportunities out there for me, and I'm more prepared for my future. I now feel like I have the tools to build a better life and make the most of what's ahead."**
>
> *- Youth Survey Respondent, 2024*

Program access and quality varied widely: Some youth shared experiences participating in a range of programs they found helpful and enjoyable, while others described a shortage of programs or limited access. Others felt that only *some* of the programs they had access to were helpful. For example, one participant noted, "The only program that is helpful is restorative resources, it's like therapy." Four youth that had SYTF *and* DJJ experience preferred SYTF programming because it offered more options, more individualized programming, and more rehabilitation-oriented services with opportunities for personal growth.[61]

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into programs that youth valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice" given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

> **"The role of probation…is to, you know, manage behaviors…[as] a CBO, we're more about changing mindset."**
>
> *- CBO Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

- **Facilitators of programs:** All stakeholders reinforced that the relationship between the youth and the staff or facilitator was most crucial, more than any specific program or curriculum. Youth feeling seen, supported and understood by staff or facilitators is key. As one youth stated, "I feel a good facilitator is beneficial because many kids would not be disengaged and would be able to build rapport with the facilitator." CBO stakeholders emphasized the value of offering treatment and support programs through local CBOs, especially when the staff have lived experiences. This allows for a deeper level of trust because they can understand youths' challenges firsthand and connect with them on a personal level.

- **Resource navigator roles to connect youth with resources:** One county shared the immense value of having a resource development navigator dedicated to helping youth access opportunities. For example, this navigator determined that youth in their juvenile hall were eligible for $1,500 monthly

[61] Small sample to be interpreted with caution; county-dependent

through a guaranteed basic income program. Navigators have helped probation find and access valuable resources available for youth. Navigators can also assist youth who may be experiencing difficulties accessing the help requested (e.g., not hearing back from a program).

- **Listening sessions:** CBO stakeholders reinforced that co-creating listening sessions with the youth and community being served, centered around relationships and trust, allow for solutions that are community-driven and long-lasting.

- **Youth input in program development:** Probation, CBOs, and youth saw value in youth leadership opportunities and involving youth in designing programs and curriculum. One probation stakeholder explained:

  - "…it's asking [the youth] for their feedback. 'What is it they'd like to do? What would benefit them?' Because we've seen and learned from other partners that when … you think you know what's best for the youth and you develop a program, and you only have one or two youth that use that program, you've just wasted thousands of dollars."

PROGRAMMING DOMAINS OVERVIEW

The following sections provide a closer examination of programming for youth in SYTFs and LRPs across four key Positive Youth Development domains: *Educational Programming*, *Employment/Vocational Training*, *Health and Well-being Programming*, and *Relationships and Community-Oriented Programming*.[62]

Educational Programming
E.g., Access to college courses and learning supports

Employment and Vocational Training
E.g., Certifications and career preparation supports

Health and Well-Being Programming
E.g., Counseling and mental health supports

Relationships- and Community-Oriented Programming
E.g., Credible Messengers, restorative justice programs

The information in these sections describes what was most mentioned by stakeholders within these four programming domains. This is not meant to provide an exhaustive list of programming options or opportunities, but a general overview of programming, challenges, and practices that stakeholder groups find to work well.

[62] Counties use varied systems to categorize programming and may not have used these domains. Since we cannot replicate all categorization methods, this report organizes programming into four simplified domains based on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, which has been applied to justice-involved youth and emphasizes the importance of supportive environments, self-development opportunities, and community engagement. Two domains were combined for sake of clarity and conciseness.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Research has shown that high-quality education can be a foundational element for rehabilitation and success in reentry. Specifically, a 2013 RAND Corporation study found that incarcerated individuals who participated in educational programs were 43% less likely to recidivate, and those who pursued college programs were 51% less likely.[lxi] The Youth Bill of Rights states that all youth have the right to "rigorous, quality education that complies with state law, and the abilities of students and prepares them for high school graduation, career entry, and postsecondary education."[lxii]

"I want them all to have access to higher education…a youth who's a few credits away from getting a bachelor's degree, I mean, I'm tap dancing on my tabletop in my courtroom practically when I see those things happening."

- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024

OYCR describes educational health as the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to succeed academically, socially, and developmentally. Educational health is a critical aspect of advancing youth opportunity and justice.

County Offices of Education provide access to high school education through juvenile court schools, with a minimum day program of 240 minutes. County Offices of Education maintain responsibility for youths' education until they attain a high school diploma or equivalency. Because youth can remain in SYTFs up to age 25, educational opportunities have had to expand even further (e.g., dual enrollment programs, access to associate and bachelor's degrees).

Progress Across the State

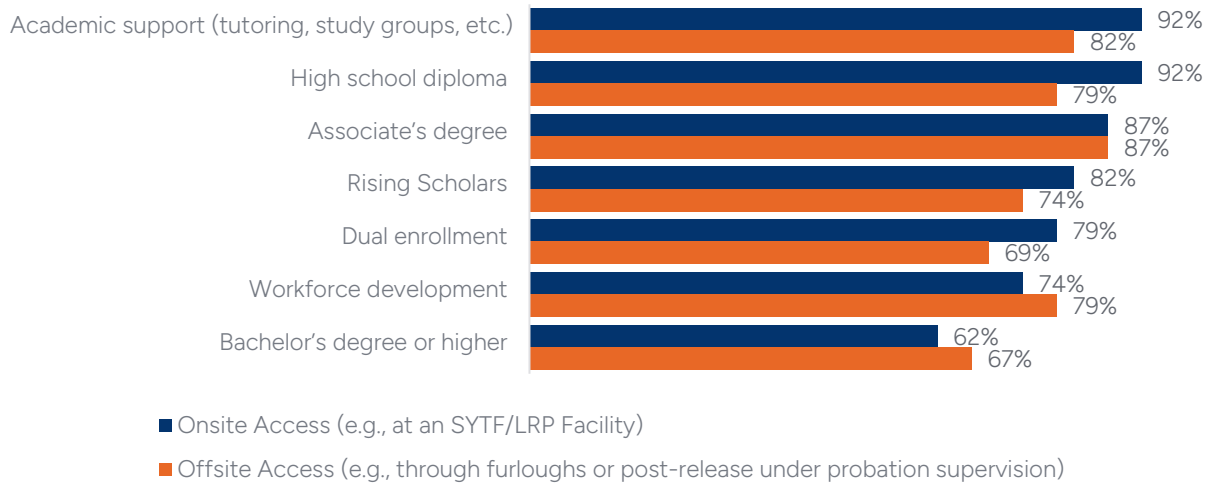
There are 45 court schools operated by County Offices of Education across 39 California counties.[63] Schools are located within various facilities, including juvenile halls, ranches, and camps. Higher education opportunities continue to evolve. As of 2024, there were 90 community colleges (across 23 counties), 21 California State Universities (across 12 counties), 10 UC campuses (across 10 counties), and 23 juvenile halls using Prison Education Project (across 18 counties) that partner with Rising Scholars, Project Rebound, Underground Scholars, the Prison Education Project, or Project Change.[64]

OYCR developed and published the Education Dashboard in 2024, which for the first time, provides access to data on CA juvenile court schools in

The probation departments participating in the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey offered a range of education opportunities, in and outside of SYTF or LRP locales. Most counties offered onsite academic support, such as tutoring and study groups, and opportunities for students to attain a high school diploma (92%). Slightly more than half of participating counties offered bachelor's degrees or higher onsite (55%), and youth in three out of five responding counties had offsite access to higher education (59%). (see Appendix 14 for a further breakdown).

[63] Numbers based on OYCR educational consultant research and verification
[64] Numbers represent opportunities for youth and adults in adult correctional facilities

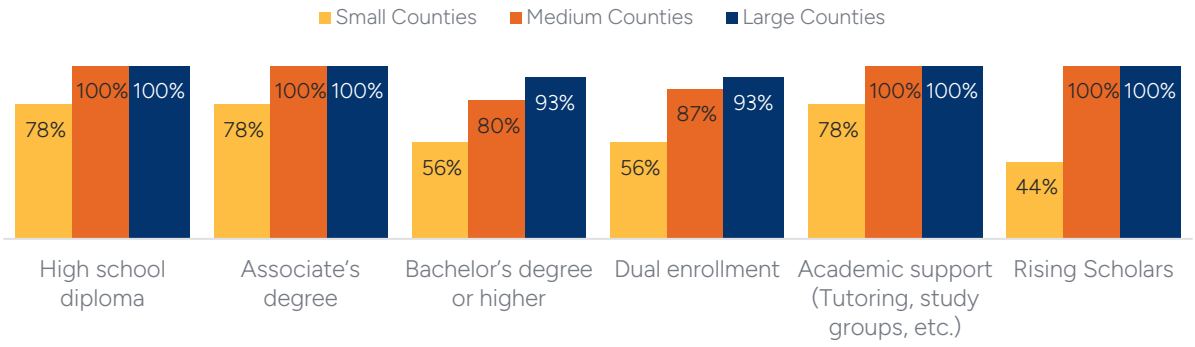
Figure 26. Academic Opportunities for Youth in SYTF Facilities



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments. N = 39. Excludes five small counties with no response or responses indicating "N/A" or "Unknown"

Large and medium counties were more likely to provide academic opportunities, with 100% of respondents agreeing they provide access to high school diplomas, associate's degrees, academic support, and Rising Scholars (see Figure 27).[65] Large counties were slightly more likely to provide access to dual enrollment and bachelor's degrees. Fewer small counties provided these services on or offsite.

Figure 27. Academic Opportunities for Youth in SYTF Facilities, by County Size



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments. N = 39. Excludes five small counties with no response or responses indicating "N/A" or "Unknown"

[65] Community colleges apply for grant funding to partner with juvenile probation agencies to offer youth access to Rising Scholars programs; Rising Scholars will be explained in the spotlight at the end of this section

Educational Outcomes and Opportunities[lxiii]

Often, juvenile court schools underprepare youth for higher education.[lxiv] Research shows that inconsistent access to rigorous coursework, lack of college-prep classes, and disruptions in continuity (i.e., frequent transitions or suspensions) affect adequate preparation.

- **Low literacy rates and failure to meet academic standards:**[66] Many youth graduating from juvenile justice facilities between 2018 and 2023 had a lower than 8th-grade reading level, and 85% of youth in these facilities had a lower than 12th-grade reading level. Many youth in juvenile court schools did not meet ELA reading standards. In the highest performing court school, 51.5% did not meet the standard (2018-19), which rose to 61.5% in 2021-22.

  These findings have implications for student achievement, as low literacy rates indicate youth are not adequately prepared for college-level work, and therefore, potentially not positioned for higher education success.

- **Low graduation and college-going rates:** Court school graduation rates are lower than public schools statewide. The 2018-19 court school graduation rate was 30%, compared to 84.5% statewide. This increased slightly in 2021-22 (31.8%) yet remained substantially lower than statewide (87%).

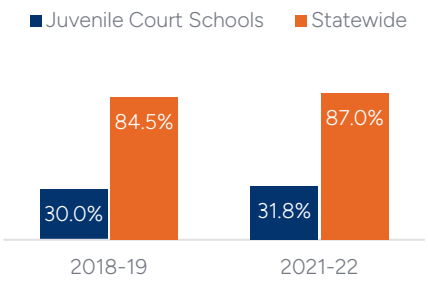
  College-going rates are also lower than statewide rates. In 2020-21, only one of 21 court schools for which data was available had a higher college-going rate than the statewide average of 62.2%. Ten court schools exceeded the alternative school average of 22.5%. However, as discussed below, barriers to college access and transition persist.

- **High suspension rates:** Suspension rates in juvenile court schools exceed state rates (see Figure 29), in part due to willful defiance polices (see Appendix 15 for more information about willful defiance.) In 2018-19, juvenile court school suspension rates were 9.3%, compared to the statewide rate of 3.5%. While rates dropped in 2021-22, students in juvenile court schools were still suspended at twice the statewide rate (6.6% vs. 3.2%).

Pilot Program: OYCR and a large county's Office of Education launched a literacy intervention pilot. Since existing literacy programs are for students reading at least at a 4th-grade level, the program targeted students with a K-3rd-grade literacy proficiency (about 25% of students).

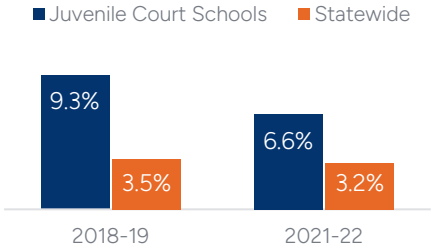
Results: Students received nearly 70 personalized sessions with team members. All showed growth at program completion, approximately 10 passed mastery tests, and three passed the total progress monitoring test.

Figure 28. Graduation Rates



Source: Recreated from Youth Law Center's Out of Sight, Out of Mind report

Figure 29. Suspension Rates



Source: Recreated from Youth Law Center's Out of Sight, Out of Mind report

[66] All data presented in this challenges section sourced from the Youth Law Center's (2023) report for juvenile court schools.

- **High levels of chronic absenteeism despite supervision:** Although youth in court schools are typically under close monitoring, absenteeism rates remain high – 12.9% in 2018-19 and 16.8% in 2021-22, with some court schools nearing 50% chronic absence.[67] Any amount of chronic absenteeism within court schools is cause for concern, as students are under close supervision.[lxv] Absenteeism, which may stem from facility practices and limited oversight, student disengagement, and poor coordination between probation, school staff, and youth, is problematic as it reduces the chances of obtaining a diploma.

OYCR Role in Addressing Chronic Absenteeism: Assembly Bill 2176 outlined OYCR's responsibility to review policies and procedures, facilitate coordination between schools and probation staff, and review agreements between the County Office of Education and probation, in an attempt to better understand barriers to school attendance.

Initiatives to Support Justice-Involved Youth in Pursuit of Higher Education

As discussed above, many juvenile court schools lack alignment with state academic standards and leave youth underprepared to succeed in dual enrollment or college pathways. Networks and programs have emerged across the state to provide currently and/or formerly incarcerated youth with the opportunity and support to overcome challenges and excel in postsecondary education. Some of these programs include Rising Scholars, Project Rebound, Underground Scholars, the Prison Education Project, and Project Change (for more information, see Appendix 16). Rising Scholars, a program highlighted by various stakeholders, is one of the few that provides academic support for youth while incarcerated.

Policy Shaping Opportunities

California has invested in prioritizing higher education for youth and adults in confinement, including through the Senate and Assembly bills:

- SB 716 (2019) required probation departments and DJJ to offer online college courses and career and technical education (CTE) to youth with a diploma or equivalent, on and off campus.[lxvi]

OYCR and the CA Institute Collaboration:

The Institute is partnering with OYCR to conduct a comprehensive survey of California court schools to assess educational challenges and develop policy interventions.

- SB 416 (2021) ensured the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) provided access to college programs with regionally accredited, nonprofit colleges or universities.
- SB 132 (2021) enacted the California Bench to School Initiative, creating the California Institute on Law, Neuroscience, and Education to empower literacy and learning for California's children and youth.
- AB 417 (2021) authorized the Chancellor of California Community Colleges to enter into agreements with up to 50 community colleges to fund services for justice-involved students (see below).[68]

As shown below, California is the first state to dedicate higher education dollars specifically to juvenile-justice impacted youth, reinforcing efforts to promote educational opportunities.

[67] Statewide rates of chronic absenteeism increased between 2018-2019 (12.1%) and 2023-24 (20.4%). Statewide rates were particularly high during 2021-22 (30.0%) likely due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on communities
[68] AB 417, Sect. 2, 78071 (a)

Rising Scholars

- The Rising Scholars Network (RSN) was established in 2014 to expand opportunities for justice-involved students in community colleges throughout California. In 2021, AB 417 allowed CA community colleges to expand community college courses and reach to support justice-impacted students by providing degree and certificate programs both inside juvenile detention facilities and on-campus at California community colleges.[lxvii]

- Rising Scholars provides textbooks and/or digital textbooks to justice-impacted students enrolled in one or more CA community college courses.

- Rising Scholars advocates to revolutionize juvenile justice through education though promoting college as an alternative to detainment, using step-downs as a reward for participation in college programs, and offering furloughs to temporarily leave facilities and attend classes. [lxviii]

- To prepare for youth's transition from DJJ facilities to local care, Rising Scholars offered many trainings on how to serve youth in detention facilities as well as school campuses, and the logistics of facilitating dual enrollment in detention facilities.

- Substantial funding has been allocated to Rising Scholars. Of the $25 million allocated in the 2022-23 state budget, $15 million was earmarked specifically for juvenile-justice-impacted youth. To receive this funding, community colleges must apply through the network, detailing the number of justice-involved students they will serve, and how they will cooperate with youth justice stakeholders. **As of June 2023, 31 of the 36 counties operating a SYTF submitted a Rising Scholars application.** [lxix]

Impact and reach:

- Serves over 17,000 justice-impacted individuals in California each semester [lxx]

- Partners with 44 college programs across the state for youth [lxxi]

- In the SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey, 87% of counties (34 out of 39) said youth have access to Rising Scholars

Barriers to Higher Education Access

While counties and local colleges and universities are expanding efforts to support youth with higher education opportunities, the process is not without challenges. According to interviews conducted by Forward Change (2023) and stakeholders interviewed for this report, barriers to higher education include:[lxxii]

- **Limited economies of scale** make it harder to offer robust education opportunities. Community colleges have minimum full-time equivalent student enrollment requirements, which hinder access for youth who are currently incarcerated. Some County Offices of Education attempt "contract education", which requires direct payment to community colleges for smaller classes. Some counties have considered pooling youth across facilities, creating a type of educational regional hub, and others have created avenues for furloughs, where youth can attend college in person and return to the facilities after classes.

- **Coordination barriers** between local community colleges/universities and probation, especially if there is not one dedicated contact at the facility to coordinate calls or follow-ups.

- **Probation staffing shortages** affect access to quality education opportunities as staff escort youth and provide oversight for programming. Staff shortages can contribute to limited class offerings and frequent cancellations.

- **Limited educator availability and timing constraints** make it difficult to provide classes that align with youth interests for both in-facility and online instruction. This is compounded by the state-wide teacher shortage.

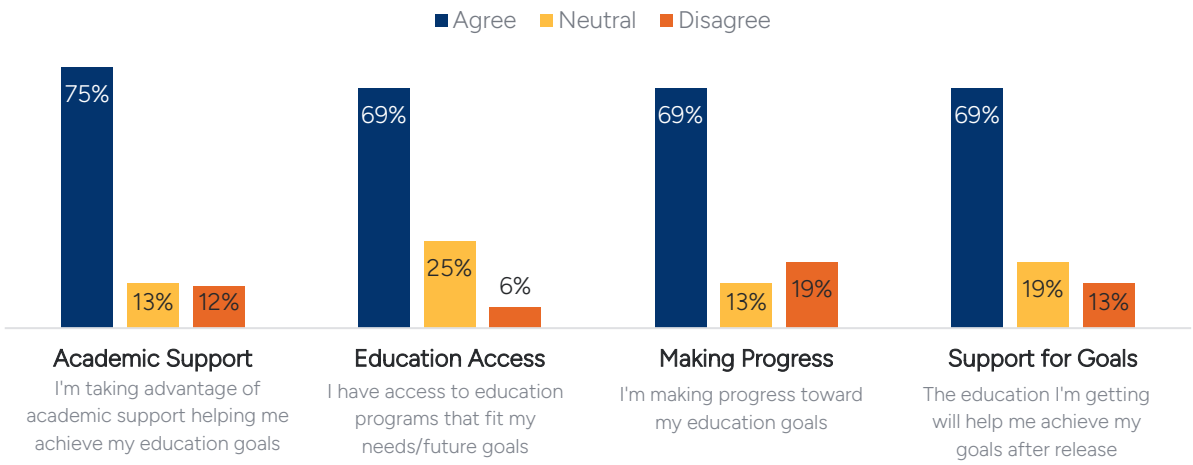
- **Procurement and partnership challenges** persist with some counties reporting little or no response to RFPs for in-facility instruction, as well as challenges creating contacts with community colleges outside of specific districts. One probation stakeholder explained that after no response to the first RFP, the county involved the board of supervisors and met with the college presidents of all five districts in the county. Despite the attempted collaboration, no responses to a second RFP were received. Another probation department described a pitch to a local college to place a satellite campus at their facility to increase access and options for youth while reducing transportation burdens, though the procurement process and leadership changes within the college created barriers to implementation.

- **Absenteeism due to structural barriers** occurs when facilities have WIFI connectivity issues or a disruption, such as a fight in the facility. Probation stakeholders explained that youth have no way of contacting their instructor to notify them of the absence, and probation is unable to directly contact instructors for privacy reasons. One probation stakeholder explained that instructors are not informed that a student is incarcerated.

Youth Perspectives on Educational Opportunities

Three-quarters of the youth who responded to the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey agreed they were taking advantage of academic support to achieve their goals (75%, 12/16), and more than two-thirds (69%, 11/16) agreed they had access to programs aligned with their needs/goals, were making progress, and felt the education would help them after release (Figure 30). Similarly, 73% of youth participating in the Center for Improving Youth Justice's California Perspective survey said attending school was helpful or very helpful (compared to 62% nationally).[69] Rising Scholars and Project Rebound were cited as helpful programs for pathways to college and building a network within the community.

Figure 30. Youth in SYTFs' Perception of Educational Opportunities



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16, although ns may vary by question.

Some youth said **education felt forced**, particularly when tied to expectations in their IRP or progress reviews. For youth who did not have higher education goals, expectations felt misaligned with their interests. Others who were interested in pursuing higher education felt that options were **limited or inaccessible**. This was echoed by probation staff. These challenges are discussed in Barriers to Higher Education Access.

Some youth felt **instructional material** was of poor quality, too basic, or irrelevant to their learning needs. As one youth described, "People don't learn all the same so doing school all together doesn't work." Another youth explained, "The education that the system gives to youth, it is so vague and so mundane. Not really much to learn, it's like giving kindergarten work to someone who is grown." Other youth mentioned barriers to in-person learning such as transportation challenges, inconsistent policies, and lack of support. Students felt processes **lacked clarity** and they had to advocate for themselves to receive educational opportunities.

[69] It is unclear how the survey defines "school"

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into strategies and/or practices that youths valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

- **Access to college programs:** Programs like Rising Scholars and Project Rebound provide youth with direct pathways to college and help them build a network within the community. Probation stakeholders and youth reinforced the value of these programs, including having the program available in facilities, and importantly, through furloughs.

- **Leverage in-person teaching:** Some probation stakeholders felt in-person sessions were more dynamic and engaging than online coursework valued and highlighted a desire to partner with more instructors in their communities. One probation stakeholder shared an effort to address the shortage of instructors willing to enter their facility for in-person classes. Their youth advisory board gave a presentation to the teachers' union. The presentation focused on how education impacts youths' lives. This stakeholder noted a tangible shift in instructor interest following the presentation.

- **Educational liaisons:** Probation stakeholders found that hiring staff solely focused on educational coordination (i.e., collaborating with local colleges, proctoring college classes, supervising online classes, and providing academic/financial aid support) offered youth more options (e.g., more flexibility in times to attend classes). The counties also found that having a single contact between educational institutions created more efficiency in coordination.

> **"We have to engage our youth in something that expands their minds…we have people that are still being rewired and reconnected. We only have that opportunity until they're 25, so these are critical years."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Key Takeaways

The extended age range and duration of commitments in SYTFs necessitated the development of educational opportunities that meet youth's evolving developmental and academic needs. Counties across the state are expanding academic access for youth, offering pathways to college degrees and piloting programs that directly address barriers, such as low literacy rates. Programs like Rising Scholars and partnerships with UC, CSU, and community colleges are providing youth access to pursue postsecondary goals during and after their commitment. While barriers exist, including but not limited to quality of educational programming, variety in classes and major selections, and access to instructors for in-person teaching, investments have been made to develop partnerships with institutions that are showing promise. As one teacher reflected while in a facility with a youth in SYTF, "This is the first class where I felt I was a scholar contributing to the world of academia." (Resources: The Stepping Home Model; Building Higher Education Pathways for Youth in Secure Treatment Facilities in California: A Call to Action)

EMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Programming for vocational training/career and technical education (CTE) and job skills enhances job prospects for youth, provides an alternative means to pursue a bachelor's degree, and can aid in reentry success and long-term stability. The RAND Corporation conducted a study that found that individuals who were incarcerated and received vocational training were 28% more likely to gain employment than those who did not participate in vocational training.[lxxiii] These programs help youth develop practical skills and acquire certifications and internships in preparation for a job post-release.

Progress Across the State

Counties continue to explore ways to offer vocational and workforce development opportunities to help youth build real-world skills and prepare for employment after release. According to the 2024 JJRBG County Plan Summary Report, 34 counties offer Career Technical Education (CTE) hands-on training in various trades, 20 counties offer workforce development programs, 16 counties provide work experience through internships, and nine counties offer certifications.[lxxiv]

> **"She came out of it with a welding certification and some other stuff. You know, which is pretty awesome, if you ask me."**
>
> *- Family Respondent, 2025*

Stakeholders across all groups reinforced the critical value of vocational programming, certificates, career preparation support, and paid/unpaid internships for youth in a SYTF and/or LRP. This area continues to evolve for the youth population's wider age range and longer stays in a facility. During interviews, CBO and probation stakeholders described specific training, certifications, and supports provided to youth in SYTFs, summarized in the table below:

Vocational Training Areas	Certifications
➤ Auto trade ➤ Construction ➤ Culinary arts ➤ Agriculture ➤ Warehouse ➤ Hospitality ➤ Solar ➤ Electrical ➤ Forklift operation *(one county mentioned purchasing virtual forklift simulation training)*	➤ C3 certification[70] ➤ Food handling ➤ Welding ➤ Culinary arts
	Career Preparation Support
	➤ Resume building ➤ Interview preparation ➤ Internship coordination with local community businesses that may extend into employment post-release

[70] Construction Career Collaborative (C3)

Court and probation stakeholders noted that while DJJ provided youth opportunities to work and save during their commitment, many counties struggle to provide the same options. Although counties are expanding efforts (e.g., through online, innovative strategies), all stakeholder groups discussed barriers that impact additional opportunities in local facilities.

STATE INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

> **"By partnering with the Department of Rehabilitation and Amity Foundation to present a variety of education and career pathways to youth in our state, we empower the individual and benefit our communities."**
>
> *- Katherine Lucero, Director of OYCR, 2024*

OYCR and the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) have partnered to enable young people with disabilities to succeed in their educational and career endeavors. To address the needs of youth with physical, emotional, or learning disabilities, the joint initiative is collaborating with probation and County Offices of Education to identify and connect youth with specialized career services.[lxxv] This pilot program will enable the collection of data to refine practices and validate approaches. Nine counties are participating in the initiative, and as of May 2025, **77 youth have received services.**

OYCR has also partnered with the California Conservation Corps (CCC), a state-run youth workforce development program that offers a unique and challenging, paid experience for youth involved in the justice system that are between the ages of 18-25. A year in the CCC can transform their lives through developing new job skills, expanding personal growth, and conserving California's natural resources. As of May 1, 2023, corpsmembers are paid a monthly stipend of $2,814 with opportunities for overtime along with medical benefits.

Through coordinated efforts, OYCR and CCC support justice system-involved young adults in enrolling in, participating in, and transitioning from the CCC program with a goal of promoting successful community reintegration and access to job training and educational opportunities. Since 2022, **67 youth have been placed in the CCC** directly from within custody.

Barriers to Expanding Vocational Programming

CBO, court, and probation stakeholders identified the need to expand vocational programming options for youth in SYTFs. While they emphasized the critical value, probation stakeholders also noted several barriers to expanding vocational programs, work furloughs, and internships:

- **Space:** Many facilities lack space to provide the designated areas required for program materials and equipment. For example, one county wanted to offer the Maker Nexus program, but lacked the classrooms to create dedicated stations with the required machines. Small space constraints also make it difficult to run multiple programs at the same time.
- **Staffing:** Additional staff are needed, particularly to supervise youth using dangerous tools and for off-site transportation (e.g., internships, furloughs).
- **Time:** Vocational training programs may be designed as a full-day (8-hour) curriculum. Requirements specified by Title 15 for minimum time spent doing other activities (e.g., recreation, free time), can create challenges for youth to also meet vocational program requirements.

- **Community connections:** Counties mostly rely on external community partners to connect youth to post-release opportunities such as internships and employment. Community partners must be willing and able to provide these connections.

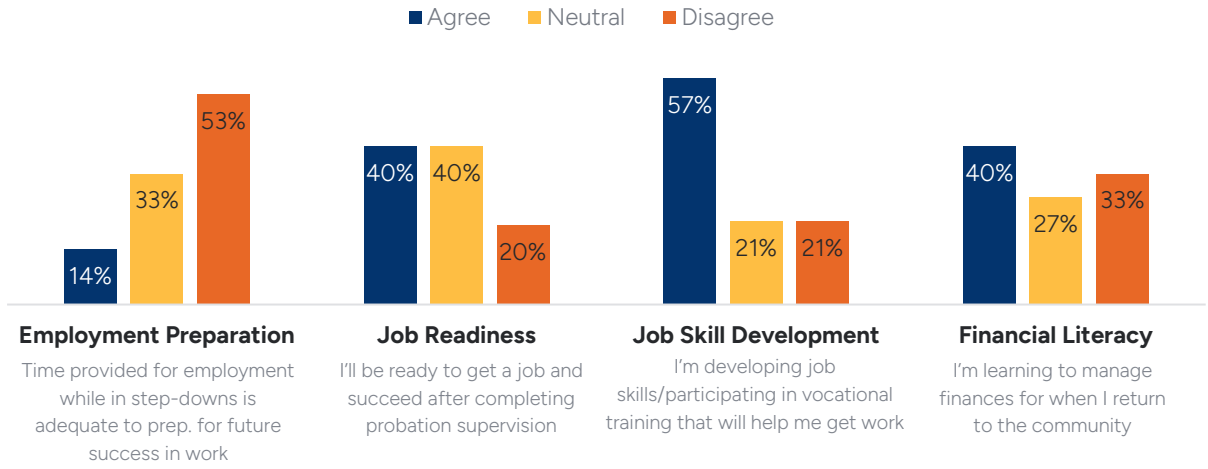
- **Funding and availability:** Some counties have limited funding for vocational programming, including purchasing equipment and contracting with CBOs. In addition, some counties lack CBOs or training providers available to deliver the programming.

Youth Perspectives on Vocational and Employment Opportunities

In focus groups, youth reinforced the value of vocational and employment opportunities. Some explained how important it is to have an alternative to traditional education, especially when that is not aligned with their future goals. Youth in SYTFs were asked about their experience with programs that supported future employment. More than half of the youth (57%, n = 8/14) **agreed they were developing job skills**, though 40% felt ready to secure a job and succeed after completing probation supervision.

Fourteen percent of youth felt that the time provided for employment (i.e., most commonly, six months) while in step-down programs is adequate. Most youth (53%, n = 8/15) disagreed, indicating they **do not feel they have enough time** for meaningful work experience.

Figure 31. Youth Perceptions of Employment Readiness and Skill Development



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16, although ns may vary by question.

When discussing skill development and job readiness, youth focus group participants shared that the certifications offered did not equate to actual employment opportunities. They also felt that low-paying and/or part-time jobs do not pave the way for career advancement or success. Meanwhile, some youth found that real-world work experience, training, and support helped them develop discipline, work ethic, confidence, and preparedness for life after release. One youth mentioned, "Knowing that I'm gaining skills that can open doors to career opportunities has been a huge motivator…I can create a better future for myself."

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into programs that youth valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

- **Innovative means for increased opportunities:** Probation stakeholders reported using online tools such as iCEV (which provides access to 100+ career exploration courses) and Paxton/Patters (an online system with hands-on modules and enough content to span the duration of a youth's SYTF stay). These tools provide access to opportunities that may not be feasible otherwise due to space limitations.

- **Support for employment transitions:** Youth focus group participants discussed the importance of counties investing in their preparation for employment. According to participants, one county offers youth up to $7,000 to cover employment-related needs such as uniforms, tools, or business licenses, removing one of the major barriers to getting started.

- **MC3 Certification through the Building Trades Council:** Probation stakeholders noted that youth learn skills for "the trades" through this statewide resource. Funding goes to a nonprofit to facilitate the MC3 certification and provides a direct path to apprenticeships. Youth can acquire an MC3 Certification after a six-week or extended 130-hour program. When paired with a project labor agreement or community workforce agreement, the certificate enables youth to be added to a hire list.

- **Online certifications:** Stakeholders emphasized that certifications bolster youths' resumes. One probation stakeholder signed up for a Coursera membership, which provides access to over 7,500 certifications. This membership gives the county an administrator account and the ability to create different accounts and assignments based on youth interests. According to this stakeholder, it took nearly a year to acquire membership due to licensing and insurance requirements as well as the facility's unique needs.

Key Takeaways

The extended age range and duration of commitments in SYTFs necessitated the development of vocational opportunities that prepare youth for employment post-release. Counties described a range of workforce development opportunities to help youth gain job skills, earn certifications, and acquire experience through internships. Despite efforts, barriers with shortages, limited space and equipment, time and funding constraints, and challenges forming community partnerships impact the further expansion of opportunities. Stakeholders described some success with navigating barriers, including innovative tools such as iCEV and Paxton/Patters to offer online career exploration and training can help overcome space limitations. Other strategies include providing stipends for employment-related expenses, expanding certification programs (e.g., MC3 program), and offering access to online certification through platforms like Coursera. (**Resource**: The Stepping Home Model)

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING PROGRAMMING

For this report, health and well-being programs include programs that support medical, physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being. Examples include mental health support, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), cultural and spiritual practices, and enrichment programs such as access to forms of self-expression. These programs aim to help youth navigate through previous trauma, connect with their cultural and spiritual identities, and repair their connection with family through counseling.[71] At minimum, Title 15 requires probation facility administrators to ensure all youth in SYTFs and/or less restrictive programs (does not include community-based LRPs) have access to health care services, including medical, dental, and mental health.[lxxvi] In addition, youth must be provided the opportunity for at least one hour of "large muscle activity" each day.[lxxvii]

Progress Across the State

Participants across all stakeholder groups strongly agreed that consistent, reliable access to quality mental health care for all youth was a crucial aspect of health and well-being. As discussed prior, probation departments responding to the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey (n = 38) specified various health and well-being-related services offered in their counties:[72] All participants offered health/medical services and mental health or trauma-based supports, 97% offered substance abuse treatment support, and 95% offered behavioral support. Nearly nine out of 10 (87%) offered specialized programs for specific populations, and about three-quarters offered after-school sports, recreation (76%) and gender-expansive services (74%). In addition to county practices, various statewide initiatives aim to improve youth mental health support.

STATE INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Access to comprehensive quality healthcare is critical for justice-involved youth who face disproportionately higher risks of trauma, violence, overdose, and suicide.[lxxviii] On January 26, 2023, **California became the first state to offer targeted Medicaid services for youth** in juvenile correctional facilities up to 90 days prior to release (see Transition Planning and Reentry Support for more information). Additionally, California has launched major statewide initiatives to improve access to mental health support for youth. OYCR's Health and Policy Division provides training and technical assistance to correctional facilities and CBOs to assist with implementation and sustainability efforts. Some of the key initiatives include:[73]

- **Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI):** more than $4 billion initiative to transform behavioral health services and supports for children, youth, and families by strengthening four strategic areas: workforce training and capacity, behavioral health infrastructure, service coverage, and public awareness.

- **Proposition 1:** Proposition 1 expands funding for mental health and substance use disorder treatment facilities and supportive housing. Prop 1 addresses underlying factors that influence youth justice outcomes, such as behavioral health needs, housing, and care coordination.[lxxix]

- **The Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Networks of Equitable Care and Treatment (BH-CONNECT):** State initiative to improve mental health and substance use services for Medi-Cal members, including justice-involved youth. Counties receive support to strengthen the continuum of

[71] This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but one that provides insight into ways these programs can impact youth
[72] Survey responses do not indicate amount. Quality of delivery will vary by county as will facilitator of the programs.
[73] CalAIM JJ Reentry initiative is discussed in Transition Planning and Reentry section

community-based behavioral health services. To expand the continuum, DHCS will add new evidence-based practices as a county option through the Medi-Cal specialty behavioral health delivery systems.[lxxx]

- **Safe Spaces:** Part of CYBHI, an online trauma-informed training program developed by the California Office of the Surgeon General and administered by the California Department of Public Health to help youth-serving professionals recognize and respond to signs of toxic stress.[lxxxi]

- **California Child and Adolescent Mental Health Access Portal (Cal-MAP):** A resource portal that provides free behavioral health consultations for pediatric primary care providers, as well as training and resource navigation for school staff to expand their capacity to support youth mental health.[lxxxii]

Challenges in Providing Programming for Health and Well-Being

Probation departments that responded to the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey reinforced the need for system-wide reforms, including but not limited to improvements in mental health services. This emphasis on the importance of mental health support aligns with research showing that up to 70% of system-involved youth have a diagnosable mental health issue.[lxxxiii] Counties are working to overcome structural and resource-based challenges that can interfere with timely and appropriate care, including:

Structural limitations in service capacity: Probation stakeholders reported that behavioral health/counseling staff shortages, limited-service options offered in the county, and gaps in provider capacity create barriers to finding support for youth. Probation stakeholders described examples, such as a facility counselor who was constantly managing psychiatric emergencies, leaving little time to see other youth.

Statewide shortage of psychiatric care: Most counties lack access to in-county psychiatric hospital beds, which limits options for youth experiencing acute mental health crises. In California, 74% of counties (43 out of 58) have no in-county child/adolescent acute psychiatric hospital beds, and 43% of counties (25 out of 58) have no access to adult beds.[lxxxiv]

Inconsistency in care and workforce shortages: CBO stakeholders cited challenges with frequent changes in therapists and professionals, causing youth to repeatedly start over to rebuild trust. This can negatively impact youth for whom consistency and stability are crucial. Stakeholders also felt that therapy needs to evolve for this population, as many youth have been through very serious traumatic events and require professionals who understand the depth of trauma they are facing. Stakeholders were encouraged by seeing more individuals with lived experience entering this specialty area.

Policy gaps and contracting delays: Behavioral health stakeholders described how changes to AB 1051 removed the "presumptive transfer" process, which transfers mental health oversight to the youth's county of residence. With counties maintaining responsibility for youth regardless of their placement, they must create contracts with providers and facilities that result in long delays before a youth may receive care.

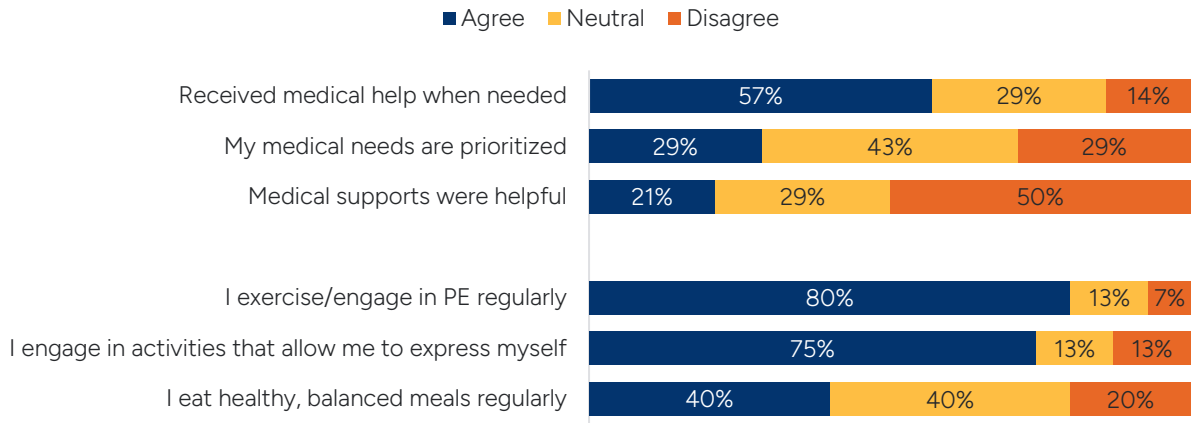
Youth Perspectives on Health and Well-Being Supports

Participants completing the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey were asked about the health and well-being support they received. More than half of the respondents (57%, n = 8/14) agreed they **received medical help when needed,** but fewer felt that care was responsive. Only 29% felt their medical needs were prioritized, and just 21% found the medical support helpful (see Figure 32). However, perceived helpfulness varied depending on the facility or support context. In a larger sample (n = 68), 62% of youth

in SYTFs who participated in the Center for Improving Youth Justice California Perspective survey said their **care was helpful or very helpful**, aligning with the national average of 61%.[lxxxv]

Less than half (40%) of youth surveyed for the purpose of this report agreed that they regularly had **access to healthy, balanced meals**. However, youth voiced dissatisfaction in interviews with the quality and variety of the food available. Next, most youth surveyed said they **engaged in regular physical activity** (80%) and activities that allowed self-expression (75%) (Figure 32). In interviews, one youth shared how much he valued creative opportunities like the facility's music studio, which allowed him to record music and express himself authentically.

Figure 32. Youth in SYTFs' Perception of Health and Well-Being Supports



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16, although ns may vary by question.

Youth survey participants described the mental health services, counseling, and structured programs they accessed. These programs played a significant role in helping youth cope with challenges and grow. Youth described programs like Anger Replacement Therapy (ART), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and restorative justice programs as particularly beneficial in teaching emotion regulation, communication, and coping skills.

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into strategies and/or practices that youth valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

- **Mental health support:** Strategies beneficial to youth's restorative process include counselors (especially those with lived experience), wellness coaches, and innovative programs, such as a dog training program which allows youth to have a 24/7 emotional support pet. Youth described how valuable these supports were for coping with challenges and forward thinking.

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):** Stakeholders highlighted opportunities for youth to participate in CBT with a trusted provider as key in providing space to self-reflect, challenge thinking patterns, and create positive habits. As one CBO stakeholder said, "If they can't ever get to understanding that they have to care about themselves, they're never going to care about who they harmed."

- **Cultural and spiritual practices:** CBO stakeholders emphasized that spaces for youth to connect with and develop their cultural and spiritual identities, through tribal healers, talking circles, and spiritual advisors, can be influential.

- **Authentic self-expression:** Probation stakeholders saw clear value in providing spaces for youth to express themselves through music, dance, poetry, art, and journaling. Youth reinforced the therapeutic value of enriching activities and opportunities for self-actualization.

- **Culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and healing-centered training:** CBO stakeholders emphasized that effective programming requires staff who understand adolescent development, have lived or cultural insight into the youth they serve, and have gone through a healing journey themselves. They reinforced the importance of demonstrating respect for other cultures and the need to go beyond clinical models to focus on healing the whole person, including heart, mind, and soul. They also highlighted the importance of programs that represent the communities they serve, that encourage healing, resilience and empowerment.

Key Takeaways

Stakeholders across all groups agreed that consistent access to quality mental health care is vital to youth well-being. Achieving this requires coordinated, cross-system efforts, including behavioral health, probation, education, and community partners. Overall, stakeholders, including youth, saw value in programs that allow for self-expression, provide opportunities to address complex trauma and work toward self-love and healing, as well as engage in cultural and spiritual practices. Counties reported offering a range of health and well-being-related services yet noted that barriers remain, particularly in terms of staffing, psychiatric bed availability, and workforce stability. Importantly, access to and the quality of these services are not consistent across all facilities and counties. Stakeholder perceptions varied, with some highlighting meaningful opportunities for engagement, while others raised concerns about unmet needs and varied implementation. Despite these challenges, state-wide efforts are expanding to support the physical and mental health of youth. (**Resources**: The Stepping Home Model; Trauma-Informed Care; Practice Guidelines for Treating Behavioral Health Disorders in SYTFs and Other Facilities)

RELATIONSHIP- AND COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PROGRAMMING

Relationship- and community-focused programming are efforts centered around providing pro-social opportunities for youth through relationship building, mentoring, family support, community service, and restorative justice. These programs intend to help youth give back to their community, build relationships, and make amends–all integral parts of the rehabilitative process.

Progress Across the State

Counties reported offering many services and programs aimed at building relationships and community. In the SB-823 Post-Realignment Survey, **92% of counties said they offer mentorship opportunities**, with many specifically mentioning the credible messenger approach for youth to connect with mentors with lived experiences.[74] Credible messengers is discussed in further detail in the program spotlight section. Other counties described peer mentorship programs where youth are involved formally or informally. One probation stakeholder described the process of designing a peer mentorship program, incorporating focus groups into the scope of work to ensure the expertise of those facilitating the program is captured fully.

> **"They need a mentor, someone who's there that understands and is a guide to fill in the void of the school…[and] fill in the void of the parents."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

In the same survey, 97% of county probation offices reported offering **family counseling and support services**. In interviews, stakeholders discussed examples, including parenting classes for youth, family-based case planning, and family reunification support. In addition, according to the 2024 JJRPBG County Plan Summary, 25 counties host family engagement events and 18 provide wraparound services, which include support for both youth and families.[lxxxvi] Stakeholders also mentioned providing youth access to **community service opportunities**, both inside and outside of the facilities. Examples included community clean-up, presentations at events (e.g., youth sharing art at an opioid outreach event), and toy drives.

Probation, CBO, and court stakeholders mentioned various ways of incorporating **restorative practices** with youth. CBO stakeholders shared practices that involved incorporating victim advocates and youth advocates at court hearings and doing intentional deep work with both parties before creating space for restorative conversations. Probation stakeholders also mentioned community providers that host circles with youth, bringing in parents and/or loved ones to discuss how the youth's actions impacted them, share their personal experience, and converse with youth. Others shared practices of writing letters of apology/accountability for their actions.[75] CBO and advocate stakeholders reinforced the value of restorative justice. One CBO stakeholder explained, "Restorative justice is a worldview, not just a theory of justice and a practice of justice…it's actually a way in which **people hold themselves accountable** and how they operate in the world."

> **"In one case, the father of the victim had already expressed forgiveness to the young person and had wanted to be involved in the rehabilitation as a supporter."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

> **"In the beginning, she [mother of the victim] reacted like any parent does, angry…. Now, she thinks that the best way to honor her son is to help and mother [him]."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

[74] Credible messengers is used loosely throughout interviews to reference mentors with lived experience. It has not been confirmed that all of these reference individuals who have gone through the Credible Messengers training program.
[75] Restorative practices, implementation, and definitions of what practices qualify as "restorative" vary by county.

Challenges with Relationship and Community-Focused Programming

Court, probation, and CBO stakeholders noted that while restorative justice practices are important, in reality, many victims often do not wish to participate. In addition, court and probation stakeholders described the challenge and importance of advocating for the victim as well as the youth, as they both have likely undergone harm. Despite advancements with restorative justice work, probation departments shared concerns that the restorative justice emphasis of the reform needs to be more consistently exercised and extended to all supporting systems (e.g., victims, families, communities).

CBO stakeholders reinforced that, despite recognition that mentors with lived experience are very effective, not all probation departments allow individuals into facilities with prior criminal records. Among the counties responding to the SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey, 79% (n = 30/38) allowed youth access to mentors/credible messengers. The changes in visitation policies within juvenile halls have and are continuing to evolve.

Youth Perspectives on Relationship and Community-Focused Programming

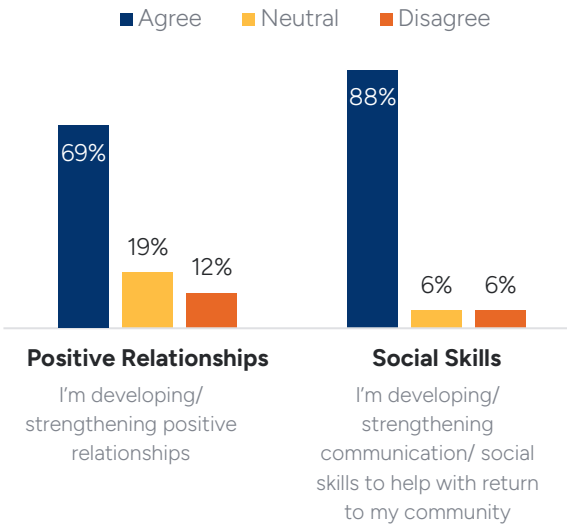
Youth validated stakeholder insight into the value of relationships throughout their commitments. This includes staff and community-based partners as well as peer mentors, whether formally or informally. As one youth stated about a peer support program, "They turned into family, and I felt supported." Specifically, youth highlighted the importance and benefits of building relationships with mentors, peers, and providers who had been through similar experiences. One youth illustrated the importance of this by noting, "Some people say they want to help but they have never been part of the system…I feel like people in [juvenile halls] have trust issues…If you can relate to the kids, you have a better chance of them listening and getting to know you."

Youth who completed the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey were asked about their relationships and sense of community. Nearly nine out of 10 participants (88%) reported growth in communication and social skills that will help them return to their community, and 69% agreed that they were developing or strengthening positive relationships while in the facility (Figure 33).

Further, 69% of youth agreed they were making amends with their community, and 81% said they saw value in doing so. This may speak to progress in the healing journey. As one CBO stakeholder described, "If they can't ever get to understanding that they have to care about themselves, they're never going to care about who they harmed."

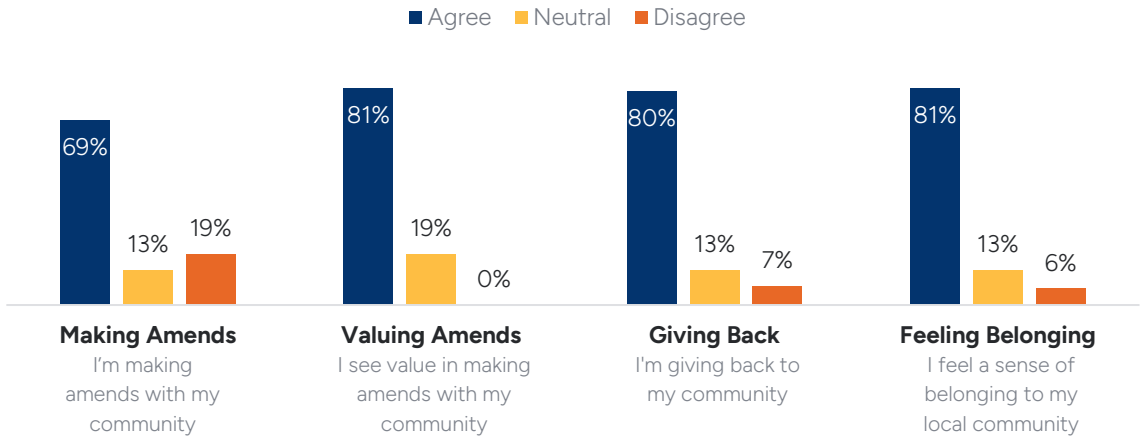
A strong majority also agreed that they were giving back (80%) and felt a sense of belonging (81%) (Figure 34). These highlight key indicators of positive development and readiness to reengage with their communities post-release.

Figure 33. Youths' Perceptions of Relationships and Social Skills



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16, although ns may vary by question.

Figure 34. Youths' Perceptions of Community Engagement and Making Amends



Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16, although ns may vary by question.

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into strategies and/or practices that youth valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

- **Mentors with lived experience:** Access to mentors with lived experience (e.g., Credible Messengers, peer mentors) that offer youth relatable role models and emotional support was highly valuable. CBO stakeholders supported removing barriers that prevent mentors with prior justice involvement from entering facilities, something that was reinforced by youth. As one youth stated:
  - "Get youth who have had experiences back into juvenile halls without a probation term barring their commitment to coming in the more you can get a youth who has been successful in their program to come in and out and be a mentor to those going through the same program, the more beneficial it will be for all involved."

> **"The best way that you can have somebody learn is to put somebody in their shoes. If we have youth-on-youth mentors, then I believe that the programming will be a lot more successful."**
>
> *- Youth Respondent, 2024*

- **Restorative justice practices:** Probation, court, and CBO stakeholders reinforced the value of restorative opportunities to aid youth in processing harm, generating empathy, and taking accountability. Examples included restorative circles, empathy development, life ownership plans, and victim/youth advocacy and support programs. Many stakeholders specifically mentioned the *Healing Dialogues in Action* program.

- **Consistent relationships:** Probation and CBO stakeholders emphasized the importance of consistent relationships with trauma-informed staff or mentors who can build trust and stability by working with youth throughout their commitment and upon reentry (e.g., therapists, mentors, staff).[76]

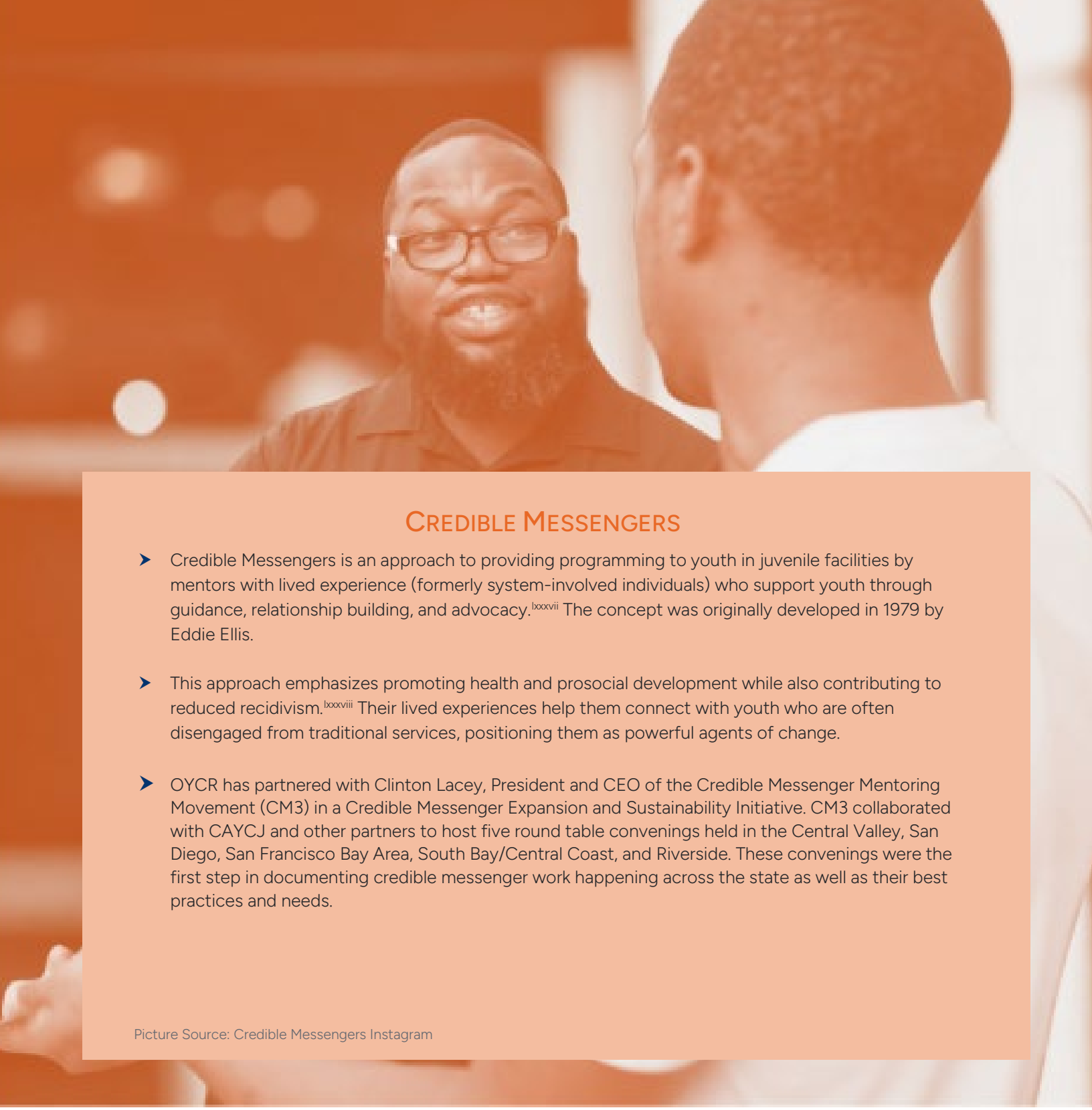
- **Peer mentorship and youth-led support groups:** Access to peer support systems and positive peer models was highly valued by youth and seen as essential for well-being and growth. Many youth value peer mentorship opportunities and peer-led support groups to exercise agency and take an active role in their own and others' rehabilitation. Some felt that learning from peers with shared experiences could provide better guidance and support than top-down authority structures. Youth discussed that younger youth might listen to older peers more than correctional officers, for example, about the consequences of gangs and drugs.

> **"My son had some very positive role models while he was in the local county care. He was able to be a mentor and help the other youth because he was coming from a place of knowledge and compassion."**
>
> *- Family Respondent, 2024*

Key Takeaways

Efforts to promote relationship- and community-focused programming, including but not limited to mentorship, family engagement, community service, and restorative justice, support prosocial development by fostering accountability, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Counties have expanded opportunities, including adjusting policies to allow credible messengers into facilities, as well as options for peer support programs, community service projects, and restorative practices. Importantly, youth affirmed that they were developing/strengthening positive relationships in SYTF commitments and felt a sense of belonging to their local communities, a key facet of the intention behind SB 823. (**Resources**: The Stepping Home Model; Restorative Justice; Credible Messengers)

[76] While this was noted as crucial for stability, there are various factors that impact consistency (turnover, youth transition in placement, end of contacts, etc.)



Credible Messengers

- Credible Messengers is an approach to providing programming to youth in juvenile facilities by mentors with lived experience (formerly system-involved individuals) who support youth through guidance, relationship building, and advocacy.[lxxxvii] The concept was originally developed in 1979 by Eddie Ellis.

- This approach emphasizes promoting health and prosocial development while also contributing to reduced recidivism.[lxxxviii] Their lived experiences help them connect with youth who are often disengaged from traditional services, positioning them as powerful agents of change.

- OYCR has partnered with Clinton Lacey, President and CEO of the Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement (CM3) in a Credible Messenger Expansion and Sustainability Initiative. CM3 collaborated with CAYCJ and other partners to host five round table convenings held in the Central Valley, San Diego, San Francisco Bay Area, South Bay/Central Coast, and Riverside. These convenings were the first step in documenting credible messenger work happening across the state as well as their best practices and needs.

Picture Source: Credible Messengers Instagram

"My job is to develop the next generation of leaders, who will make tomorrow better than today for the incarcerated, the formerly incarcerated, and everyone connected to that community of human beings."

- Eddie Ellis, Creator of the Credible Messengers Concept

PROGRESS REVIEW HEARINGS

Youth in SYTFs attend progress review hearings every six months. During this hearing, the court will review the youth's progress in their treatment. Welf. & Inst. Code § 875 (e) and (f) stipulate that progress review hearings should consider input from probation, counsel, and any other providers (e.g., behavioral, educational) who have insight into the youth's progress. In some courts, youth also provide self-reflection on the progress they have made. Based on this review, judges have the discretion to reduce up to six months from a youth's baseline commitment during each review and/or approve a step-down to a less restrictive setting, if a motion is filed by probation or the youth. These reviews intend to be motivational and to allow updates to programming and goals based on demonstrated progress and evolving needs. Ideally, the process helps reinforce positive behavior and forward movement.

Progress Across the State

SB 823 introduced a new judicial mandate requiring juvenile courts to conduct progress review hearings. Counties and courts vary in how they conduct progress reviews and who is involved. The Los Angeles Justice Partners modeled their SYTF Court after their successful Juvenile Mental Health and Succeeding Through Achievement and Resilience (STAR) Courts, to create a safe environment for youth where the SYTF progress review hearings are conducted in a collaborative, trauma-informed manner. OYCR has provided grant funding to support this initiative in hopes of generating and disseminating ideas on best practices for the hearings.

From interviews, court and probation stakeholders described practices such as including community providers, peer advocates, behavioral health providers, and other stakeholders in the reviews for youth. Many court stakeholders prioritized including youth voice, as well as their providers, to enforce shared accountability for the progress made and access to services received.

"When youth actually start programming, the focus shifts not to the bad that they've done, but the good... And there's something that I think motivates them to continue receiving praise that perhaps they didn't receive before."

- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024

Stakeholders experienced mixed outcomes of the progress hearings, regarding the time-off commitment awarded. Some probation stakeholders said that courts were giving the full six months off at every review. Others found it rare to see any time being taken off, and some stakeholders described their experience as somewhere in between, including those who described following templates for time-off commitment suggestions.

Overall, court stakeholders valued progress review hearings as a way to develop a relationship with the youth and be involved in their progress. They noted that this process was motivational for some, especially as a strengths-based approach and positive encouragement reinforced and incentivized their successes. However, others mentioned challenges that surfaced.

Challenges

SB 823 encourages a strength-based, rehabilitative approach to promote youth growth and accountability. However, hearings can be emotionally difficult for both victims and youth and potentially cause re-traumatization. As one court stakeholder described, DJJ youth would only encounter victims or families during parole hearings, meanwhile progress review hearings are held every six months. Court stakeholders described tense conversations with victims in which they tried to reiterate the purpose of a rehabilitative court, and many court and probation stakeholders saw the unintended emotional consequences for victims and/or their families during progress review hearings. When youth are granted time off commitments and access to opportunities, those affected may view these decisions as unfair and not aligned with the harm caused. As one probation stakeholder explained, "There are very real victims…that need to be advocated for. And at the same token, our young people are often very real victims as well."

> **"The premise of the six-month review is that it be treatment oriented. And it's hard to fulfill that in balance with acknowledgement and sensitivity to the feelings of the harmed parties."**
>
> *- Court Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Additionally, because hearings occur at six-month intervals, youth nearing the end of their baseline commitment may receive a time reduction, resulting in immediate release. This disrupts transition planning and efforts to ensure youth receive critical support for reentry into their community. It could also interrupt their completion of a program. For example, if a youth was in a six-month program and only attended three months before their time reduction resulted in immediate release, they may not receive the full benefit of the program in which they were enrolled.

Stakeholders also highlighted that decisions about reducing commitments vary widely by county and can feel subjective or unclear. Some court and probation stakeholders described how situations like behavioral issues occurring too close to a progress review hearing may influence the outcome or perception of progress. Despite steady progress, a behavioral issue occurring close to the hearing may disproportionately affect the courts' perception of overall progress. On the opposite end of the spectrum, probation staff felt disrespected or that youth were not being held accountable if a situation occurred (e.g., physical altercation with staff), and the youth still received the full six months off their commitment.

Youth Perspectives on Progress Reviews

In focus groups, youth consistently emphasized the importance of including the youth voice in the review process. Many felt their input and perspectives were not considered or carried less weight.

Some youth shared that the process felt like a formality, in which boxes were checked off, rather than a true assessment of their progress and growth. Youth recommended that progress reviews focus on meaningful, real-life development rather than generic checklists. They emphasized the importance of reviews that reflect individual growth and achievements. Like

> **"While the idea of reviewing progress every six months with the county judge sounds beneficial, in practice it didn't always feel like my input truly mattered."**
>
> *- Youth Respondent, 2024*

systems stakeholders, youth raised concerns about how time-off decisions are made, describing them as **unfair due to subjectivity** in how the time-off is calculated.

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into strategies and/or practices that youth valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

- **Youth-led presentations:** Court stakeholders emphasized the importance of encouraging youth to prepare and present their own reflections on progress, goals, and challenges, and advocate on their own behalf. Stakeholders said this strength-based approach is important because it provides insight into youth experiences, is motivational, and promotes accountability. Probation stakeholders also discussed the following practices to help youth prepare for progress review hearings:
  - Purchasing professional attire for the youth to wear during court sessions.
  - Discussing with the court that not all youth are comfortable with public speaking and collaboratively determining various ways youth can present their progress (e.g., written youth statements, vision boards, PowerPoints). Youth affirmed the importance of educating courts on alternative formats to share their growth more comfortably, as public speaking in a court setting can feel stressful.
- **Multi-stakeholder involvement and accountability:** Court stakeholders emphasized incorporating multiple perspectives, including mentors, community partners, behavioral health providers, and others during court sessions to provide a well-rounded perspective of youth progress and to ensure those involved in youth progress are held accountable as well.
- **Flexible review schedules:** Some probation stakeholders learned that interim 90-day progress reviews between the standard 180-day reviews were beneficial. These more frequent reviews allow the team to assess progress and adjust programming to maintain momentum and ensure youth are on the right track before time-off decisions are made during the 180-day review.
- **Collaboration efforts:** Some court stakeholders noted developing a court committee of judges, the public defender, probation, and DA representatives to meet monthly and discuss any challenges that may arise. One probation stakeholder added that including line staff in reviews allows for insight into how the youth is responding to the available programming and what may work better for them.
- **Preparation for court sessions:** In response to the emotional intensity of hearings, some court stakeholders proactively communicate with families and victims to clarify that the primary objective of youth court is rehabilitation. They emphasize that this focus may result in rulings that reward youth for progress in their treatment. Judges also mentioned extending the duration of hearings to ensure all voices are heard and participants do not feel rushed and less transactional.

> **"The six-month reviews with the county judge should feel more personal and engaging, focusing on real progress and challenges rather than just checking off boxes."**
>
> *- Youth Respondent, 2024*

Key Takeaways

Progress review hearings are intended to reinforce youth progress using a strengths-based approach. Across counties, there is variation in time-off commitments, stakeholder involvement, and incorporation of youth voice. Stakeholders describe progress reviews as valuable, especially for shared accountability and cross-collaboration. However, sudden reductions during these reviews can disrupt program completion and shorten or prevent transition planning. Variation in time off can also be perceived as unfair and subjective. Counties are continuing to refine their practices as they learn throughout implementation. Some have found success through more frequent reviews, earlier transition planning, and structured support to help youth prepare. (**Resources**: Best Practices on Progress Review Hearings, Forthcoming).

LESS RESTRICTIVE PROGRAMS (LRPs)

The Stepping Home Model describes less restrictive programs (LRPs) provide youth "gradual exposure to less restrictive programming (i.e., more access to the community) until they are ultimately placed at home where restrictions are removed as their commitment is completed.",[77] LRPs offer more freedom and independence than in SYTF, helping youth apply new skills in real-world settings with ongoing supervision and structure. Youth in LRPs receive day-for-day credit off their baseline commitment and still participate in six-month progress reviews. They may be returned to a SYTF for the remainder of their baseline term or modified based term if the court determines that the youth has not complied with their conditions.

"There are different levels of step downs and there's different levels of support at step downs. When youth are hooked up with particular community-based organizations, it just makes a huge difference."

- Court Respondent Stakeholder, 2024

LRPs can either be in a facility (governed by Title 15 standards) or outside of a facility (not governed by Title 15 standards), including those offered through community-providers in residential settings, by probation in residential settings, in state-run conservation camps, or LRPs in a different wing or floor of a SYTF facility which provides greater community access (e.g., furloughs).

Common Types of LRPs

Residential Programs

These can be community- or county-based and offer a structured, supervised living environment outside of a secure facility.

Electronic Monitoring

Youth live at home or independently while being monitored through electronic devices with wraparound teams for high touch support.

Fire Camps

Youth may be placed state-run camps such as Pine Grove where they receive firefighting training or local-run fire camps.

Environmental/ Vocational Programs

State-run programs like California Conversation Corps (CCC) provide hands-on environmental or j b eadi t ai i

[77] LRPs are also referred to by some stakeholders as step-downs

Progress Across the State

Not all counties currently have or use LRPs. Stakeholders described challenges accessing consistent, reliable funding to support LRP development, in addition to gaps in staffing and partnerships in the community to provide oversight.

Yet, despite these challenges, LRP options are increasing. The number of counties known to be operating LRPs more than **doubled in just over a year**, from 16 counties in March 2023 operating LRPs to 34 counties operating a total of 124 LRPs as of November 2024 (Figure 35).[78] Nine counties are using Pine Grove and 12 are using California Conservation Corps (CCC). [lxxxix]

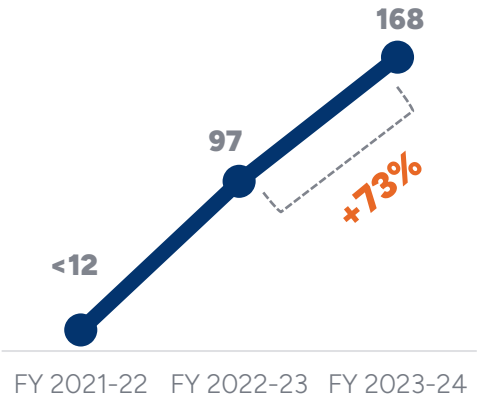
LRP use is expanding – 34 counties now operate LRPs (up from 16) and youth transfers from SYTFs to LRPs grew by 73% in one year.

Increase in youth transfers to LRPs: The number of youth transferred from a SYTF to an LRP increased 73% between FY 2022-23 and FY 2023-24 (Figure 36).[79] The usage increase over time could be due to the fact that in FY 2021-22, probation departments were just starting to receive youth in their SYTFs, and thus, many did not have LRPs in place or youth who had completed enough of their baseline commitment for courts to consider LRP placement. Probation stakeholders also reinforced the consideration of timing as probation assesses every person independently to determine placement options, considering aspects such as safety, security, and their community.

Figure 35. Statewide Growth in LRPs

Source: Inventory of Statewide Capacity to Serve Youth Returning from DJJ (March 2023) and Less Restrictive Programs throughout California directory (November 2024).

Figure 36. Increase in Number of Youth Transferred from SYTF to LRP



Source: AB102 Data by County (C.)

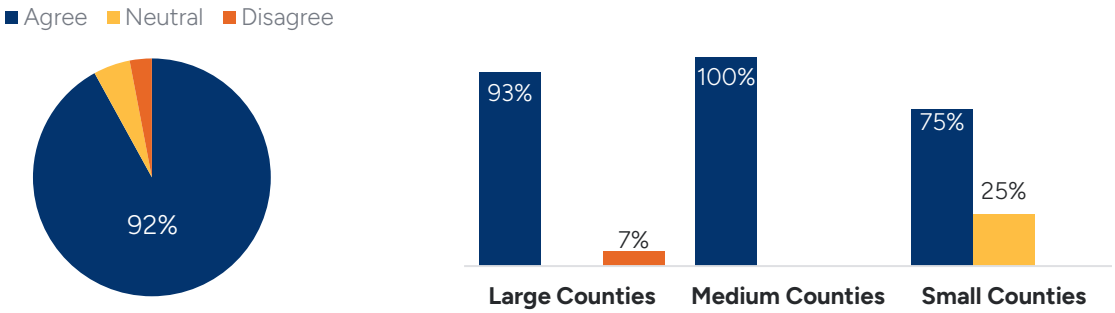
Grant funding for innovative options: OYCR offered less restrictive placement grant funding to county probation departments and community partners to demonstrate innovative approaches to help youth transition into less restrictive programs. 11 counties are receiving funding.

[78] As of the publication date, the LRPs listed are based on county self-reporting and documentation available to OYCR.
[79] Data provided via AB 102 county reporting requirements (a data point that will continue to be collected via AB 169 county reporting requirements)

Perception of LRP benefit to reentry: Nine out of 10 county probation departments agreed that creating LRPs will improve reentry services (92%, n = 34/37).[80] Small counties were more likely to be "neutral" (25%, n = 2/8). Stakeholders mentioned challenges that could disproportionately impact smaller counties, including potentially not being able to provide access to an LRP due to a lack of funding, gaps in staffing and/or lack of community partnerships to facilitate programs.

92% of responding counties agree that LRPs help reentry.

Figure 37. Perspectives on Whether LRPs Will Improve Reentry Services, Overall and by County Size



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments (N = 37).

Overall, most stakeholders valued LRPs and desired to see them used more frequently, especially those located outside of a SYTF facility. LRPs vary by county, with stakeholders providing examples of: youth stepping-down to attend college classes on campus with a cohort, a probation-paid apartment for a youth attending college and working part time, fire camps and programs for youth to develop skills and gain firefighting experience, returning to home environments with electronic monitoring, and partnering with well-known organizations, such as the Anti-Recidivism Coalition. One court stakeholder reinforced how important this opportunity was for youth, as there are limited opportunities to practice skills in such a structured SYTF environment. He expressed, "they don't have opportunities to practice what they're learning…driven by the limitation of the facility itself…a young person [needs] to practice agency and have the experiences that they would have in real life." LRPs offer space for independence, skill integration, and socialization with peers and family.

"She was in…transitional housing. I think that did a lot of good getting her adjusted to being back… and helped normalize getting her into society."

- Family Stakeholder Respondent, 2024

Some court and probation stakeholders shared that while they could see the value of LRPs, outcomes for youth stepping down varied, as each individual situation is unique. As one court stakeholder explained, youth progress at varying speeds, and many can be impulsive during the adolescent phase. Even if they may be doing well in a structured environment, that may not be the case when returning to a community that could surface triggers.

[80] Perception of agreement could vary based on definition of an LRP, which requires further clarification for probation stakeholders

County Perceptions of What Benefits Youth in LRPs

In the 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey, 21 of the 44 responding counties shared what benefits youth in LRPs.[81] These insights reflect where counties are seeing the greatest value for youth, even if implementation varies. Three major themes emerged in their responses:

	Area	Purpose and Value	Examples Mentioned
	**Education, Vocational Training, and Employment Support (n = 14)**	Opportunities to *build* life skills, pursue higher education, and gain real-world experience, helping youth develop employable skills and strong work habits.	➤ Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp ➤ The Coastal Valley Academy ➤ The California Conservation Corps
	**Housing and Independent Living Skills (n = 10)**	Transitional housing and programs that allow for independent living, learning practical skills, or preventing return to unfit environments. One county noted that "… LRP programs with housing are extremely beneficial, as youth prefer not to return to the same home environment from which they came."	➤ Step-down home with structured support ➤ Community residential placements[82] ➤ The Turning Point Program ➤ Programs focused on practical transitional living skills
	**Step-Down Models and Community Integration Programs**	Programs that gradually transition youth from custody using monitoring and structured strategies.	➤ GPS monitoring ➤ Youth Day Reporting Center (YDRC) ➤ Court-approved furlough programs that allow youth to temporarily leave SYTF for structured activities such as school or work

Challenges with LRPs

Despite the options available, stakeholders expressed a **lack of clarity** in the statutory definition of an LRP. Some stakeholders felt LRPs were never intended to be in a facility with furlough options, and others felt that there needs to be a range of options to meet local needs.

> **"[The LRP] was not even for a nanosecond envisioned to be another unit of lock up."**
>
> *- Court Respondent Stakeholder, 2024*

[81] The 21 counties who shared best practices included 12 large counties and nine medium-sized counties.
[82] Under Section 875(f)(1) of the Welfare and Institutions Code

Overall, probation stakeholders noted challenges in identifying the appropriate time for youth to transition into an LRP, reinforcing a **need to balance youth and community safety**.

Youth Perspective on LRPs

Youth also emphasized the importance of LRPs. Overall, youth who completed the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey (n = 16) generally reported **positive experiences with LRPs**, noting benefits such as building important connections, developing healthy habits, and gaining independence. They had suggestions, including incorporating peer mentorship opportunities and ensuring group dynamics foster, rather than hinder, those who are making progress and on track.

However, others described how decision-making regarding how much time each youth was allowed to spend at home or school was inconsistent, and at times, felt unfair. They called for **more clearly defined timelines** and milestones so that opportunities (e.g., visits home, access to school) are standardized and applied equitably, rather than left to the discretion of probation officers.

Positive Practices and Strategies

Stakeholders provided insight into strategies and/or practices that youth valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

- **Placements outside of SYTFs:** LRPs outside of SYTFs were noted to have the most powerful impact in that they provide greater opportunities for real-world integration and reflect stakeholders' perception of the law's intent.
- **Therapeutic environments:** Facilities that are therapeutic, such as dorm-style housing models that include counselors or therapeutic supports embedded within each pod.
- **LRP Youth Advisory Council:** One county created a youth advisory council for youth in LRPs to provide feedback to the probation department about their experiences during that unique stage.

Key Takeaways

LRPs are meant to provide youth a gradual transition from SYTFs back into the community, providing guidance and supervision in tandem with increased independence. The number of operating LRPs and the number of youth transferred to LRPs has increased greatly within the last two years. Almost all stakeholders, including youth, reinforced the value of LRPs. Despite the variation in interpretation of definition, most stakeholders reinforced the importance of LRPs being outside of a facility, which presents challenges for certain counties due to limited local resources and community partnerships. (**Resources**: Less Restrictive Programs)

> If you don't change the circumstances that facilitated them making these decisions you can't expect someone who's 15, 16, 17, to change their own life.
>
> Behavioral Health Stakeholder Respondent
> 2024

TRANSITION PLANNING AND REENTRY SUPPORT

To support a successful return to the community, a transition plan is developed for youth in SYTF a minimum of six months before reentry. Planning considerations include medical, housing, financial support, and obtaining necessary paperwork (e.g., IDs, transcripts). Transition planning may involve taking advantage of state resources, such as Medi-Cal Justice-Involved Reentry funding. Reentry efforts also focus on continuity of care through warm hand-offs and connecting youth with community-based case management and services. When possible, the transition plan will prioritize connecting youth to people with whom they already have a relationship. This rapport-based ongoing support further reinforces the value of local SYTFs and partnerships with local organizations. The Stepping Home Model reinforces pre-release engagement with community health and resources that address social determinants of health.

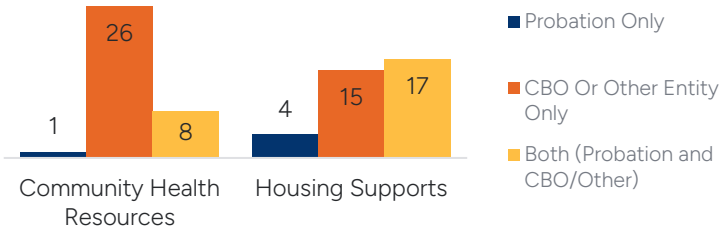
Progress Across the State

Across the state, counties have implemented reentry support for youth transitioning from SYTFs back into their communities. Many have begun the transition planning process earlier in the commitment process, established multidisciplinary teams to coordinate reentry support, and increased partnerships and collaborative efforts to support continued education and/or employment opportunities post-release. Some counties have begun tapping into Medi-Cal Juvenile-Involved Reentry Initiative funding to expand access to behavioral health care and continuity of service.

According to the 2024 Post-Realignment Survey, 93% of counties (38 of 41) offer transition planning for youth in SYTF programs. [83]

Most counties responding to the survey that provide housing or health services post-release collaborate with community-based organizations or other outside providers (Figure 38).

Figure 38. Number of Counties that Provide Reentry Supports for Youth Post-Release



Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments. N = 38.

[83] Five out of six participants who did not answer yes included small counties who either contract with another county or plan to contract with other counties, if SYTF is needed

CBO and probation stakeholders described efforts in the transition planning process to support youth post-release. One CBO participant mentioned helping youth acquire a driver's license. Another shared how they help youth access school transcripts and navigate the process of transferring education credits. If youth enter the juvenile justice system without personal identification or the skills to acquire what they need, navigating systems after release may be especially challenging. Ensuring youth have their **personal identification and records** helps reduce barriers to employment, schooling, or general self-sufficiency and stability.

Counties mentioned that **transition plans** should include:

- Medical, housing, and financial support
- Acquiring medical, educational, and identification records
- Family reunification counseling, when appropriate

Many probation and court stakeholders also shared examples of working with youth who are unable to return to family environments that are unsafe or may not be conducive to their continued progress. They worked with youth to identify other options such as extended family, siblings, and transitional housing. Some said their counties **provided stipends** for housing and/or work (to purchase uniforms, licenses, etc.). Overall, these examples highlight the importance of guiding youth toward the path of success, rather than recidivism. Yet, implementing reentry support is complex and highly dependent upon the youth's individual situation.

STATE INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT REENTRY AND CONTINUITY OF CARE

- **Juvenile Reentry Grant (JRG):** The JRG (disbursed by OYCR as of July 2024) provides funding for expenses to support a youth's successful reentry, including costs of housing, supervision, programming, and education.[xc]
- **CalAIM Justice-Involved Reentry Initiative:** Beginning in 2023, California became the first state to receive federal approval to offer Medi-Cal services to youth and eligible adults in correctional facilities, county jails, and state prisons. This initiative is designed to provide continuous Medi-Cal coverage and access to quality physical and behavioral health care from incarceration through release, building a bridge to community-based care. Full statewide implementation is required by October 2026, and four California counties have been conditionally approved. OYCR has provided training and technical assistance to correctional facilities and CBOs focused on reentry support, to help with implementation and sustainability.
- **Justice Serving Network Development Initiative:** The initiative works with OYCR staff, the Sierra Health Foundation's Elevate Youth California Initiative, stakeholders, and other philanthropic leaders to identify 20 juvenile justice serving agencies. These agencies will receive between $100k - $200k a year for two years to hire staff and build capacity to aid in reentry support after the probation period ends. The agencies will receive increased funding opportunities through Medi-Cal and managed care plans, learn from a cohort of like-minded organizations, and align with best practices.
- **Youth Employment Initiative**: Youth who are connected to the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Youth Employment Initiative (partnership between OYCR and DOR) are supported throughout reentry and beyond to achieve their career and educational goals.

Challenges with Transition Planning and Reentry Support

Stakeholders across probation, CBOs, and courts identified challenges in reentry support for youth transitioning out of SYTFs. While efforts to improve early planning are in motion, structural and resource-related barriers remain. Counties have described adapting to start transition planning as early as possible. Because progress review hearings occur every six months, youth nearing the end of their baseline commitment may receive a time reduction that advances their release date. While this can be a positive outcome, it may limit the time available to coordinate reentry services and finalize transition planning.

Stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of **services to support reentry** yet described the complexity of delivering support. Strategies and outcomes depend on a youth's individual needs, family dynamics, environment, and availability of local services.

Housing barriers: Barriers to securing safe, youth-appropriate housing include high housing costs, lack of youth-specific transitional housing (most programs are designed for 18+), and limited space to build housing units. Counties with transitional housing in place report inconsistent occupancy due to small numbers of youth and variation in transition times. This equates to paying high rent costs for limited use.

Environment and employment stability: Many stakeholders described a gap in employers willing or able to hire youth during their commitments and continue employment after reentry. This can create a lack of stability, structure, and/or sense of purpose after release. Additionally, youth may return to unstable environments. Many stakeholders mentioned that youth will make progress in SYTF but encounter setbacks once returning to an unstable or unsupportive environment. One behavioral health provider explained when youth return home, "It's almost subconscious, but they end up becoming the same kid that they were before. Nothing else has changed…the pressure's just too great on these kids." For some youth, once they turn 18, they face a particular challenge where families see them as adults who need to find their own living situations.

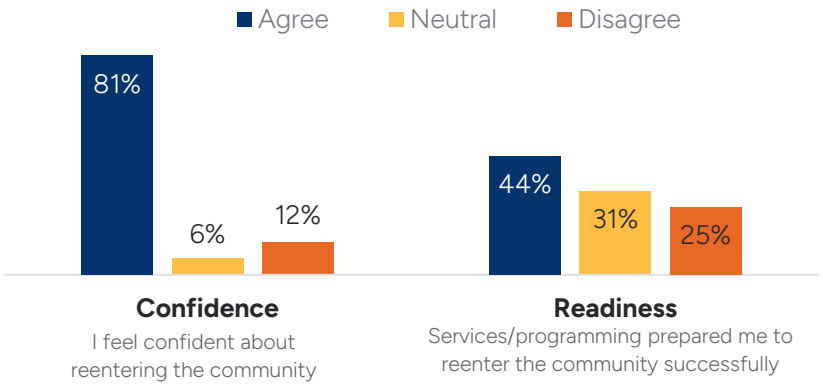
> **"We had a few incidents where a juvenile would get released post the age of 18. And the family is like, hey, you're an adult now. You brought this upon yourself. You're on your own. But he's still a kid."**
>
> *- CBO Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Funding for services post-reentry: CBO stakeholders described how transition planning and support are funded, but services after reentry are either not in their county or are very limited. Additionally, CBOs have to apply for funding to provide services post-release by responding to RFPs posted by their county probation department. They must then be the selected recipient following the RFP, which is not only time-consuming but not guaranteed if there are no sustainable or alternate funding sources.

Youth Perspectives on Transition Planning and Reentry Support

Youth expressed similar sentiments as mentioned above. In the 2024 Youth Realignment Survey, youth were asked how confident they felt about returning to the community after time in a SYTF. While 81% (13/16) of youth who responded agreed that they feel **confident about reentering**, only 44% (7/16) agreed that the services and programs at their SYTF **adequately prepared them** to reenter (Figure 39). This gap suggests that while youth feel hopeful about reentry, they may not feel fully equipped to succeed.

Figure 39. Youth Confidence vs. Readiness for Reentry



Surveyed youths felt confident, but not fully prepared, to reenter the community.

Source: 2024 Youth Realignment Survey. N = 16 although numbers may vary by question.

Barriers to reentry: For some youth, reentry into the community was a significant concern. Several felt unprepared for life after incarceration, citing a lack of transitional housing, employment opportunities, and financial support. Youth without family supports spoke about being released without basic necessities, which created instability. As one youth stated, "I remember when, after that eight months, I had nowhere to go. I had no money in my pocket, and no food on my table." Others expressed concerns about no longer having a support system after release and returning to the same environment that contributed to their initial system involvement. Additionally, some youth feared having a criminal record would be a major barrier to obtaining employment.

> **When youth leave this place, they don't have the support systems they have been working on. They go back to the environment that put them there in the first place.**
>
> *- Youth Respondent, 2024*

Key supports: In the focus group and interviews, youth who had reentered their communities discussed what contributed to their confidence and what they still needed to feel ready. Their reflections echo much of what was described by probation, court, and CBO stakeholders. They emphasized the importance of employment, community connection, housing stability, and mentorship:

- Employment and job skills: For some youth, having a job, and the skills needed to succeed in that job were the biggest indicators of success.
- Community and social support: Some youths appreciated opportunities to connect with peers with lived experiences because it helped normalize the transition. Examples shared included a fellowship and camping program that connected youths with previously released youths. This opportunity expanded their social circles and offered them perspective and support from a trusted peer.

- **Housing and stability:** Some youths explained that access to secure housing (especially when probation can help obtain housing before release) and financial support is crucial, as this gives them a strong foundation for reentry.
- **Consistent mentorship:** Youths emphasized that having a continuous relationship with a trusted mentor helped them feel supported and served as a safe outlet and source of accountability.

> **"I have a mentor that helps people when they are released from juvenile hall and gives them a monthly stipend [and] a support system that gives them a chance when they get out."**
>
> *- Youth Respondent, 2024*

Positive Practices and Strategies

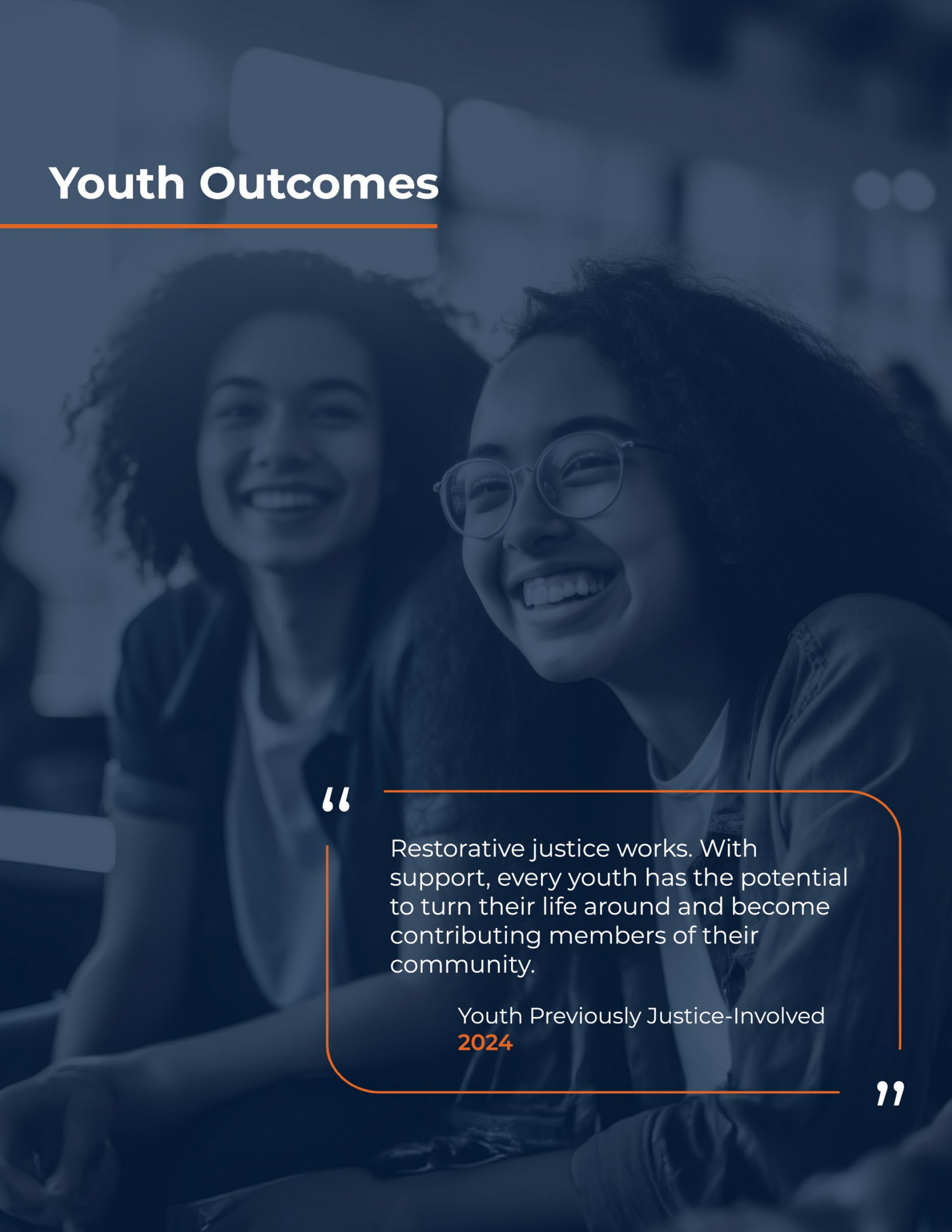
Stakeholders provided insight into strategies and/or practices that youth valued or found effective. While many impactful programs were shared, this section does not list all programs or label them as "best practice," given the variability in access across counties or suitability/access in different areas of the state. Practices or programs that were highlighted as highly impactful but are region-specific can be found in Appendix 13.

- **Planning early and intentionally:** Probation and youth emphasized the importance of early planning for reentry. Some started transition planning upon entry, and others said they started the process at least one year prior to release. Some probation stakeholders referenced model approaches such as Michigan's "Exit Upon Entry" program.
- **Preparation with essential documents:** CBO stakeholders underscored the importance of ensuring youth have what they will need once released, like transcripts, IDs, driver's licenses, and medical records.
- **Family reunification into transition planning:** CBO and probation stakeholders emphasized engaging families in transition planning, whenever possible, and providing family reunification counseling before release.
- **Targeted housing supports:** Some counties provide deposits or stipends for rent, or help youth secure transitional housing, which is especially important for youth who need a stable and positive environment to return to upon release. Youth emphasized that access to housing was essential for their success.

Key Takeaways

Implementation of transition planning and reentry supports varies across counties. Plans can include medical coordination, housing and financial support, compilation of paperwork (e.g., IDs and transcripts), and strategies for warm hand-offs. While reentry planning requires cross-system coordination for seamless continuity of care post-release, barriers exist in housing availability, stable employment opportunities, access to services and resources, and environments not conducive to rehabilitation. State initiatives like the CalAIM Justice-Involved Reentry Initiative have provided critical resources to enhance reentry services, including behavioral healthcare and case management. Sustained investment in youth-centered reentry strategies is needed to address individual and systemic barriers. (**Resources**: The Stepping Home Model; Reentry).

Youth Outcomes



> Restorative justice works. With support, every youth has the potential to turn their life around and become contributing members of their community.
>
> Youth Previously Justice-Involved
> **2024**

Youth Outcomes

This section discusses the state of available youth outcome data, county insights on post-release experiences, and examples of youth growth in areas such as education, employment, leadership, emotional development, and relationships.

"When a kid's going to be with us for eight years, they better be a lot better when they leave, right? I mean or else, it's shame on us."

- Probation Stakeholder Respondent, 2024

Current State of Youth Outcome Data: An Evolving Landscape

Data systems track some youth information, but do not capture overall outcomes: Most counties have developed data systems and tools to track information such as youth demographics, adjudications, program participation, and recidivism rates. According to the 2024 JJRBG County Plan Summary Report, 49 counties have systems in place, including Enterprise Supervision, Youth Level of Service Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), and Corrections Software Solutions.[xci] However, data collected are not standardized across all counties and may not include consistent measures or comparable outcomes. Furthermore, while AB 102 provides some basic information about age, gender, race/ethnicity, and adjudications, information about program efficacy and youth trajectories after release is not available statewide. Therefore, it is not possible to assess youth outcomes with these data. As a result, this section draws on probation, court, and CBO stakeholder interviews and survey responses to provide insight into outcomes and other promising models.

Recidivism research and re-offense outcomes post-realignment are still emerging, but other models offer hope: While statewide research is still limited, promising practices from other models offer insights about potential outcomes for realigned youth. For example, the Missouri Model is frequently cited by advocates of justice reform as it prioritizes close-to-home care geared toward "change" rather than "compliance."[xcii] The model uses a continuum of care, including aftercare, community care, tailored treatment plans, and evaluations to determine progress and risk. Under this model, over 70% of youth discharges remained law-abiding after three years, a result that has held steady over a five-year period.[xciii] Working to align with models that have demonstrated success offers hope for similar results, with the understanding that each state is highly unique and requires adaptations.

Additionally, programs and initiatives provide evidence of successfully reducing recidivism. In 2024, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) provided programming to 1,215 incarcerated youth, including through mentorship, job training, and housing support. Membership in the ARC program has shown a three-year recidivism rate of less than 10%, which is one-sixth the statewide average (60%).[xciv] The Young Women's Freedom Center served 746 system-impacted youth between 2022-2023 through programs that focus on economic justice, healing, and community support. They have shown an 87.4% reduction in recidivism for youth who participate in their programs.[xcv] Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) provide justice-impacted youth in the Bay Area with access to positive mentors, encourage their understanding of their rights, and support them to become leaders in their communities. According to FLY, their youth are six times less likely to face later system involvement. Specifically, over 90% of FLY youth do not recidivate, over 80% achieve their educational goals, and more than 90% report they have hope for their futures.[xcvi] Educational programs, like Project Rebound, have also shown substantial promise. In the Spring of 2022-23, 836 Project Rebound Scholars were enrolled, of which 688 were undergraduates, 119 were graduate students, and 29 were non-matriculated. In the same term, 195 bachelor's degrees and 50 master's degrees were conferred. In Fall 2022, Project Rebound Scholars had a recidivism rate of less than 1%.[xcvii]

County Insights on Youth Outcomes

Mixed reentry outcomes: Fourteen stakeholders reported mixed results regarding how youth were doing after reentering the community. Court and probation stakeholders found that youth who returned directly to their communities from DJJ without established relationships with probation staff or in the community struggled more with reintegration. Without ongoing support or connections, these youth lacked the continuity of care to bridge the transition home. Many DJJ youth transferred to an LRP or home on electronic monitoring. For those who returned to SYTFs, most probation and court stakeholders noted that **very few stayed for more than a few weeks or months**.

Probation and court stakeholders described varying results for youth who began their time in a SYTF. Many noted that this variation was expected given the unique circumstances of each case. Youth enter the system at different developmental and mental health stages, which can significantly influence their progress and needs during commitment and upon release. Probation and court stakeholders reported that even if youth were doing well in a SYTF, without the structure and routine, their **progress does not always translate into continued success** when reentering the community and returning to challenging environments.

Successes after SYTF: Despite these challenges, stakeholders also shared examples of positive outcomes after youth's time in STYFs. As presented on the following pages, many youth found meaningful growth and successes while in SYTFs and after returning to their communities.

Education and Employment Successes

Through SYTF programming and opportunities, youth earned degrees and certifications, gained work experience, and in some cases launched their own businesses. Respondents from four counties referenced over 50 youth who have attained or are currently pursuing an associate's or bachelor's degree, including students attending UC Berkeley, UCLA, and San Diego State.[84] Other counties spoke of youth being hired by CBOs post-release and engaging in Rising Scholars to continue with their college studies and gain employment. Stakeholders shared the following success stories:

Certified and ready to reenter: A probation officer reported that their first youth who transitioned to a step-down in January 2024 earned certifications in food handling, solar installation, and forklift operations. He also gained employment through the Rise to Higher Grounds Café, reentering the community with $4,000 in his savings account he earned while in LRP program.

Entrepreneur instead of college: A probation officer shared that a youth was accepted into college but decided to start a business instead. After participating in an entrepreneurship program where he learned skills to develop a business model, do taxes, and adhere to labor laws, he launched a successful window washing business and is now employing others in the community.

Barbering with a business plan: A probation officer described a youth who pursued his goal of becoming a barber, receiving training and mentorship while in the facility. Post-release, he established his own business which has been successful.

From community college to UC Berkeley: A probation officer described the accomplishment of a youth who acquired an associate's degree and was subsequently accepted to the University of California, Berkeley to pursue a four-year degree.

Leadership, Mentorship, and Advocacy Successes

Stakeholders described youth taking on leadership roles during and after their time in SYTFs, serving as peer mentors, contributing to national initiatives, and using their lived experiences to support others.

From justice-involved to justice leaders: A CBO described a youth who has shown strong commitment and great progress. She was selected to serve as a youth advocate for a countywide training course through the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Washington DC, where she contributed great insight and was a valuable member of the process.

Leading by example: A judge highlighted how a group of youth who graduated from DJJ and SYTF are now working as advocates through the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, and are serving as Credible Messengers, using their lived experience to support and mentor others.

Guiding each other forward: A probation officer shared that three youth who were in the SYTF for a long-term commitment developed a peer mentorship program in collaboration with a program facilitator. The program has been positively received by other youth in the facility and has resulted in an increase in positive conflict-resolution.

[84] Totals are based on 22 counties who reported successes during the key informant interviews and/or provided a response on the DJJ Realignment Probation Survey

Confidence, Accountability and Emotional Growth Successes

Stakeholders described youth who experienced personal growth while in SYTF, such as increased accountability, emotional regulation, and a strengthened sense of self-worth.

"A completely different person": A father described his daughter as "a completely different person" than when she entered SYTF. He shared that she made changes for the better, especially after participating in therapy and learning to take accountability.

> **She's a completely different person now than what she was before."**
>
> *- Family Respondent, 2024*

Owning his actions: A judge described an instance where one youth wrote a letter of apology on his own volition and read it aloud in court.

Building emotional tools: One youth shared that she felt a lot different than she did before her detainment. Through her involvement in the anger replacement therapy (ART) program, she learned patience, self-control, and communication skills which "calmed her down."

Realizing her worth and reclaiming her purpose: A youth reflected on how her outlook and self-worth has changed. She came to understand that many of her past actions stemmed from survival. She now feels worthy and empowered to help others avoid the same mistakes. She expressed: "…the things that I had done, I did them out of survival and there are people that got hurt and lost their lives… I can't undo that. So, I decided to be part of making a change…I'm still worthy of my beautiful family, a flourishing business, and getting a great education and really just being my best self."

Relationship and Connections Successes

As stakeholders described, youth also experienced growth in their relationships, including strengthened family connections and trust in supportive adults.

Reuniting with family and finding stability: Probation and court stakeholders felt touched by stories of youth who reunited with their families in a healthy way. One court stakeholder described a youth who joined his father's business and is successfully working two jobs. The entire family held a lot of gratitude for probation and the court's involvement in their son's life.

Recognizing supportive relationships: A judge described attending an event where one youth was selected to share his art and self-expression. The judge noted the young man's confidence and was touched to see that he selected two probation officers to sit alongside his family to support him at his table.

Reflections and Next Steps

> I mean, when you talk about outcomes at the end of it all, it's having youth that are... healed, you know, or on that process of healing and ... that come out with actual goals... a plan [and] a support system.
>
> CBO Stakeholder Respondent
> **2024**

Reflections and Next Steps

Since the passage of SB 823 in 2020, California has shifted from state-level incarceration to a locally driven, health-based approach to youth justice. This report underscores the complexity of a reform that intersects multiple systems and navigates multifaceted, diverse needs of the youth and communities, while balancing public safety and rehabilitation. Implementation has varied across counties, and the infrastructure is continuing to develop. Stakeholders and youth shared anecdotal experiences which reflect the signs of a reform in its early stages but gaining momentum. A probation stakeholder reflected on the evolution through the perspective of a youth formerly in their SYTF, who was serving as an informal mentor. The youth remarked, **"you guys have really stepped it up"** after seeing the improved reentry supports. In another account, a youth returned to his former facility and expressed surprise and appreciation for the expanded resources available to youth who came after him.

> **"He's like, 'I wish this was available to me.' And so, I have those moments where... youth that were committed to this program early on really didn't come close to reaping the benefits they should have and the intent behind it. ... it breaks my heart, and it always makes me want to move faster so that the youth that are in our care currently get absolutely each and every benefit that they should have."**
>
> *- Probation Stakeholder Respondent, 2024*

Community advocates, community-based youth-serving organizations, and local alliances have played a critical role in championing this reform and advocating for actualizing its intent. Multiple organizations support youth with culturally relevant programming, engage with them in restorative practices, and provide access to individuals who empathize with the youth's experience and journey. Probation departments across California have taken on expanded responsibilities, including providing realigned youth housing, delivering rehabilitative programming, managing staffing, and expanding opportunities in collaboration with local providers and County Offices of Education. Courts have collaborated with stakeholders to develop new processes and policies. OYCR engaged in efforts to support counties, youth, and CBOs through technical assistance and guidance, developing partnerships, distributing grant funding, and collaborating to ensure youth have access to developmentally appropriate services. State investments have bolstered these efforts, including investment in educational opportunities through community colleges and Medicaid dollars for better continuity of care across systems.

NEXT STEPS AND CROSS-SYSTEMS RECOMMENDATIONS

Making recommendations for the future of the youth justice system in California is inherently complex due to the multifaceted nature of the system and diverse needs of the youth and communities it serves. Reform must balance public safety, accountability, and rehabilitation while also addressing systemic issues including racial and ethnic disparities, socioeconomic inequities, widespread mental health needs, and the impact of trauma. The youth justice system intersects with education, child welfare, and public health systems, necessitating coordinated, cross-sector solutions. With the decentralization of the DJJ system, balancing support for diverse local infrastructures leveraging county-specific strengths and resources with the importance of standardized practices and data metrics to uphold standards of service and inform decision-making are particularly important.

Despite this complexity, California strives to make a difference in the lives of youth who are justice-involved. This exploration of SB 823 implementation resulted in two sets of data-driven and community-oriented recommendations. These recommendations are informed by evaluations from initiatives

pioneered elsewhere,[85] a review of county- and state-level reports, analyses of available public data and recognition of challenges acquiring outcomes data, as well as insights from a diverse array of youth justice stakeholder key informants. The recommendations and next steps discussed below are centered in the contextual and procedural knowledge and expertise of stakeholders to continue to shape the future of this reform.

Strategic Solutions Grounded in Local Strengths and Resources

Local systems of care and oversight vary across multiple parameters, such as county size, funding, staffing, facility type and size, availability of local programs, population characteristics, and the number of youth in SYTFs. For instance:

- **Small counties** may be limited in expanding partnerships to local community-based organizations to meet their programmatic needs due to the scarcity of therapeutic programming and/or community-based organizations in their area. Small counties may also receive few or no SYTF youth, which poses challenges to develop comprehensive and specialized programming and retain providers, particularly with limited unrestricted funding. [86] Finally, small counties may not have local SYTF facilities. Contracting with a neighboring county for SYTF beds necessitates a different infrastructure for cross-county collaboration, transportation, and shared responsibility of youth oversight.
- **Large counties** may have more resources but also higher expenditures, and, more often, higher numbers of youth in SYTFs. Additionally, greater availability of local programming and diverse stakeholder involvement requires more time and effort to form and strengthen partnerships and create a shared infrastructure with distinct yet complementary roles and responsibilities.

1. **Convene cross-county workgroups:** Develop workgroups by county-size to address the distinct structural and operational challenges discussed above (e.g., limited economies of scale, staffing capacity, access to nonprofit service providers, and resources).[87] These workgroups may consider options, such as the development of cross-county specialized programs (e.g., for girls and/or youth requiring more intensive treatment for specialized needs), which may not be feasible to operate or provide without the enrollment of enough participants at the county-level. Solutions such as these may help ensure equitable access to quality services across geographic locations.

Standardized Policies, Practices, and Data Metrics

Decentralized youth oversight has created a change in the youth justice landscape that necessitates corresponding adjustments in standardization of policies, practices, and data metrics to ensure sustainable and equitable access to services across all geographic locations and inform data-driven decision making.

1. **Convene expert stakeholders:** Leverage expertise of stakeholders across the nation through partnership with established initiatives that emphasize a collaborative approach (e.g., involving court, probation, school, community organization, youth, advocates) to promote community-based alternatives that support rehabilitation and long-term success for youth accountability and public safety. By tapping into existing networks that offer national frameworks for proven models and technical assistance, state and local leaders can share best practices, policy recommendations, and data-informed strategies.

[85] Evaluation of Missouri Model conducted by the Missouri Division of Youth Services
[86] Small counties who reported "0" in AB 102 section B1 (number of youth adjudicated of a 707B offense) were 12 in FY 2021-22, 12 in FY 2022-23, and 13 in FY 2023-24.
[87] Not an exhaustive list of all challenges but representative of the unique challenges facing counties with small populations, especially in rural areas

2. **Establish data taskforces**: Continue to develop and improve data systems like the Juvenile Court and Probation Statistical System (JCPSS). Convene an interdepartmental data group to engage all stakeholders in determining priorities, aligning data collection efforts with key outcomes, leveraging shared data expertise, and navigating barriers to data collection, sharing, and analysis. This collaborative approach may be beneficial to building trust and supporting best practices through data-driven recommendations and insight into youth outcomes through common language.

   Areas of focus may include:

   a) Developing a data set comprised of key metrics that support data-driven insights and youth justice reform processes. Measures may include data previously collected by state correctional agencies (e.g., DJJ), measures that have been beneficial at the local level, and nationally validated metrics. Developing a set of key metrics may also create a foundation to identify and address future needs specific to this reform (e.g., with the addition of CalAIM services, expansion of behavioral health services, tracking of specialized program needs).

   b) Developing standardized definitions and operationalization of key performance indicators (e.g., creating data dictionaries to ensure interpretability and interoperability of data).

   c) Exploring strategies to address the current fragmentation of youth justice data across agencies, levels of government, and phase of youth justice in California. The group may consider a centralized location for publicly available data while considering privacy protections.

   d) Investigating how to balance the need for protection of youth privacy (e.g., redacting counts and unique youth identifiers) with the need to track youth outcomes, particularly within the context of predominantly small sample sizes at the county-level due to lower rates of commitment.

   e) Formalizing requirements related to standardized data metrics that would enable meaningful examination of progress and ongoing youth success and needs with county-level programs in SYTF, LRPs, and post-release. Data metrics suggested by stakeholders to assess success of realignment efforts can be found in Appendix 17.

While gaps remain and barriers exist locally and systemically, stakeholders across all groups expressed a passion and commitment to the success of realigned youth and sustaining and improving SB 823 implementation. It will take a coordinated, collaborative effort with youth at the center to ensure state and local youth justice systems and their stakeholders have the capacity, clarity, and opportunity to pursue strategies that lead to better outcomes for young people.

Appendix 1 – 2024 SB 283 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments

---------- [Online Survey INTRO PAGE] ----------

The Office of Youth and Community Restoration has partnered with Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct key informant interviews and Focus Group sessions with the Probation Departments across California. Your participation will help us better understand your perspective on the Juvenile Justice Realignment (SB 823) Reform. We would like to get your insights in terms of impact, changes, challenges, and areas of opportunity. Your experiences and perspectives will help us evaluate the strengths and opportunities to further improve the Juvenile Justice system in California and provide effective assistance and supports to key partners in this process.

All responses will be kept confidential. All feedback and/or data collected through this survey will be de-identified and summarized across multiple counties.

Completing the survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes. The survey automatically saves your responses for each page when you click "NEXT" so if you need to pause it, you can work on it whenever is convenient. Just use the original survey link to access your draft and continue where you left off.

If you have any questions about this survey or would like to provide any additional feedback, please contact Christa Bixby at Christa@appliedsurveyresearch.org.

Thank you for your partnership in this bettering the Juvenile Justice system of California.

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

1. What county do you represent? (Open-Ended)
2. Your county… (select all that apply)
   - ☐ Has an SYTF
   - ☐ Contracts with an SYTF in another county
   - ☐ Partners with other counties to provide programming to youth in SYTF programs
   - ☐ Plans to contract with other counties if SYTF is needed

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

The next set of questions relates to changes in collaborations and programming for youth in an SYTF program that took place since the SB 823 realignment.

Please, note, that for readability, the phrase youth committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county is used throughout this survey in reference to all youth committed to an SYTF program under your county's supervision, whether they are detained within your county or in a contracted county facility (e.g., if your county does not have an SYTF or a specific SYTF program or service).

3. How well do the following statements describe your county since the SB 823 realignment?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
a. Housing youth in local SYTF programs positively impacts their capacity for re-entry.	○	○	○	○	○	○
b. Creation of LRPs will improve re-entry services for youth in SYTF programs.	○	○	○	○	○	○
c. Our county modified secure facilities to serve SB 823-realigned population.	○	○	○	○	○	○
c(i). The awarded resources were adequate to implement all needed modifications to secure facilities.	○	○	○	○	○	○
d. Our county modified staffing/ HR (hiring, training, etc.) to serve SB 823-realigned population.	○	○	○	○	○	○
d(i). The awarded resources were adequate to implement all needed modifications to staffing/ HR.	○	○	○	○	○	○
e. To serve SB 823-realigned population, our county increased number and/or capacity of programs/services offered to youth in an SYTF program (e.g., in SYTF(s), LRP(s), at re-entry).	○	○	○	○	○	○
f. Our county strengthened collaboration with the Juvenile Justice system stakeholders (CBOs, judges, defenders, etc.), to better support youth in an SYTF program (e.g., in SYTF(s), LRP(s), at re-entry).	○	○	○	○	○	○

[IF 3b. answered] 3b(i). Of the LRP types offered to youth committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county, which, if any, do you observe to benefit youth the most? (Open Ended)

[IF 3f. answered] 3f(i). Since the SB 823 realignment, which stakeholders have you expanded or strengthened collaboration with? (Select all that apply)

☐ CBOs/Non-Profits	☐ DHCS	☐ Higher Education providers
☐ Judges	☐ DOR	☐ Workforce Development partners

☐ DAs	☐ County Office of Education	☐ Defense Counsel (including public, independent, and alternate defenders' office)
☐ Behavioral Health/Mental Health Providers	☐ Family Members	☐ Advocates
☐ Health providers	☐ Tribal nations	☐ BSCC
☐ Child Welfare providers	☐ Other: _____	

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

4. Please, use the space below if you wish to provide any additional information on your responses above (e.g., challenges in supervising youth of older ages/with high risk profiles, etc.) (Open-Ended)

5. Please describe any gaps in services or resources that hinder the creation of a full SB 823 continuum of services and programs below: (Open-Ended)

6. How may youth, committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county, communicate with their social networks? (select all that apply)

☐ Mail	☐ Telephone	☐ Zoom	☐ In-Person

6a. Outside of the team working with the youth as part of the facility programming, who is allowed to visit youth committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county? (select all that apply)

☐ Immediate family	☐ Clergy	☐ Community advocates	☐ Extended family
☐ Sponsors (e.g., AA, NA, etc.)	☐ Undocumented loved ones	☐ Siblings under 14	☐ Therapists/Counselors
☐ Friends/Family Friends	☐ Mentors/Credible Messengers	☐ Other _____	

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

7. Does your county offer transition plan services to youth committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county?
O Yes O No

8. Please select all opportunities offered by Probation, Education Partners, or CBOs to youth committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county:	Onsite Access (e.g., at an SYTF/LRP facility)			Offsite Access (e.g., through furloughs or post release under probation supervision)		
	Yes	No	N/A	Yes	No	N/A
Academic support (tutoring, study groups, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O
High school diploma	O	O	O	O	O	O
Dual enrollment	O	O	O	O	O	O
Rising Scholars	O	O	O	O	O	O
Associate's degree	O	O	O	O	O	O
Bachelor's degree or higher	O	O	O	O	O	O
Workforce development	O	O	O	O	O	O
Other: _____	O	O	O	O	O	O

8a. Please, use the space below to share any addition information you would like to add about the information above (Open-Ended)

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

9. Which programs/services are offered to youth committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county at these points in the system? (select all that apply):	In SYTF	In LRP	Post Discharge (on Probation supervision)
a. Mental Health/Trauma Based Support (therapy, etc.)	O	O	O
b. Behavioral Support(CBT, Anger Management, Conflict Resolution)	O	O	O
c. Health/Medical Services	O	O	O
d. Substance Abuse Treatment	O	O	O
e. Specialized Programs(sex off ender, etc.)	O	O	O
f. Educational Support(high school completion, tutoring, college coursework, etc.)	O	O	O
g. Vocational Support or Training	O	O	O
h. Employment Support or Job Placement	O	O	O
i. Gender-Expansive (for LGBTQ+ youth , girls, etc.)	O	O	O
j. Community Health Resources	O	O	O
k. Housing Supports	O	O	O
l. Family Engagement	O	O	O
m. Family Counseling and Support Services	O	O	O
n. Life Skills (financial literacy, communication)	O	O	O
o. Mentorship/Positive Role Models (Credible Messengers)	O	O	O
p. Case Management and/or Case Planning	O	O	O
q. MDT (Multidisciplinary Team)	O	O	O
r. CFT (Child/Family Team)	O	O	O
s. Screenings	O	O	O
t. Legal Support (advocates, courts navigation)	O	O	O
u. Afterschool, Sports &Recreation	O	O	O
v. Other (Please specify)	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

[DISPLAY only those selected in Q9] 9a. Who provides each program/service you have selected above? (select all that apply):	By Probation	By CBOs	By other gov. entity
a. Mental Health/Trauma Based Support (therapy, etc.)	O	O	O

b. Behavioral Support(CBT, Anger Management, Conflict Resolution)	O	O	O
c. Health/Medical Services	O	O	O
d. Substance Abuse Treatment	O	O	O
e. Specialized Programs(sex off ender, etc.)	O	O	O
f. Educational Support(high school completion, tutoring, college coursework, etc.)	O	O	O
g. Vocational Support or Training	O	O	O
h. Employment Support or Job Placement	O	O	O
i. Gender-Expansive (for LGBTQ+ youth , girls, etc.)	O	O	O
j. Community Health Resources	O	O	O
k. Housing Supports	O	O	O
l. Family Engagement	O	O	O
m. Family Counseling and Support Services	O	O	O
n. Life Skills (financial literacy, communication)	O	O	O
o. Mentorship/Positive Role Models (Credible Messengers)	O	O	O
p. Case Management and/or Case Planning	O	O	O
q. MDT (Multidisciplinary Team)	O	O	O
r. CFT (Child/Family Team)	O	O	O
s. Screenings	O	O	O
t. Legal Support (advocates, courts navigation)	O	O	O
u. Afterschool, Sports &Recreation	O	O	O
v. Other (Please specify)	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

[DISPLAY only those selected in Q9] 9b. Please, select which programs/ services have been added or increased incapacity since the SB-823 implementation? (select all that apply):	Added	Increased
a. Mental Health/Trauma Based Support (therapy, etc.)	O	O
b. Behavioral Support(CBT, Anger Management, Conflict Resolution)	O	O
c. Health/Medical Services	O	O
d. Substance Abuse Treatment	O	O
e. Specialized Programs(sex off ender, etc.)	O	O
f. Educational Support(high school completion, tutoring, college coursework, etc.)	O	O
g. Vocational Support or Training	O	O
h. Employment Support or Job Placement	O	O
i. Gender-Expansive (for LGBTQ+ youth , girls, etc.)	O	O
j. Community Health Resources	O	O
k. Housing Supports	O	O
l. Family Engagement	O	O
m. Family Counseling and Support Services	O	O
n. Life Skills (financial literacy, communication)	O	O
o. Mentorship/Positive Role Models (Credible Messengers)	O	O
p. Case Management and/or Case Planning	O	O
q. MDT (Multidisciplinary Team)	O	O
r. CFT (Child/Family Team)	O	O
s. Screenings	O	O
t. Legal Support (advocates, courts navigation)	O	O
u. Afterschool, Sports &Recreation	O	O
v. Other (Please specify)	O	O

10. Of the programs/services offered to youth committed to an SYTF program located within or outside of your county, which would you elevate as a best/promising practice (in SYTF or LRP)?
    a. Name of the program/service/practice/approach: (Open-Ended)
    b. Brief explanation of the program/service/practice/approach (or link to description online): (Open-Ended)
    c. What makes it effective for youth in SYTF programs: (Open-Ended)
    d. Outcomes (if applicable): (Open-Ended)
    e. Success story (if available): (Open-Ended)
    f. Point of contact/contact information (if available): (Open-Ended)
11. Please, use the space below to share any additional information you would like to add (e.g., successes/ challenges post-realignment, additional resources, services, professional development opportunities/ trainings needed, etc.):
12. If possible, please link any evaluation data or public reports that provide information related to your county's programs or youth:

Appendix 2 – Small, Medium, Large Counties

County size was determined based on Department of Finance Population Projections 2023 estimates (P-2B) for ages 13-25 (Small: age 13-25 pop. < 25,001, Medium: age 13-25 pop. 25,001-95,000, Large: age 13-25 pop. > 95,000). The specific population counts used to distinguish county sizes intends to reflect the BSCC California Youth Programs and Facilities Grant Program (SB 823) report published in October 2024.[xcviii]

Small	Medium	Large
Alpine	Butte	Alameda
Amador	El Dorado	Contra Costa
Calaveras	Humboldt	Fresno
Colusa	Imperial	Kern
Del Norte	Kings	Los Angeles
Glenn	Madera	Orange
Inyo	Marin	Riverside
Lake	Merced	Sacramento
Lassen	Monterey	San Bernardino
Mariposa	Placer	San Diego
Mendocino	San Francisco	San Joaquin
Modoc	San Luis Obispo	San Mateo
Mono	Santa Cruz	Santa Barabara
Napa	Shasta	Santa Clara
Nevada	Solano	Stanislaus
Plumas	Sonoma	Tulare
San Benito	Yolo	Ventura
Sierra		
Siskiyou		
Sutter		
Tehama		
Trinity		
Tuolumne		
Yuba		

Source: Department of Finance Population Projections 2023 estimates (P-2B), ages 13-25

Appendix 3 – 2024 Youth Realignment Survey

---------- [Online Survey INTRO PAGE] ----------

Thank you for taking a part in this Youth Survey, which will be a vital part of the report that the Office of Youth and Community Restoration and Applied Survey Research (ASR) are currently working on. Your participation will help us better understand the experiences and perspectives of young people like you on the Juvenile Justice Realignment (SB 823) Reform. By sharing your thoughts, you can help improve the Juvenile Justice system in California and make it more effective in supporting youth and their needs.

Before you begin, please read the following section on the Informed Consent. Once you begin the survey, your answers should save automatically when you click "NEXT," so if you have to take a break and return to it later, you should be able to reopen the link in the same browser, and continue from where you stopped.

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Informed Consent

Title of Study: DJJ Realignment in California

Researcher(s):
Christa Bixby, Applied Survey Research, christa@appliedsurveyresearch.org
Maria Usacheva, Applied Survey Research, maria@appliedsurveyresearch.org

Purpose of the Study: The goal of this study is to understand youth experience with the programs and services provided by local counties while in a secure youth treatment facility (SYTF) and/or less-restrictive placement. Your input will help inform future improvements to the youth justice system in California.

What is Involved in the Study:
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey that takes approximately 15 minutes to finish.
The survey includes questions about your experiences with programs, community services, and in relation to work, education, relationships, health, creativity, and community.
Some questions may feel sensitive in nature, but you do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. You can skip any question or stop the survey at any time.

Confidentiality: Your answers will be kept completely confidential. We will not share your name, county association, or any other personal information in the report.
All information you provide will be stored in encrypted cloud storage to ensure it is secure and only the research team has access to it.
The survey will be anonymous, meaning no one will know how you answered any particular question.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Potential Risks and Benefits:
Risks: While we do not anticipate any risks from your participation, answering questions about personal experiences or difficult situations may bring up uncomfortable feelings. If you feel upset or need help, please contact Susie Rivera at susie.rivera@chhs.ca.gov. You can also contact 988 lifeline at any time if you wish to talk to their team that is on-call either via phone or text.
Benefits: Your responses will be combined and sent to legislation, enabling your voice to be heard and helping them to work for the betterment of all youth in the future. By sharing your thoughts, you can help policymakers and service providers understand what works well and what could be improved in the system.

Right to Ask Questions:
You are welcome to ask any questions about this study before or during completing the survey. If you have any questions about the survey or the research process, please feel free to contact Christa Bixby at christa@appliedsurveyresearch.org.

Consent to Participate:
By clicking 'I agree to participate' below, you are agreeing that you understand the information in this form, that you voluntarily agree to participate in the survey, and that you understand you can stop at any time. Once you click, 'I agree to participate' below, you will be taken to the survey questions.

- O I agree to participate
- O I do not agree to participate [End of survey]

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

1. Which of the following do you have experience with? (Check all that apply)
   - ☐ State facilities (large facilities outside of my community known as DJJ facilities)
   - ☐ County secure youth treatment facilities (SYTF; facilities inside my community or close to my community run by the county)
   - ☐ Less-restrictive community placement

   1a. [DISPLAY if LRP selected in Q1] If you have experience with a less-restrictive community placement, was it:
   - ☐ In the SYTF?
   - ☐ Outside SYTF (in a community placement)?

2. Please select the option that best describes your current situation
   - O I am still completing my sentencing commitment
   - O I have completed my sentencing commitment (completed probation supervision) [Move to section B]
   - O N/A [End of survey]

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

[DISPLAY BLOCK if Q2="I am still completing my sentencing commitment]

While in a SYTF or in a less-restrictive placement in the community…

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Do you have additional (example: after completing high school) educational goals? ○ Yes ○ No

Thinking about education, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I have access to educational programming that fit my needs and future goals	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am making progress toward my educational goals	○	○	○	○	○	○
I believe the education I'm getting will help me achieve my goals after release	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am taking advantage of academic support that are helping me achieve my education goals (peer mentoring, tutoring, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Are you offered employment programming? ○ Yes ○ No

Thinking about employment, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I am developing job skills and/or participating in vocational training that will help me to get work in the community	○	○	○	○	○	○
The time provided for employment while in step-downs is adequate to prepare me for future success in work	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that I will be ready to get a job and succeed after completing probation supervision	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am learning to manage my finances for when I return to my community	○	○	○	○	○	○

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Are you offered medical support? ○ Yes ○ No

Thinking about health and wellbeing, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I receive medical help when needed	○	○	○	○	○	○
The medical supports are helpful	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel my medical needs are prioritized	○	○	○	○	○	○
I exercise or engage in physical activity/exercise regularly	○	○	○	○	○	○
I eat healthy, balanced meals regularly	○	○	○	○	○	○
The mental health supports help me stay healthy and manage stress (examples: counseling, support groups, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
The screening tools accurately identify my needs which help connect me with the services that meet those needs	○	○	○	○	○	○

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking about recreation, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I engage in activities that allow me to express myself (examples: hobbies and/or sports, cooking, art, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking about relationships, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
Staying close to my community allows me to feel supported by one or more community members (such as family, friends, mentors, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am developing or strengthening positive relationships (peers, staff, community organizers, mentors, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am developing or strengthening communication and social skills that will help me when returning to my community	○	○	○	○	○	○

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking about community, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I am engaging in giving back to my community (volunteering, voting, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am working towards making amends with my community (ex. Discussion with community member(s), writing a letter, etc.)	○	○	○	○	○	○

I am developing or strengthening communication and social skills that will help me when returning to my community	O	O	O	O	O	O
I see value in making amends with my community	O	O	O	O	O	O
I feel a sense of belonging to my local community	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking of overall experience, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I often feel motivated and interested in the activities/programming offered	O	O	O	O	O	O
The SYTF facility feels/felt like a safe and homelike environment	O	O	O	O	O	O
I have found at least one person who I feel I can trust or look up to within the SYTF	O	O	O	O	O	O
I have found at least one person who I feel I can trust or look up to outside the SYTF	O	O	O	O	O	O
I believe the services/programming offered prepare me to re-enter my community successfully	O	O	O	O	O	O
I feel confident about re-entering my community	O	O	O	O	O	O

[DISPLAY BLOCK if Q2="I have completed my sentencing commitment]

During your time at a SYTF or in a less-restrictive placement in the community…

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Did you have additional (example: after completing high school) educational goals at the time of your commitment?

O Yes O No

Thinking about education, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I was provided access to educational programming that fit my needs and future goals	O	O	O	O	O	O
I made progress toward my educational goals	O	O	O	O	O	O
The education I was provided helped me achieve my goals after release	O	O	O	O	O	O
I took advantage of academic support that helped me achieve my education goals (peer mentoring, tutoring, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Were you offered employment programming? O Yes O No

Thinking about employment, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I developed job skills and/or participated in vocational training that helped me get work in the community	O	O	O	O	O	O
The time provided for employment while in step-downs was adequate to prepare me for future success in work	O	O	O	O	O	O
I felt ready to get a job and succeed after completing probation supervision	O	O	O	O	O	O
I learned to manage my finances which helped when I returned to my community	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Were you offered medical support? O Yes O No

Thinking about health and wellbeing, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I received medical help when needed	O	O	O	O	O	O
The medical supports were helpful	O	O	O	O	O	O
I felt my medical needs were prioritized	O	O	O	O	O	O
I exercised or engaged in physical activity/exercise regularly	O	O	O	O	O	O
I ate healthy, balanced meals regularly	O	O	O	O	O	O
The mental health supports helped me stay healthy and manage stress (examples: counseling, support groups, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O
The screening tools accurately identified my needs which helped connect me with the services that meet those needs	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking about recreation, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I engaged in activities that allow me to express myself (examples: hobbies and/or sports, cooking, art, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking about relationships, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
Staying close to my community allowed me to feel supported by one or more community members (such as family, friends, mentors, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O
I developed or strengthened positive relationships (peers, staff, community organizers, mentors, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O
I developed or strengthened communication and social skills that helped me when returning to my community	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking about community, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I engaged in giving back to my community (volunteering, voting, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O
I made amends with my community (ex. Discussion with community member(s), writing a letter, etc.)	O	O	O	O	O	O
I am developing or strengthening communication and social skills that will help me when returning to my community	O	O	O	O	O	O
I saw value in making amends with my community	O	O	O	O	O	O
I felt a sense of belonging to my local community	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

Thinking of overall experience, how much would you agree with the following? (Please select N/A if it doesn't apply to you or you don't have the experience to respond to this)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I often felt motivated and interested in the activities/programming offered	O	O	O	O	O	O
The SYTF facility felt like a safe and homelike environment	O	O	O	O	O	O
I found at least one person who I feel I can trust or look up to within the SYTF	O	O	O	O	O	O
I found at least one person who I feel I can trust or look up to outside the SYTF	O	O	O	O	O	O
I believe the services/programming offered prepared me to re-enter my community successfully	O	O	O	O	O	O
I felt confident about re-entering my community	O	O	O	O	O	O

---------- [Online Survey PAGE BREAK] ----------

[DISPLAY BLOCK to ALL] **In general, what are your views on the following questions?**

[If Q1 = State Facilities OR County Secure Youth Treatment Facilities] Do you feel that being in a local SYTF instead of a DJJ state facility is a better option for you and other youth? Can you explain: (Open-Ended)

[If Q1 = Less-restrictive community placement] What is or was your experience like with the less-restrictive program(s)? (Open-Ended)

All youth should have an Individual Rehabilitation Plan (IRP), reviewed every six months with the county judge. How was your experience with developing an IRP and following it? Did you find this process beneficial? (Open-Ended)

Is there anything that would make this step more effective or beneficial? (Open-Ended)

What is the most beneficial program you are participating (or have participated) in and why? (Open-Ended)

What additional services/programs do or did you participate in? (Open-Ended)

Can you describe any new connections, skills, strategies, or knowledge you have gained there? (Open-Ended)

How do these program(s) make you feel about yourself and your future? (Open-Ended)

Do you have any recommendations to better these programs, or what is offered to youth in general? (Open-Ended)

What else would you like to share or recommend to those who are making decisions for youth involved in the justice system? (Open-Ended)

Appendix 4 – Probation Key Informant Respondents by Role

Role of Key Informant Respondent	Total Number
Chief Probation Officer	22
Deputy Chief Probation Officers	10
Assistant Chief Probation Officer	3
Division Director or Manager	5
Services Manager/Director	2
Program Manager	2
Total	**44**

Appendix 5 — Statutes Included in SB 823

Government Code

- **Section 12803:** Removed references to the Department of the Youth Authority, which no longer exists, and replaced them with updated responsibilities for the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR), which now focuses on supporting local juvenile justice efforts.
- **Article 1 (Section 12820):** Repealed provisions that originally established and defined the role of the California Youth Authority and the Division of Juvenile Facilities, as these entities became obsolete with the closure of the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).
- **Sections 12838 and 12838.1:** Repealed provisions that gave the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) jurisdiction over the DJJ and reenacted them to delegate these responsibilities to counties and the OYCR.

Penal Code

- **Section 13015:** Encouraged the DOJ to submit a plan for developing a new data collection and reporting system with specific data points identified.
- **Section 830.5:** Repealed provisions granting peace officer authority to DJJ officers, as the DJJ is no longer operational, and reenacted them to specify the role of peace officers within local juvenile detention facilities.
- **Section 2816:** Removed provisions governing DJJ's parole board structure and operations, transferring authority for parole supervision and decision-making to local probation agencies and courts.

Welfare and Institutions Code

- **Sections 207.1, 207.2, 209, and 210.2:** Updated provisions related to the confinement of minors to prohibit detention in adult facilities (unless under specific circumstances) and to require compliance with modern standards for health, education, and rehabilitative services. These replaced outdated guidelines that allowed less stringent conditions for juvenile detainees.
- **Section 733.1:** Prohibited most DJJ commitments as long as the state complied with Welf. & Inst. Code 1991 and paying the counties the required funds.
- **Section 736.5:** Ended DJJ placement except for those who have a transfer motion filed.
- **Section 1955.2:** Provided that youth under 18 who are convicted in criminal court may remain in a county juvenile facility until they turn 18.
- **Sections 607 and 730:** Removed references to the DJJ in sentencing and jurisdiction statutes, replacing them with language assigning responsibility for juvenile rehabilitation programs to county probation departments; limited the time a juvenile can be committed to any facility to the middle term of imprisonment.
- **Chapter 1.7 (Section 1990):** Added provisions for state funding of local, community-based rehabilitation programs, replacing reliance on large, centralized state facilities.

- **Chapter 4 (Sections 2200-2202):** Created the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) to replace the Division of Juvenile Facilities as the primary agency overseeing juvenile justice programs, ensuring a restorative, evidence-based approach.

- **Chapter 5 (Section 2250):** Repealed provisions governing temporary state funding to counties once transition goals were met, and replaced them with one-time grant funding structures tied to measurable outcomes.

- **Sections 208.5, 1703, 1710, 1711, 1712, 1714, 1731.5, 1752.2, and 1762:** Repealed provisions governing the operation of DJJ facilities, parole boards, and youth transfers between state and local systems, as these functions are now managed entirely by local probation and court systems.

Examples of Obsolete Provisions Repealed

- **Government Code 12820:** Previously required the establishment and maintenance of DJJ facilities and programs, which became redundant with DJJ's closure.

- **Penal Code 830.5:** Previously granted peace officer authority specific to DJJ employees, no longer relevant after DJJ ceased operations.

- **Welfare and Institutions Code 1712:** Outlined outdated parole board procedures for youth offenders, which have been replaced with local probation oversight.

- **Welfare and Institutions Code 207.6:** Allowed commingling of juveniles with adults in detention under certain conditions, now prohibited by modern standards.

- **Welfare and Institutions Code 2201-2202:** Required DJJ to oversee youth rehabilitation programs statewide, which is no longer applicable under local jurisdiction.

Appendix 6— List of OYCR Webinars and Trainings

- **Probation Webinar Series (with CPOC):** This series supports probation leaders with practical tools to support youth skill-building and behavior change in juvenile institutions. Topics included trauma-informed CBT, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and A Coaching Model for Change.

- **Behavioral Health Webinar Series:** OYCR's Behavioral Health Webinar Series, led by OYCR's Health Policy Division, promotes collaboration and knowledge sharing on behavioral health best practices. Topics included California Sexual Offender Management Board treatment guidelines, substance use disorder strategies for judges and leveraging CalAIM.

- **OYCR – ALL RISE Substance Use Disorder Webinar Series for Judges and Court Officials:** OYCR and All Rise launched a four-part webinar series on substance use disorder (SUD) in juvenile justice. Topics included SUD basics, criminogenic needs, treatment and behavior management strategies.

- **Judicial Trainings:** OYCR has presented on SB 823 implementation at various conferences and institutes and offers periodic training to judicial officers to provide agency updates and topic specific deep dives.

- **The Change Company Interactive Journal Training:** OYCR and the Change Company provided six 3-day trainings on Interactive Journaling, an evidence-based approach to support behavior change for justice-involved youth.

- **University of Cincinnati Research Institute (UCRI) Trainings:** OYCR partnered with UCRI to provide training to probation departments on Core Correctional Practices (CCP), E-Learning, and coaching.

- **Evident Change: SYTF Supervision and Decision-Making Webinars:** Evident Change developed webinars to help counties use the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System and other tools to support data-informed decisions for youth who have returned from DJJ or are newly committed to SYTFs.

- **CA Sexual Offender Management Board (CASOMB) Guidelines Webinar:** OYCR hosted webinars on treating and supervising youth who have committed sexual offenses, featuring Dr. Krys Hunter, OYCR subject matter expert.

Appendix 7— Ombuds Youth Bill of Rights

OYCR | Office of Youth and Community Restoration

YOUTH BILL OF RIGHTS

In California, we have rules to protect the rights of young people who are in a juvenile hall, camp, or other juvenile justice facility. These rights are laws. Here you can find a list of your rights.

Personal

- You have the right to live in a safe, healthy, and clean place that helps you to get the skills and training you need to heal and return home.
- You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- You have the right to eat healthy food and snacks.
- You have the right to have clean water to drink at any time.
- You have the right to use the bathroom when you need to.
- You have the right to take a shower every day.
- You have the right to have clean bedding.
- You have the right to have clothes that fit you, are in good condition, and respect your gender identity and expression.
- You have the right to have clean underwear every day that fits you properly and respects your gender identity and expression.
- You have the right to have the things you need for grooming (like soap, shampoo, deodorant, menstrual products, and lotion) that respect your culture, ethnicity, gender identity, and expression. This means that you can have hair and body products that are right for your type of hair and skin and gender.

Recreation

- You have the right to have time to do physical activities every day for at least one hour.
- You have the right to go outside for at least one hour per day unless there is bad weather.
- You have the right to at least one hour a day of daily recreation, including having time to read, to write letters, and to entertainment that match your age and maturity.

Court

- You have the right to go to all the court hearings that involve you.
- You have the right to have an attorney and a court hearing, called a probable cause hearing, if you are being held in a juvenile facility for probation violations.

Pregnant and Parenting

- If you are a parent, you have the right to get information and help to take care of your child, your rights as a parent, things that can support you as a parent, reunification help, and ways you can stay connected with your child.
- You have the right to get education and special training on pregnancy, caring for your baby, parenting, breast-feeding, and child development.
- You have the right to get proper medical care if you are pregnant, including prenatal care, food and nutrition that is best for pregnancy, vitamins, other medical treatment that is needed to keep you and your pregnancy healthy, and counseling for you before and after your baby is born.
- You have the right not to be put in restraints, leg irons, waist chains, or handcuffs behind your back when you are pregnant or recovering after giving birth.
- You have the right not to be restrained during a medical emergency, labor, delivery, or recovery, unless it is necessary for safety and security, and to have them removed if a doctor or nurse determines it is needed to provide you medical care.
- You have the right to access written policies that explain how pregnant, nursing, and new parents should be treated.

Discipline

- No one is allowed to take away any of the following things from you as a form of discipline or punishment: food; contact with your parents, family, or attorney; sleep; exercise; education; bedding; clean clothes; religious services; a daily shower; clean water; a toilet; grooming products; medical care; reading materials; and sending or getting mail.
- You have the right to not be locked in a room as a punishment.
- You have the right to be given the rules on discipline. You must be given these rules in writing.
- If someone accuses you of something, you have the right to know what it is, to be heard, to defend yourself by sharing evidence or testimony, and to appeal the discipline decisions.
- You may want to contact your attorney to get their help to defend yourself and appeal discipline decisions.

Searches

- You have the right to not be searched just to make you feel bad or embarrassed, or to punish you. Searches must be done in a way that respects your privacy and dignity.
- You have the right to not be searched just to verify your gender.
- You have the right to get a written copy of the rules about searching at any time, and it must have the rules on who can do the searches.
- Searches should only be done to ensure the safety and security of the facility, youth, staff, and visitors.

Medical

- You have the right to ask for and get timely access to doctors, dentists, eye doctors, reproductive care, and mental health services when you need them. All of these services should be given to you by professionals who have the training and licenses to provide you with the type of care that you are getting.
- You have the right to say no to certain medicines that are used to help with mental health. The only time this right can be taken away from you is if it is needed to save your life or protect you or others from serious harm.
- You should always talk with your doctor about your concerns and the risks of not taking a medication. If you want to stop taking a medication you are already on, you should work with your doctor and the facility medical staff to do this in a safe way. You can also tell your attorney and probation staff how you feel about the medications you are taking, any side effects, or other concerns you might have about these medications.

Religion and Spiritual

- You have the right to practice your religion or spiritual beliefs including religious services and activities.
- You have the right to refuse to take part in religious services or activities.

No Abuse

- You have the right to not be abused in any way. This includes physical, sexual, emotional, or any other abuse. No one is allowed to punish you by hitting you.
- You should tell your attorney, a trusted adult, a staff person, or your probation officer if you are being abused. You can also call the Office of Youth and Community Restoration Ombudsperson at 1-844-402-1880.

Phone, Mail, & Visits

- You have the right to make at least two free phone calls within an hour of arrival at a juvenile facility after an arrest.
- You have the right to frequent and continuing contact with your parents, brothers and sisters, your children, and other relatives.
- You have the right to talk to them on the phone, have them visit you, or send them letters. You may be given access to a computer to connect with your family, but it shouldn't replace seeing them in person.
- You may be allowed to visit other family members and supportive adults with approval from the Facility Administrator.
- Mail that you send or get from family, friends, your children, and other supportive adults can be opened to search for contraband and can only be read by staff when they have a good reason to believe that the letter or mail could risk the safety and security of the facility, other youth, or the public.

Confidential Contacts

- You have the right to confidentially contact your attorney, the Office of Youth and Community Restoration Ombudsperson, advocates, and certain people who work for the government about your rights being violated and what is happening inside the facility. You cannot be punished for contacting them.
- You have the right to make private phone calls, send and receive private mail, and have private visits with your attorney, the Office of Youth and Community Restoration Ombudsperson, advocates, court personnel, people who give you legal services, and people who hold a public office.
- You have the right to have these visits and letters be confidential, which means that the Probation Department is not allowed to be listening or recording these visits or looking at or reading mail or letters from these people. The Probation Department can authorize certain staff to open mail from these people only to search for contraband and this must be done with you there.

Education

- You have the right to a quality education that follows the state law and standards, and prepares you for high school graduation, college, and a job.
- You have the right to attend the classes for your grade level and job training.
- You have the right to have access to college, career, and job training programs.
- You have the right to have access to a computer and the internet for your school, career, or job training program.
- You have the right to get educational services even if you are on disciplinary or medical status.
- You have the right to have access to information about the education options that are available to you.

Treated Equally

- You have the right to be treated fairly and have equal access to all available services including housing, care, treatment, and benefits.
- You should not be treated unfairly or discriminated against because of your race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, language, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, mental or physical disability, immigration, or HIV status.

WHAT IS AN OMBUDSPERSON?

A person whose job it is to help you if you are in a juvenile justice facility in California and need help to solve problems about how you are being treated.

The Ombudsperson is an independent problem-solver responsible for investigating complaints and attempting to resolve them for the people involved. As a youth in a juvenile justice facility, you have the right to ask questions or file a complaint with the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) Ombudsperson. You can file a complaint if your rights have been violated or ignored or you are concerned about the condition of the facility you are in. You cannot be punished or threatened for making a complaint. If you are not sure how we can help, please call, email, or write to us.

WHO TO CALL ABOUT MY RIGHTS:

If you think your rights are being violated or have concerns with the juvenile justice facility you are in, you have the right to privately contact the Office of Youth and Community Restoration Ombudsperson. You cannot be punished or retaliated against for making a complaint.

Helpline: 1-844-402-1880
Email: OYCROmbuds@chhs.ca.gov
Website: oycr.ca.gov

Address: OYCR Ombudsperson
1215 O Street, MS-08
Sacramento, CA 95814

Appendix 8— Ombudsperson Division Complaints

Year	General Complaints	Youth Complaints	Total Complaints
2022	6	8	14
2023	84	119	203
2024	123	173	296

2022	N	2023	N	2024	N
Staffing	5	Conditions of Confinement	83	Abuse/Excessive Force	53
Conditions of Confinement	4	Staffing	65	Staffing	50
Communication Access	3	Immediate Safety	52	Family Engagement	44
Programming	3	Programming	44	Medical Health	31
Retaliation	2	Communication Access	34	Programming/Incentives	30
Discrimination	2	Grievance Process & Responses	18	Education	29
Education	2	Physical Health Care	16	Food/Nutrition	26
Grievance Process & Responses	1	Mental Health Care	16	Discipline	26
Mental Health	1	Education	14	Confidential Communications	24
Physical Health Care	1	Facility Conditions	10	Retaliation	18
Health Care	1	N/A	12	Grievance Processes and Responses	17
Safety	1	Issues of Detention	7	Hygiene	15
		Transfer and Criminal Court Filings	5	Healthy Environment	14
		Retaliation	4	Mental Health	12
		Physical Health Care	3	Court Hearings	7
		Discrimination	2	Exercise/Recreation	6
		Education	2	Property	6
		Information Request	2	Detention Rights	5
		Youth did not Complete the Call	1	Clothing	5
		Training Request	1	Discrimination	5
		Case Plan	1	Searches	4
		Visits with Parents	1	Safety and Security	4
		Use of Force	1	Religion	3
		Other	1	Medication	3
		Court Issues	1	Youth Bill of Rights Materials	2
		Community Resources	1	Bedding	1
		Unprofessional Conduct	1	Parenting	1
		Publications Request	1		
		Visits with Sibling	1		
		Retaliation	1		
		Transfer and Criminal Court Filings	1		

Note: Categories were not consistent each year and sometimes duplicated within a single year. Similar categories are not merged because counts are duplicated as multiple concerns may arise in a call and may be overrepresented if added together.

Appendix 9 – Stepping Home Model

OYCR | Office of Youth and Community Restoration

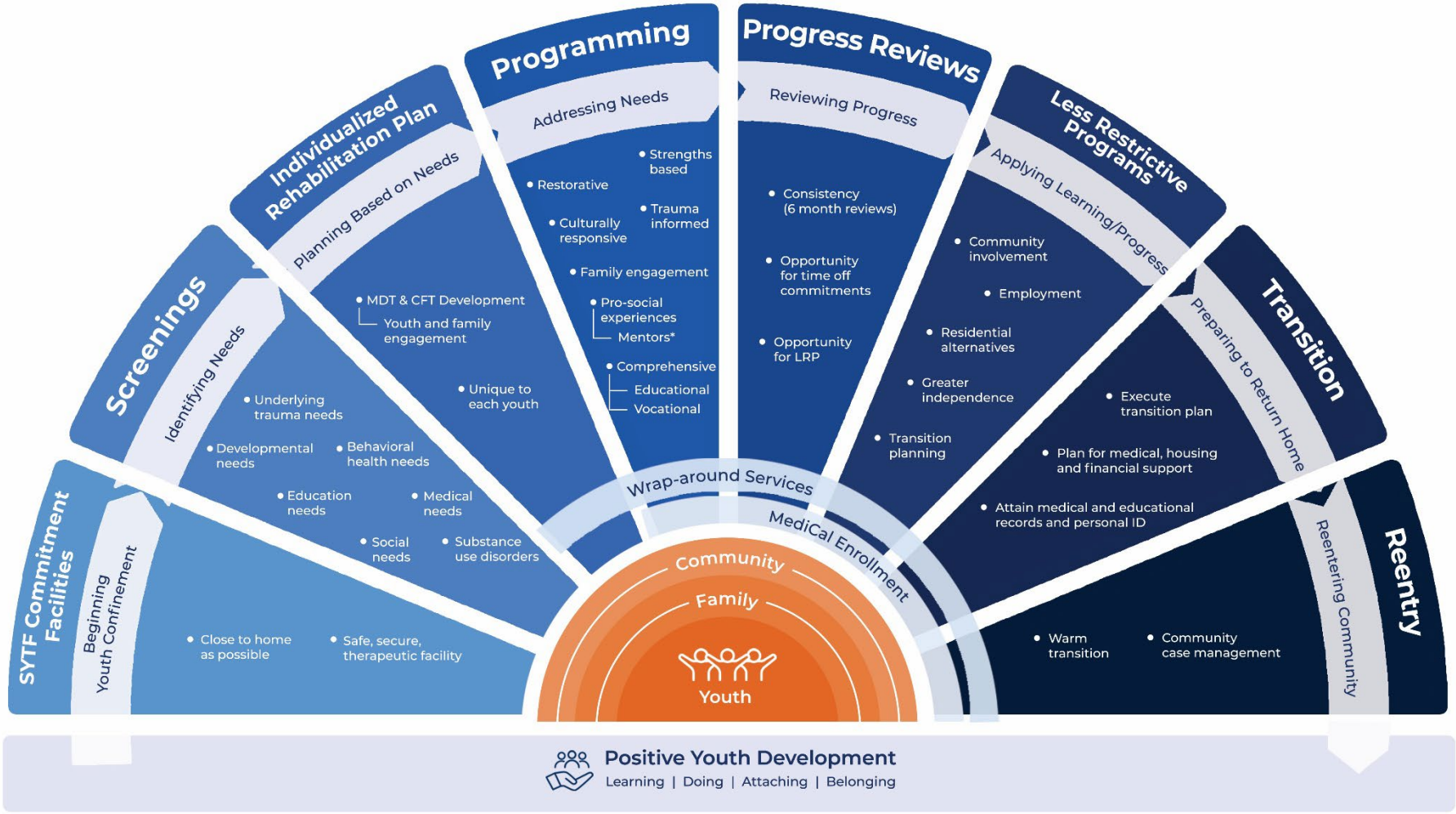
Summary of Stepping Home Model

The Stepping Home Model, developed by OYCR in partnership with UCLA, outlines a comprehensive process for all youth that starts at the beginning of a youth's confinement in a secure youth treatment facility (SYTF) and continues through their safe and successful transition back to their communities as thriving, successful young adults. The model transitions the youth out of the SYTF and gradually increases their involvement in their community until they are successfully home without supervision from county oversight committees.

Some of the Stepping Home Model's Key Elements include:

- Safe and secure facilities that protect youth from harm and abuse by promoting a culture and environment of dignity and respect.
- Professional neuro-psychosocial assessment to identify underlying trauma, developmental needs, behavioral health treatment needs, and unmet social needs contributing to behavior that led to justice system involvement, coupled with healing, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and therapeutic intervention(s) by qualified professionals and paraprofessionals.
- Restorative programming that promotes youth accountability for their offense(s) and builds and maintains positive relationships and behavior, including but not limited to victim awareness, personal insight, and restorative justice programs.
- A cohort model that promotes positive youth development by connecting youth to others going through the same transition, providing motivation through peer support, celebrating milestones, and exposing youth to pro-social experiences.
- Strengths based, healthy living and support activities for positive youth development that are strengths-based (e.g., opportunities for healing and spirituality, quality and age-appropriate education, outdoor time, leisure time, and opportunity to move from the facility to the community to attend school, work, and family and community events like funerals, births, and weddings pre-release).
- Mentorship through trusted/credible messengers with lived experience throughout the continuum of Stepping Home, including ongoing check-ins and feedback from youth regarding their treatment and programming.

Appendix 10 – Framework: Steps in the Continuum



Appendix 11 – Pre-and Post-Commitment Steps for Youth in SYTFs

This section outlines the steps that youth, who would have otherwise been committed to a DJJ, experience before and after adjudication.

Prior to Commitment

When a youth commits a serious crime, their contact is with an intake officer who gathers information about the situation and the youth's background to determine next steps. Next steps can include dismissing the case, diverting the youth to a community-based program, ordering informal probation, or formally processing the youth. If the youth is formally processed, the case is sent to the district attorney, and the youth is referred to the local probation department. The district attorney will review the case and determine if they wish to file charges. During this time, probation will conduct screenings and assessments with the youth and will provide a report with their recommendations to the court. The court will decide, through a detention hearing, if the youth will be on home supervision or placed in a facility until their jurisdiction hearing, when a judge determines whether the youth committed the offense. If the youth is found to have committed the offense(s), they will attend a disposition hearing to determine if they will receive probation, placement in a county secure youth treatment facility (SYTF), or other rehabilitative measures.

Post Commitment

Youth placed in a SYTF engage in treatment and programming offered through CBOs, the County Office of Education, behavioral health, and the probation department. After a youth is committed to a SYTF, they follow a sequence of steps which, in some instances, may be overlapping and continuous. The information below describes the ideals for each stage, though implementation may vary and overlap by individual and county.

- **SYTF Commitment**: Youth enter a SYTF facility, of which, the hope is that they are as close to home as possible and in a safe, secure, therapeutic environment.
- **Screenings and Assessments:** For the second time in the process, youth may go through a series of screenings and assessments to identify needs. The hope is that these screenings and assessments are robust and determine underlying trauma, developmental, behavioral, educational, medical, social, and substance use needs.
- **Individualized Rehabilitation Plan (IRP):** After the youth's needs are identified, a team is developed to create an IRP, or a plan that outlines a youth's goals and the programming and treatment needed to achieve those goals within thirty dates after commitment. The hope is that these plans are truly customized for each youth and developed in tandem with the youth and their family.
- **Programming:** To address the needs of the youth, diversity of programming is needed. The hope is that this programming is strengths-based, restorative, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, gender responsive and allows for family engagement, pro-social experiences, and exposure to educational and vocational opportunities. The hope is that youth will attain the skills and knowledge to contribute to successful reentry.
- **Progress Reviews:** To review progress on the IRP, the court holds a progress review hearing every six months. The hope is that these reviews are motivational for the youth and provide space for

adaptation of goals or programs based on progress and evolving needs. During these reviews, youth can receive up to six months off their baseline commitment every six months and be provided the opportunity to step-down into a less-restrictive program.

- **Less Restrictive Programs (LRP):** After a youth has shown steady progress, they can shift into a setting where they are engaging with the community regularly with high touch support and oversight. It is the hope that at this stage youth apply their learnings and newly developed skills in a practical setting, allowing for greater independence and exposure. At the LRP phase, youth will gain greater and greater autonomy.

- **Transition:** To prepare for reentry, a transition plan will be developed and executed. During this period, considerations for medical, housing, and financial supports are determined as well as the paperwork that is needed to aid youth in transitioning back home (including aspects like the acquisition of an ID, transcripts, or driver's license). Transitioning into a job or college is the gold standard.

- **Reentry:** When returning to the community, it is the hope that there are warm-hand offs to ensure continuity of care and community-based case management with individuals who have already established a relationship with the youth during the time of commitment. This includes taking advantage of state provided resources, including Medical JJ reform dollars.

Appendix 12 – Number of Secure Youth Facilities by County

County	Number of SYTF Facilities
Alameda	1
Butte	1
Contra Costa	1
El Dorado	1
Fresno	2
Humboldt	1
Imperial	1
Kern	1
Kings	1
Los Angeles	2
Madera	2
Mendocino	1
Merced	1
Monterey	1
Orange	3
Placer	1
Riverside	1
Sacramento	1
San Benito	1
Sa Bernardino	1
San Diego	1
San Francisco	1
San Joaquin	2
San Luis Obispo	2
San Mateo	1
Santa Barbara	1
Santa Clara	2
Santa Cruz	1
Shasta	1
Solano	1
Sonoma	2
Stanislaus	1
Tehama	1
Tuolumne	1
Tulare	1
Ventura	2
Yuba	2

Source: 2024 BSCC SYTF Applications List provided by OYCR

Appendix 13 – Specific Mentions of Programs Considered Most Effective for SYTF Youth

Multiple names of programs and resources were identified through the various means of data collection. While this report primarily focused on strategies for effective practices as opposed to specific programs, the programs that respondents mentioned by name as being most beneficial to youth through the DJJ Probation Realignment Survey include:[88]

Program Name	Description	Respondents' Perception of the Program's Effectiveness for Youth
Coastal Valley Academy	Camp that serves as an LRP.	This step-down offers intensive services, including reentry support such as stable housing.
Core Correctional Practices (CCP)	These practices can reduce recidivism by teaching participants how to engage in long-term prosocial behavior. UCCI has developed a formalized training protocol to instruct staff on these skills and their support of cognitive-behavioral programming (topics include: principles of effective interaction, core correctional practices, principles of behavioral management system, and implementation of CCP).	This program improves prevention and treatment outcomes.
David's Harp Biz Pod	Incubator initiative focused on the empowerment of youth between 16-24 in developing their entrepreneurial and leadership skills.	Has seen youth going on to start successful businesses and reinvest into their community
Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY)	FLY is a jury base program, focusing on preparing young people to be successful once they are released from custody. While in custody, FLY helps to assess the needs of the young people, focusing on skill building. They then work collaboratively with Probation and system partners, to build every entry plan. They take the lead in the reentry process, including helping them with accessing resources.	They provide reentry services for the young people with a focus on the "inside/out" approach that assures connection and rapport building. FLY employees are credible messengers and staff who have extensive experience helping young people be successful through a variety of challenges. They also work in multiple jurisdictions, which allows them to have a unique perspective on what works for youth in our community.
Garden Pathways	Community-based organization that offers programming, paid internships, and mentoring for youth in and out of custody	The compassionate nature of those working in this organization has had an impact on the youth. Many youth have participated in job apprenticeships and continue their partnership with the organization after returning to the community
GEO Reentry Services	Community-based organization that provides services to reduce recidivism by focusing on higher-risk individuals and targeting factors that contribute to criminogenic think and behavior. The program uses cognitive behavioral treatment	The lived experience mentorship has resulted in greater youth engagement

[88] All responses were kept as close to the respondent's description as possible. This list is not reflective of the researchers' opinions and is organized alphabetically.

Madera County Work Force Investment Corp	Provides job readiness skills, builds resumes, and assists with youth employment interest	The youth gain confidence from this program and readiness for reentry.
New Freedom	100 one-hour lessons organized into five 20-lesson books to be done sequentially in a closed group. Designed to reduce resistance to behavioral change and decrease antisocial behaviors, including gang activity, while increasing linkage to protective factors and pro-social elements.	Cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT) model, incorporation of Motivational Interviewing tools directly into the curriculum, linked to the Stages of Change Model, tailored for our population and age, high interest-easy reading, and addresses specific internal and external key risk factors for juvenile offending and re-offending. (6 youth completed the program and celebrated with a BBQ and games. All stated that they enjoyed the program.
Phoenix Transitional Housing	Program that provides transitional housing to youth who have stepped down	The housing support provides stability.
Project Phoenix	Community-based organization that offers skill development, support, and reentry services	Starting the treatment before youth being reentered into the community has created consistency and continuity of care. This helps with a smoother transition for youth
Success Centers' Credible Messenger Life Coach Model	Success Centers in-custody Credible Messenger Life Coaches serve both committed youth and youth in detention. Credible Messengers initiate trusting relationships, provide mentorship and coaching, and facilitate youth engagement with pro-social activities. Credible Messengers work in collaboration with JJC staff on the units 7 days a week, 9AM to 9PM.	Building ongoing, trusting relationships with people who have similar lived experience to young people in our care has been incredibly beneficial to our committed young people. Life Coaches are able to boost engagement in programming, support youth in reaching any personal goals they might have, and support staff in keeping units calm and focused.
Success Stories and Sharp Circles Mentorship Program	Program developed by individuals at the California Training Facility (CTF) who were previously justice-involve. This curriculum is based on the concepts of feminism and systemic injustices that help people who have been harmed get a clearer understanding of the people and goals that are most important to them as well as the beliefs that inhibit their progress. Youth can receive their support for life, and they have a network of supportive services that are statewide	This is the only program the respondent to the survey had seen in their 20 plus years of probation/parole work that has been able to create meaningful connection with the youth, motivated them to take responsibility for their behaviors and thinking patterns, and affect positive and achievable change. The mentorship program follows them into the community and has a network of support services that are available state-wide.
Rising Scholars[89]	This program is committed to supporting justice-impacted students both in custody and out of custody by providing student supports with the goal of removing barriers and building community with students. They provide linkage to secondary education, tutoring, and educational counselor services.	Many youth are becoming high school graduates and are becoming interested in college. Rising Scholars works with youth to reduce barriers to their college experience. They give in person representation from individuals with lived experience in the juvenile or adult justice systems. This program shows youth first hand how they can accomplish their goals.

Additional programs mentioned by name during interviews and focus groups without information on services or what impact they have on youth include:

[89] Four counties identified Rising Scholars as the most effective program/practice. Their responses have been combined.

Programs	
Annie E. Casey Foundation JDAI	National Compadres Network
Anti-Recidivist Coalition	New Beginnings
ARISE	PAWS
Arts for Healing	Prison Education Project
Boys and Girls Club	Project Rebound
Challenge Academy	Seeking Safety
Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)	Spirit Awakening Foundation
Facing Hearts	The Courage to Change
Forward Thinking	Thinking 4 Change
Gang Members Anonymous	Underground Scholars
Healing Dialogue in Action	Unigos
Homeboy Industries Art Academies	Women of Substance, Men of Honor
Justice Network	Young Women's Freedom Center
La Cultura Cura	Youth Justice Coalition
MILPA's Restoring Promise	

Appendix 14 – Academic Opportunities Onsite and Offsite

Variations by county were consistent with expectations by county size. Small counties were least likely to provide services on or offsite. Medium and Large counties had more similarities, although large counties were slightly more likely to provide youth with access to Dual Enrollment and bachelor's degree or higher resources.

Percentage Offering Academic Opportunities On- and/or Off-Site	Total	Large	Medium	Small
Academic support (tutoring, study groups, etc.)	95%	100%	100%	78%
High school diploma	95%	100%	100%	78%
Dual enrollment	82%	93%	87%	56%
Rising Scholars	87%	100%	100%	44%
Associate's degree	95%	100%	100%	78%
Bachelor's degree or higher	79%	93%	80%	56%
Other	10%	20%	7%	0%
Total Number of Probation Departments	**39**	**15**	**15**	**9**

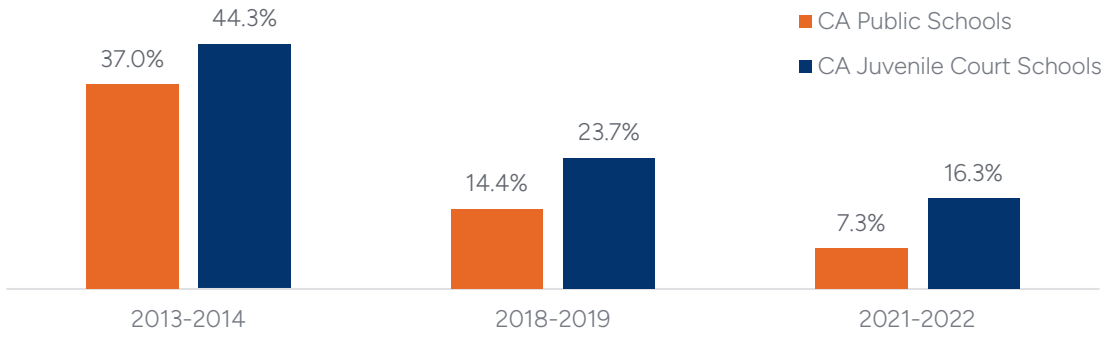
Percentage Offering Academic Opportunities by Location and County Size	Total		Large		Medium		Small	
	Onsite	Offsite	Onsite	Offsite	Onsite	Offsite	Onsite	Offsite
Academic support (tutoring, study groups, etc.)	92%	82%	100%	93%	93%	80%	78%	67%
High school diploma	92%	79%	100%	87%	93%	80%	78%	67%
Dual enrollment	79%	69%	93%	80%	80%	73%	56%	44%
Rising Scholars	82%	74%	100%	87%	93%	80%	33%	44%
Associate's degree	87%	87%	100%	93%	67%	87%	56%	78%
Bachelor's degree or higher	62%	67%	80%	73%	67%	67%	22%	56%
Other	10%	10%	20%	20%	7%	7%	0%	0%
Total Number of Probation Departments	39		15		15		9	

Source: 2024 SB 823 Post-Realignment Survey: Probation Departments. N= 39. Excludes five small counties with no response or responses indicating "N/A", "Unknown. Counts include counties reporting access on and/or off-site.

Appendix 15 – Willful Defiance Suspensions in Juvenile Court Schools

Though willful defiance suspension rates have decreased overall, they have decreased more slowly in juvenile court schools. As the Youth Law Center suggests, this is perhaps due to differences in policies between California school districts, which govern public schools, and County Offices of Education, which govern juvenile court schools. Furthermore, juvenile court school students tend to be older than those in public schools, and legislation promoting reduction in willful defiance suspensions is focused on younger students. However, Senate Bill 274 (SB 274), banning willful defiance suspensions in all age ranges, went into effect on July 1, 2024, which should decrease student suspensions overall.

Figure 40. Percentage of Suspensions where Willful Defiance was the Most Serious Offense Category



Source: Recreated from Out of sight, out of mind: How California's oversight failures leave foster youth in dangerous out-of-state facilities. Youth Law Center, 2023.

Appendix 16 – Educational Programs

Additional programs that provide opportunities for youth that were justice-involved after release from a facility include Project Rebound, Prison Education Project, and Underground Scholars.

Project Rebound: Initiative within California State University System to support formerly incarcerated students in pursuit of higher education opportunities. Their Spring 2022 cohort included 566 individuals. Between 2016-2020, there was a 0% recidivism rate for those enrolled in their program.

Prison Education Project (PEP): Initiative funded through the California Department of Education to provide educational and career opportunities to individuals in California who are justice involved in hopes of creating a "prison-to-school pipeline". This project is collaborating with 23 juvenile hall facilities. In FY 23/24, 323 youth who were in a SYTF have been enrolled. The JJRBG 2024 County Plan Summary Report notes 8 counties citing their use of PEP for support in transitioning youth back into their communities. PEP annual forum is supported by OYCR. OYCR continues to partner with PEP to expand its presence in juvenile halls throughout California.

Underground Scholars: Initiative within the University of California system to support formerly incarcerated students. 10 universities participate.

Project Change: The first community college-supported program in California to offer wrap-around students support services and access to college programs for youth that were justice involved. This model was used for developing the Rising Scholars Network. Through this program, three college courses are offered every semester, one continuation and one on site at the juvenile hall. As of February 2025, 10 youth were enrolled in their program and received programming onsite at the juvenile facility. Two of the youth who were released from the facility while taking their courses continued with their studies post-release. One teacher shared a meaningful moment where a youth said, "this is the first class where I felt I was a scholar, contributing to the world of academia."

Appendix 17 - Stakeholder-Informed Metrics for Assessing Success of Realignment

Stakeholders identified assessment metrics that are critical to determine the success of the SB 823 realignment. These metrics reflect priorities elevated by all stakeholder groups and are organized into three categories: in-custody, post-release, and system-wide.

In-Custody:

- Personal Development: Improved skills including but not limited to increased confidence, coping mechanisms, anxiety reduction, life skills, improved mental health, identifying and nurturing talents.
- Access to Healing Treatment: Consideration of access to treatment for youth-identified treatment need(s) while in custody
- Access to Education and/or Vocational Training: Improved literacy rates, alignment between youth goals and educational access/interest, grade/GPA improvement in academic progress, and increase in high school graduation rates, AA and BA achieve, certification attainment
- Program Completions: Rate at which youth successfully complete programs in SYTFs, through LRPs, and during furlough periods
- Consistency in Progress Review Hearings: Track time off recommendations by stakeholder group in comparison to actual time reductions granted by the court

Post-Release:

- Recidivism: A consistent definition of recidivism that considers the various forms of subsequent encounters that may occur with the justice system after release (mentions included re-offense, re-arrest, and adult criminal charge)
- Employment: Employment rates, livable wage, employment stability
- Stability of Environment: Post-release living arrangements, including number of youth who returned to family, number of youth who chose not to return to live with family, and number of youth who acquired desired independent housing
- Educational Continuation: Number of youth who continued educational pursuits post release
- Youth Experience: Interviews at one -year and three-year intervals post-release to inquire about how their experience contributed to gaining access to new, positive opportunities

System-Wide:

- Adequate Resourcing and Funding: Evaluation of sufficiency for funding and investment to outcomes intended under realignment, including access to services and treatment opportunities
- Prevention: Trends in overall system involvement to determine whether fewer youth are entering the justice system overall
- Net-widening: Definition of net-widening and assessment of impact of realigned youth population

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