OYCR | Office of Youth and Community Restoration

JUVENILE JUSTICE REALIGNMENT BLOCK GRANT ANNUAL PLAN

MAIN CONTACT FOR PLAN

Date: 03/11/2026

County Name: Merced County

Contact Name: Chris Henn

Telephone Number: (209)385-7560

E-mail Address: Christopher.Henn@countyofmerced.com

BACKGROUND AND INSTRUCTIONS:

Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Sections 1990 through 1995 establish the Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant (JJRBG) program, which supports county-based care, custody, and supervision of youth who were previously eligible for commitment to the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) prior to its closure. Section 1995, which governs the county planning process, was amended by Assembly Bill 118 (Chapter 96, Statutes of 2025). This template reflects those amendments, which take effect January 1, 2026. All statutory references in this document are to the law as amended. The statutory language can be found here.

To be eligible for funding allocations associated with this grant program, counties shall create a subcommittee of the multiagency juvenile justice coordinating council to develop a plan describing the facilities, programs, placements, services, supervision, and reentry strategies that are needed to provide appropriate rehabilitative services for realigned youth. (Welf. & Inst. Code § 1995(a).) OYCR may request revisions as necessary or request completion of the required statutory elements in the plan prior to final acceptance of the plan. (Welf. & Inst. Code § 1995 (f).) Plans and the date of their acceptance will be posted to the Office of Youth and Community Restoration website. (Welf. & Inst. Code § 1995(g).)

There are ten sections to the plan:

Part 1: Subcommittee Composition
Part 2: Target Population
Part 3: Programs and Services
Part 4: Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant Funds
Part 5: Facility Plan
Part 6: Retaining the Target Population in the Juvenile Justice System
Part 7: Regional Efforts
Part 8: Data
Part 9: Other Updates
Part 10: Expenditure Summary

PART 1: SUBCOMMITTEE COMPOSITION AND PROCESS (WELF. & INST. CODE §§ 1995 (B) AND (C))

List the subcommittee members, agency affiliation where applicable, and contact information:

Agency	Name and Title	Email	Phone Number
Chief Probation Officer (Chair)	Chris Henn, Chief Probation Officer	Christopher.Henn@countyofmerced.com	(209) 385-7560
Co-Chair (*If Applicable*)	Jesse Ornelas, Program Manager	jornelas@yli.org	(209) 230-6867
District Attorney's Office Representative	Nicole Silveira, District Attorney	Nicole.Silveira@countyofmerced.com	(209) 385-7381
Public Defender's Office Representative	Vicent Andrade, Public Defender	Vincent.Andrade@countyofmerced.com	(209) 985-7381
Department of Social Services Representative	John Ceccoli Director	John.Ceccoli@countyofmerced.com	(209) 385-3000
Department of Mental Health	Kimiko Vang, Director	Kimiko.Vang2@countyofmerced.com	(209) 381-6800
Office of Education Representative	Kristen Concepcion, Principal	KConcepcion@mcoe.org	(209) 381-4500
Court Representative	Amanda Toste, Court Executive Officer	Amanda.Toste@mercedcourt.org	(209) 725-4100
Three Community Members (*defined as "individuals who have experience providing community-based youth services, youth justice advocates with expertise and knowledge of the juvenile justice system, or have been directly*	Jarrod Gonzalez	jgonzalez@cic4ci.org	(650)557-6656
	Linda Levesque	Linda.levesque@comcast.net	
	Jesse Ornelas, Youth Leadership Institute	jornelas@yli.org	(209) 230-6867

involved in the juvenile justice system" (Welf. & Inst. Code § 1995(b).))			

Additional Subcommittee Participants			

Describe the process used to determine whether to select a co-chair for your subcommittee (Welf. & Inst. Code § 1995(b)):

Jesse Ornelas was re-elected as co-chair by majority vote during our December 13, 2024, subcommittee meeting. He will continue his leadership from the previous year.

Provide the dates of the last two meetings that the subcommittee convened to discuss your county's JJRBG plan?

Meeting Date 1: 12/12/2025 Meeting Date 2: 3/17/2026

Additional meeting dates of the subcommittee, if applicable:

3/18/2025, 6/17/2025, 9/17/2025

Date that the subcommittee approved the plan by a majority vote: 3/17/2026

Describe how the plan was developed, including the review and participation of the subcommittee community members as defined in Welf. & Inst. Code § 1995(b):

The subcommittee convened on February 11, 2026, to evaluate the current treatment framework and develop enhanced strategies for secured track population. Under the subcommittee's guidance, the group collaborated to review and refine the comprehensive in-custody treatment plan for 2026.

The Merced County Probation Department developed the plan in collaboration with the subcommittee and with the assistance of our external evaluator, Dr. Steve Roussos. The plan was presented and approved by the subcommittee on Tuesday, March 17, 2026.

PART 2: TARGET POPULATION (WELF. & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(1))

Briefly describe the County's realignment target population supported by the block grant.

The "target population" is defined as "youth who were eligible for commitment to the Division of Juvenile Justice prior to its closure and *shall further be defined as persons who are adjudicated to be a ward of the juvenile court based on an offense described in subdivision (b) of Section 707 or an offense described in Section 290.008 of the Penal Code." (*Welf. & Inst. Code § *1990(b))*

The realigned target population for the Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant consists of youth (males ages 14-25) eligible for a commitment to the Division of Juvenile Justice, now called a local Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTF).

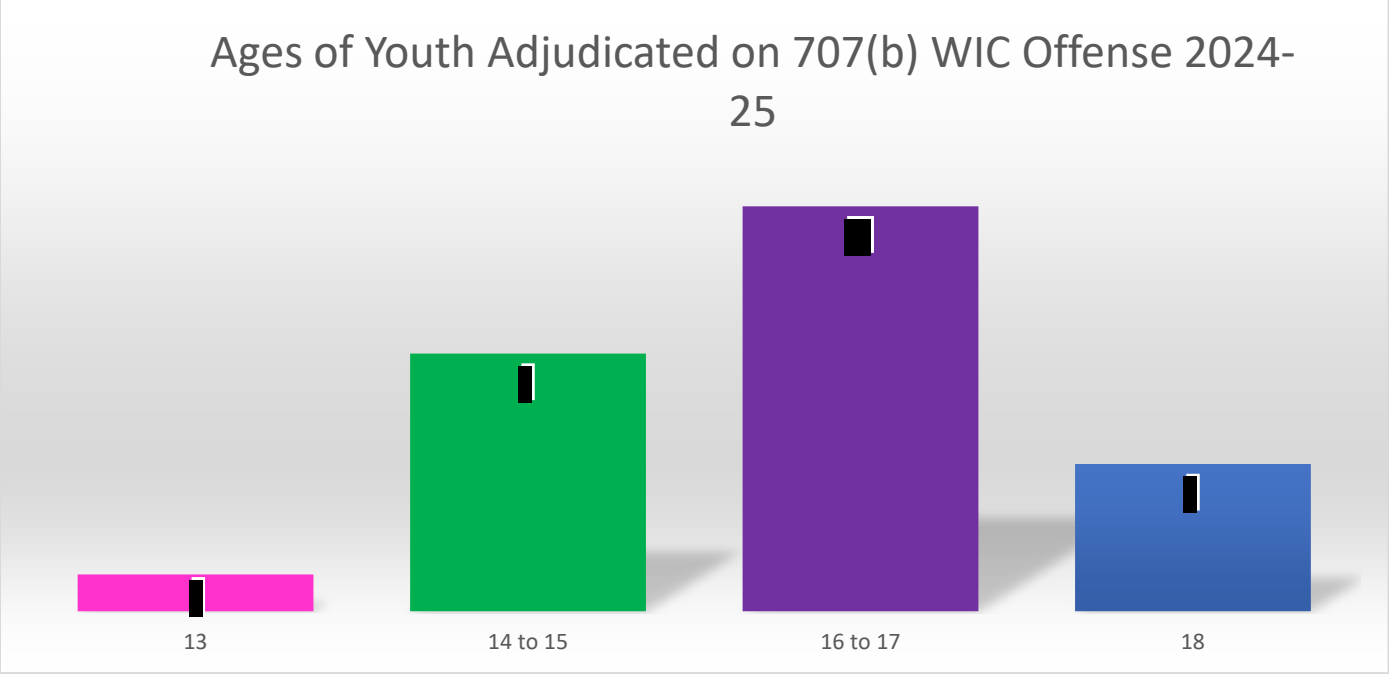
Commitments to the SYTF will require youth to be adjudicated as a ward of the Juvenile Court based on an offense described in Welfare and Institutions Code 707(b), defined under WIC 1990(b), in cases where the Juvenile Court has made a finding that less restrictive alternative dispositions are unsuitable.

Exclusionary factors for commitment to a SYTF in Merced County would consist of any youth requiring specialized treatment (i.e., females and/or any youths requiring sex offender treatment). Youths requiring specialized treatment will be referred to partner agencies that best meet their treatment needs.

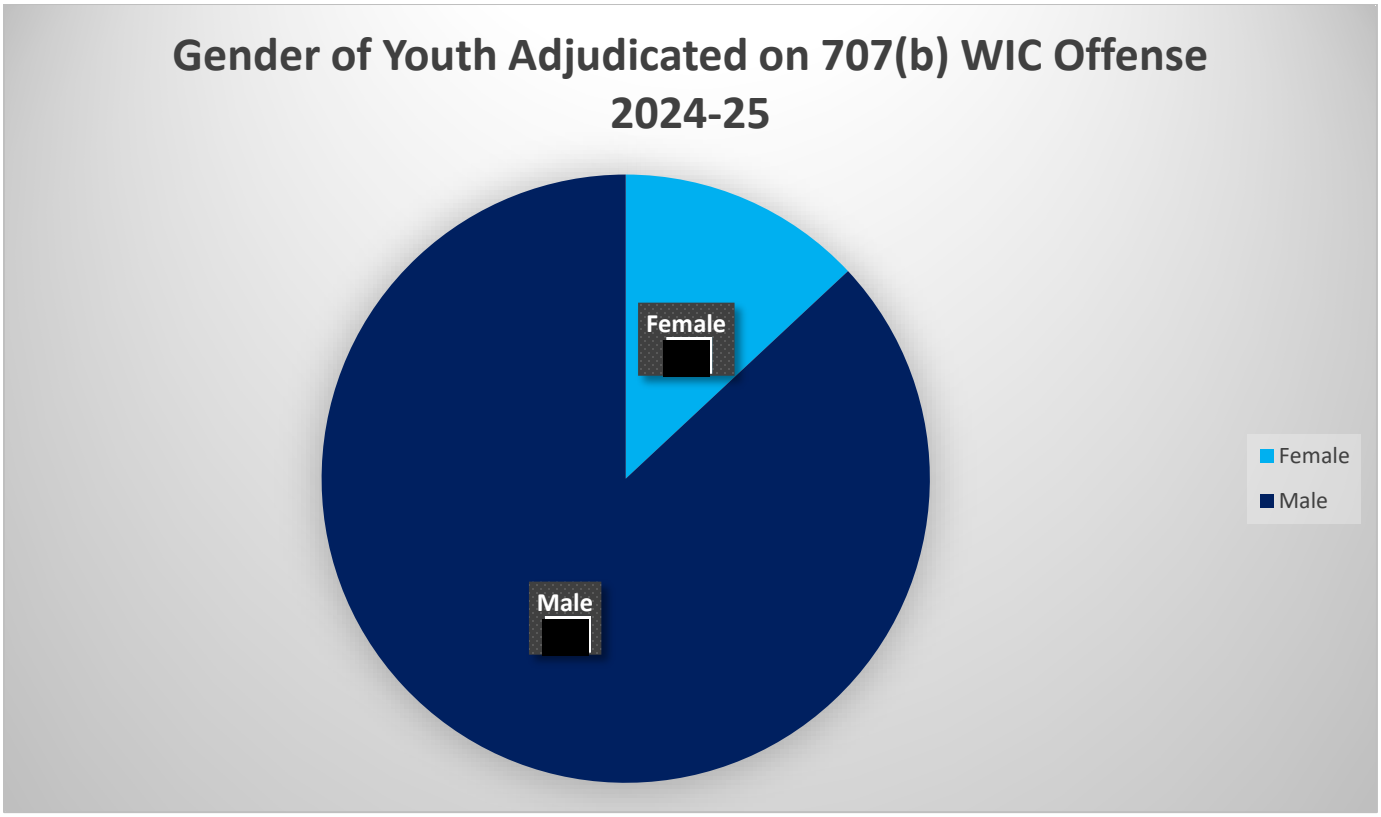
Demographics of identified target population, including anticipated numbers of youth served, disaggregated by factors including age, gender, race or ethnicity, and offense/offense history.

The Merced County Probation Department serves youth aged 14 to 23 and up to 25, depending on the length of the disposition order by the Juvenile Court. As of January 26, 2026, there are [redacted] youth ([redacted] males) who are currently in custody at the Merced County Juvenile Hall pending 707(b) offenses/offenses that would qualify for commitment to a Long Term, Youth Treatment Program, or SYTF. It should be noted these youths are still pending the court process, and there has been no judicial finding. The ages of these youth range from 16 years old to 17 years old.

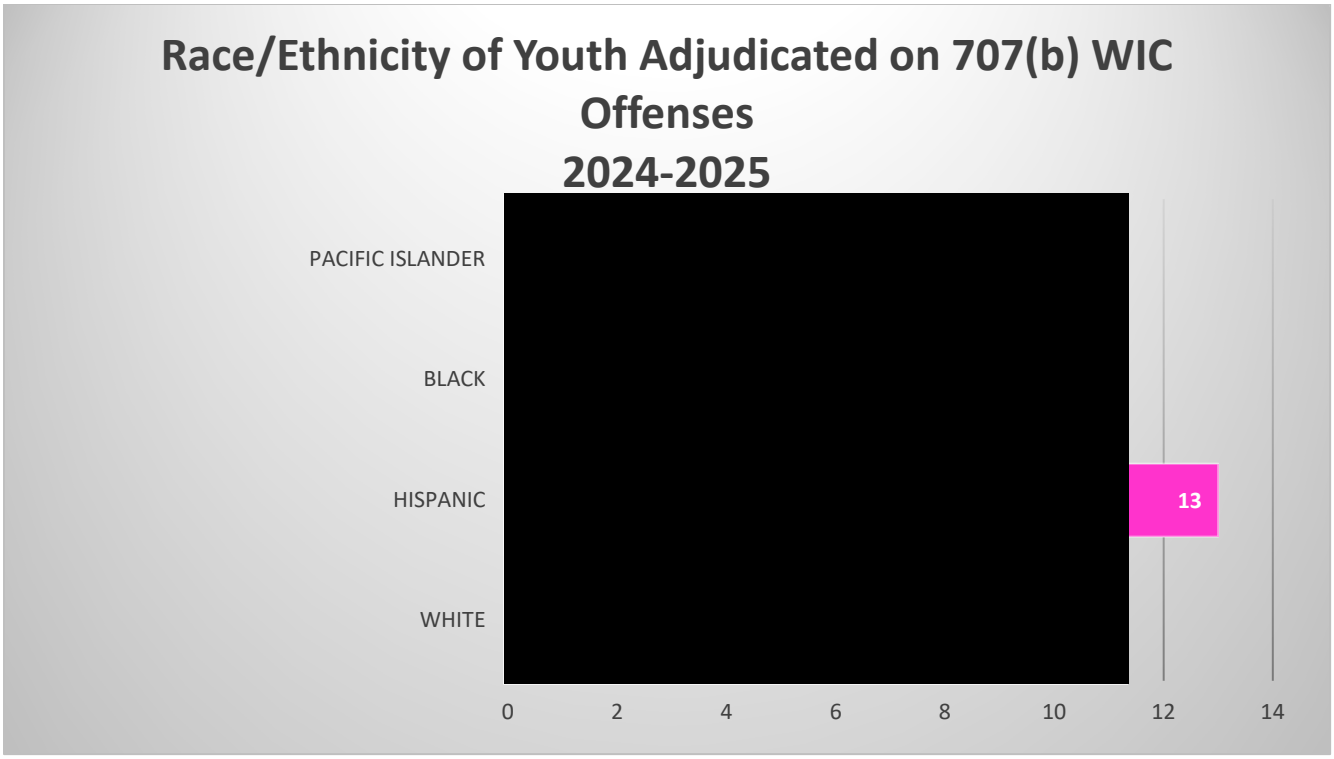
Between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, 23 unduplicated youth were adjudicated of a 707(b) offense.



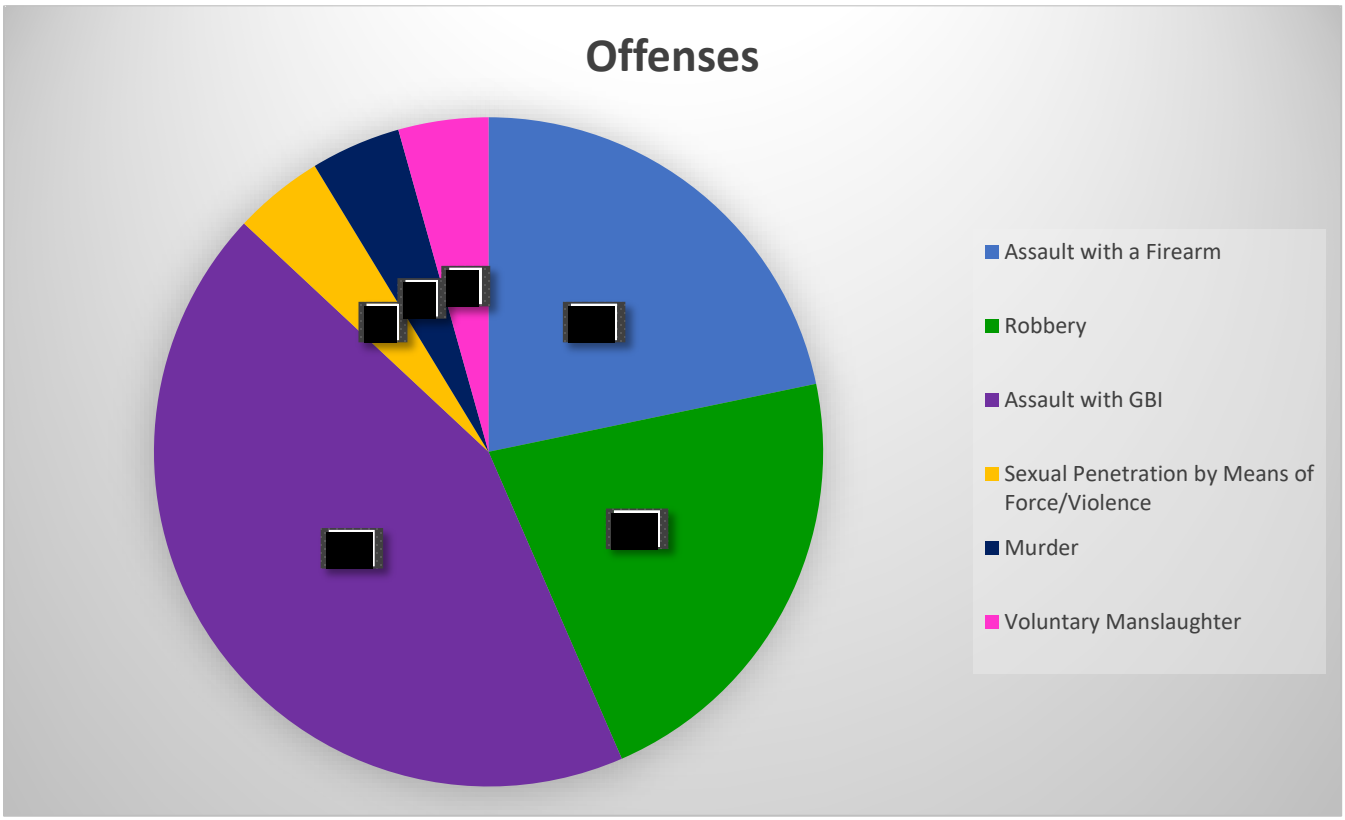
As illustrated in the chart above, the majority of 707(b) WIC adjudications were for youth between the ages of 14 and 17. During this time frame, there [redacted] under the age of 14 and [redacted] over the age of 18 who were adjudicated to a 707(b) WIC offense



As illustrated in the chart above, Males constitute a substantial majority, representing [redacted] of the adjudicated youth. Females represent a minority with only [redacted] of the adjudicated youth.



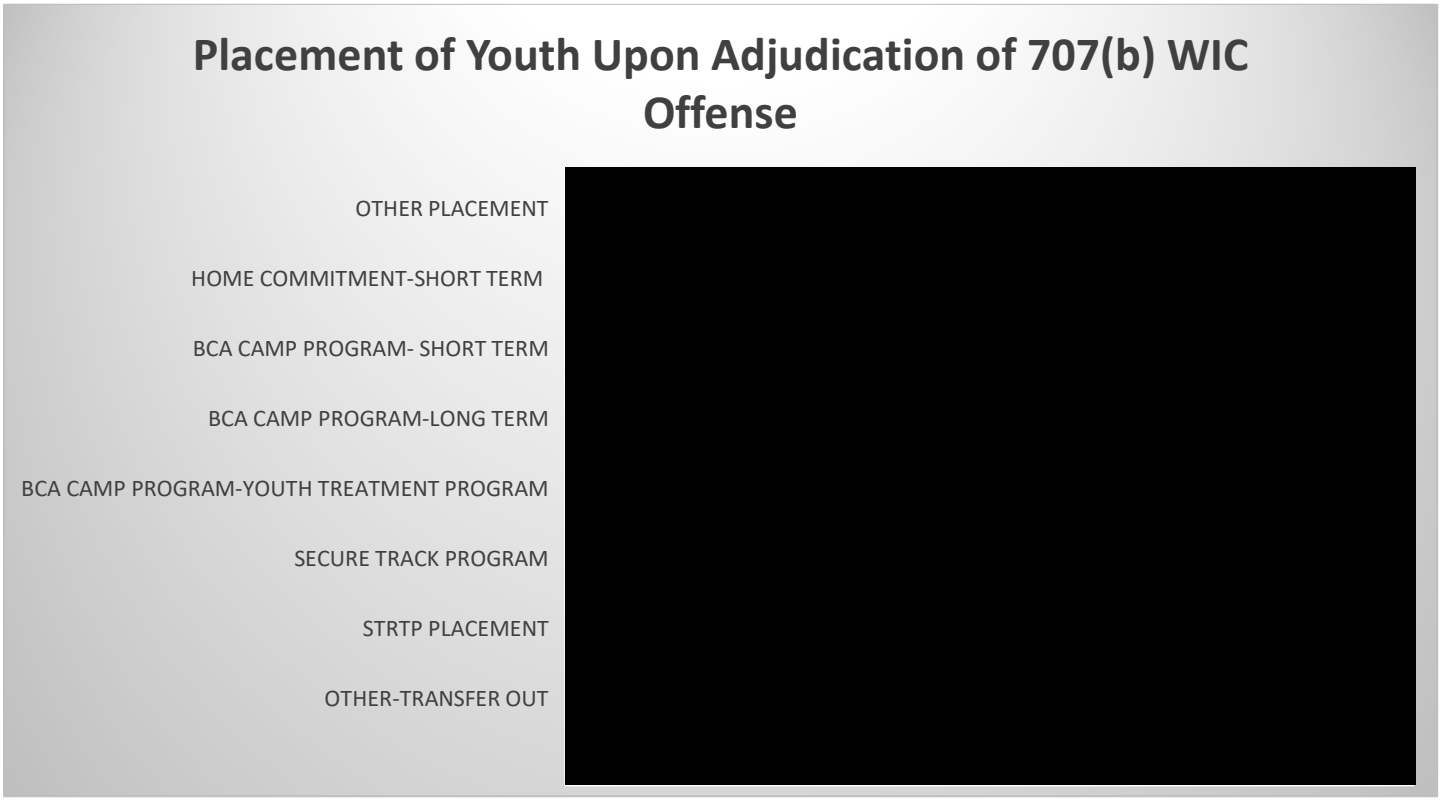
The graph above continues to be consistent with the demographics of Merced County. Approximately 63% of Merced County residents are of Hispanic descent, with the remainder of the population divided among the other categories.



Between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025, 23 unduplicated youth were adjudicated for offenses under Welfare and Institutions Code section 707(b). As shown in the chart, Assault with Great Bodily Injury (GBI) remains the most frequent offense at [redacted]. Both Robbery and Assault with a Firearm each

account for [redacted] of the total. The remaining categories Sexual Penetration by Force/Violence, Murder, and Voluntary Manslaughter each represent [redacted] of the adjudicated offenses.

Describe the target population disaggregated by programs, placements and/or facilities to which they have been referred.



The chart above illustrates the placement of youth following the adjudication of a 707(b) WIC offense. As shown, the BCA Camp Program-Long Term was the most frequent placement, utilized for [redacted]. Additionally, [redacted] were placed in the Secure Track Program, [redacted] in the BCA Camp Program-Short Term, and [redacted] were assigned to Home Commitment-Short Term.

Further placements included [redacted] in the BCA Camp Program-Youth Treatment, [redacted] in STRTP Placement, and [redacted] categorized as Other-Transfer Out to the youth's county of residency. [redacted] placed under Other Placement- returned home with no program. These figures reflect the department's ongoing commitment to utilizing the least restrictive measures possible while ensuring appropriate treatment and supervision for each young person.

Of the [redacted] who have been committed to the secured track program, [redacted] been placed in Pine Grove Fire Academy and [redacted] been stepped down to less restrictive Youth Treatment Program to complete his baseline. This allowed him to connect with the community and have an employment opportunity with a local business.

The following list represents formal and informal interventions the Probation Department utilizes. These interventions focus on addressing education, mental health, social services, drug and/or alcohol, and family resource needs.

- The Do Whatever It Takes at Home (DoWITH) Program, offered by ASPIRAnet, is a collaboration between the Human Services Agency (HSA), Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS), the Merced County Probation Department, and the Merced County Office of Education. DoWITH offers a unique blend of "wraparound" services designated to be flexible and will consider, blend, and incorporate the family's voice in the decision-making process. The family's strengths are utilized as the foundation of the planning process. The youth's parent is given a parent partner to assist the parent with parenting troubled teens. Parent Partners are parents (mothers and fathers) who have first-hand experience with the Child Welfare System, and who have exhibited exceptional qualities in their efforts to develop viable permanency plans for their children, an understanding of how the Child Welfare system works, an appreciation of what it takes to be successful, and personal qualities that lend themselves to collaboration on various levels. The (DoWITH) Program offers twenty-four-hour on-call assistance with crisis intervention. Youth can be best served by their families, schools, and communities. DoWITH utilizes the least restrictive, most beneficial setting for youth and their families while utilizing a culturally responsive, family-focused, strength-based, and evidence-based approach.

- The Wraparound Empowerment Compassion and Needs (WeCAN) Program has provided individualized, multisystemic strength-based interventions to ameliorate mental health conditions that interfere with a youth's functioning. The WeCAN Program is operated by Aspiranet and Merced County's other Full-Service Partnership (FSP), which serves children and youth ages 0 to 18 of all races and ethnicities with special efforts to reach those with increased risk factors. WeCAN delivers specialty mental health services to severely emotionally disturbed youths, according to an individualized treatment plan designed with the child and the family. WeCAN meet families in their homes in their own time and collaborate with families' natural support systems. WeCAN provides community services and support to youths 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week, emphasizing those with serious emotional behavior issues living successfully in the least restrictive normative environment. The program aims to reduce out-of-home placements and provide strength-based, family-driven services that promote wellness, recovery, and community integration.

- Youth committed to the Bear Creek Academy (BCA) Short-Term Program are allowed by the Juvenile Delinquency Court to enter a coordinated system of care to break destructive behavior patterns. Youth committed to this program are taught positive social skills, corrective thinking, ethical values, and strategies for successful community interaction. This Program is point-based, and youth receive points for pro-social behavior(s) and attending school/programming. The maximum number of points each youth can earn per day is 50. A level two commitment is 1500 points, and a level three commitment is 3000.

- The Re-Direct Program provides information to children and parents regarding community resources available to families to prevent deeper involvement in the Probation/Court system. The Redirect Program aims to empower parents to become more effective in their parenting by clarifying their rights and responsibilities and their children's rights and responsibilities. The target population for this group is youth 12 to 18 years of age who have parents/guardians/or a caring adult who is engaged in the life of the youth. This program is a collaborative effort

amongst community justice partners including but not limited to: Merced County Probation Department, Field Services and Custody Divisions, Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Merced County Public Defender's Office, Merced County District Attorney's Office, various Law Enforcement Agencies, Merced County Public Health, Merced County Child Welfare and Merced County Office of Education.

- Supportive Ongoing Services (S.O.S) is a multidisciplinary team that meets weekly to assist families in problem-solving and securing agency resources. The multidisciplinary team consists of Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Merced County Probation Department, Merced County & City School Districts, Merced County Child Welfare, Parent Partners, and Central Valley Regional Center. S.O.S. aims to keep families together by building on family strengths and providing coordinated resources. All agencies and families have access to S.O.S. Referrals to S.O.S. are routed to a single source, and families are scheduled to attend a meeting with resource providers who are typically already connected to the family. Information exchanged is developed into a plan for the youth, and a follow-up meeting is scheduled to ensure the plan's success.

- The Merced County Youth Accountability Board (YAB) is a volunteer organization initially formed by citizens concerned with escalating juvenile delinquency and the disintegration of the family. YAB provides services to first-time offenders who would otherwise be under-served due to lacking city and county resources. The volunteers strive to strengthen the community by supporting parents in raising their children to be law-abiding citizens. The family meets with a Social Investigator to review the offense's circumstances and create a contract. Once all contract conditions are met, the youth's record with the Probation Department is purged.

- The Learning for Life Program addresses taking ownership and responsibility for actions, learning from mistakes, and having an open discussion regarding anger and conflict management with the goal of accepting the consequences.

- The Teen Outreach Program, as facilitated by the Merced County Sheriff's Office, continues to provide informational sessions designed to provide troubled teens and their families with county resources and other assistance programs. The presentation provides an overview of parent involvement and awareness, drug & alcohol abuse, violent crimes, gang violence in Merced, gang structure & recruitment, community resources, and additional information on teen help programs.

- The 3rd Millennium Classroom for the intervention of first-time offenders. The 3rd Millennium Classrooms offers courses for marijuana and other drug use, intimate partner violence and sexual consent, nicotine awareness, and theft and impulse control. All programs use a motivational interviewing style and provide personalized feedback reports. The program(s) aims to engage the youth in a powerful learning experience that impacts behavior. Probation primarily used their Marijuana 101 program. Marijuana 101 is a marijuana education and intervention course used as a sanction for marijuana violations or possession of drug paraphernalia, as well as an educational component for DWI violations. Youths are presented

with compelling information about the dangers of marijuana use in a reasonable and balanced manner.

- The Juvenile Behavioral Health Court (JBHC) Program is a collaborative, court-supervised specialty court initiative designed to serve Medi-Cal eligible youth involved in the juvenile justice system who have an identified mental health diagnosis and/or co-occurring substance use disorder. The program utilizes a structured four-phase model focused on early identification, intensive care coordination, accountability, rehabilitation, and sustained continuity of behavioral health treatment, including mental health and co-occurring disorder services. JBHC operates through a formal multidisciplinary partnership among the Juvenile Delinquency Court, Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS), the Probation Department, the Merced County District Attorney's Office, and the Merced County Public Defender's Office. Through this coordinated framework, the program promotes stabilization, treatment engagement, and improved long-term outcomes for justice-involved youth.

- Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS) is an intensive, individualized, one-to-one behavioral coaching program available to children/youth up to age 21 experiencing a current emotional or behavioral challenge or experiencing a stressful life transition. TBS is only available to children/youth with full-scope Medi-Cal benefits receiving ongoing mental health services. TBS can help children/youth and parents/caregivers learn skills to increase successful behaviors and new ways of reducing challenging behaviors. TBS is not a stand-alone service; it supports an ongoing primary mental health service such as mental health therapy or case management.

- The CUBE is a wellness center that is planned for youth by youth. The CUBE offers a safe setting for youth to set their wellness & recovery goals. The CUBE serves all transitional-age youth between 16 and 25. Services and Resources available at the CUBE include but are not limited to Therapy, Counseling, Case Management, Social Skills Groups, Indoor/Outdoor Recreation Activities, Independent Living Skills Classes, Employment Assistance, Laundry, Tables for Homework, Computers with Internet Access, Tutoring, and a Quiet Area to Relax.

- Parent Café provides a physically and emotionally safe environment where participants can openly discuss and listen to each other on important topics, such as the joys and challenges of raising a family, navigating inequality, improving well-being, and supporting a loved one in recovery. Through personal reflection and peer-to-peer learning, participants explore their strengths, gain insight about the Protective Factors, and develop strategies based on their own experiences and wisdom to strengthen their families. The primary goal of Parent Café is to encourage and promote positive parenting practices that nurture healthy family relationships.

- The RISE Program is a collaborative program between the Merced County Probation Department and Merced County Office of Education. The program's purpose is to provide participants with employability skills training, work experience through job placement in the community, and access to paid vocational training opportunities. The RISE program bridges the gap for at-risk youth and assists them in acquiring skills, training, and experience that will enable them to gain employment successfully.

- RISE to Higher Grounds Mobile Coffee Cart -The Mobile Coffee Cart is a collaborative reentry program between Merced County Office of Education and the Probation Department which

helps clients overcome one or more of barriers of transition back within the community. The purpose of the Mobile Coffee Cart program is to provide an opportunity for youth currently detained to complete an in-custody program, to learn skills related to customer service, handling cash, barista, merchandising, stocking and various other tasks oriented towards daily operational duties. The ultimate goal is to give youth practical work skills they can use once they leave and assist them with a smoother transition to the community if employment is no longer a barrier to success.
Clients will be enrolled in the Merced County Regional Occupational Program (ROP) Culinary Essentials program. Participation in the program is based on behavior, current status within their commitment program and overall drive to partake in and contribute to the success of the program. The program's instructor is a credentialed teacher who is a former restaurant owner/manager. The program is also supported by an Instructional Aide with food service experience. Once clients have learned the necessary culinary skills in the classroom/kitchen lab and have obtained their Food Handlers certification card, they can then utilize their skills in the mobile coffee trailer to gain hands on culinary experience and customer service training through interaction with customers from the general public.

- Merced County Probation, in collaboration with UC Merced College Corps, is currently working to create a generation of civic-minded leaders. We currently host three (3) fellows who work directly with our youth to provide mentorship and tutoring and to lead pro-social activities at our reentry center. Fellows' contributions to Pathways to Success are designed to be meaningful and responsive to our youth's needs, while also advancing College Corps' mission of fostering civic engagement and community impact. Our collaboration aims to give justice-impacted youth direct exposure to UC Merced, making higher education a tangible and accessible option. Many of these young people lack the resources or positive role models to see college as a possibility. We're bridging that gap to empower them to envision a brighter future.

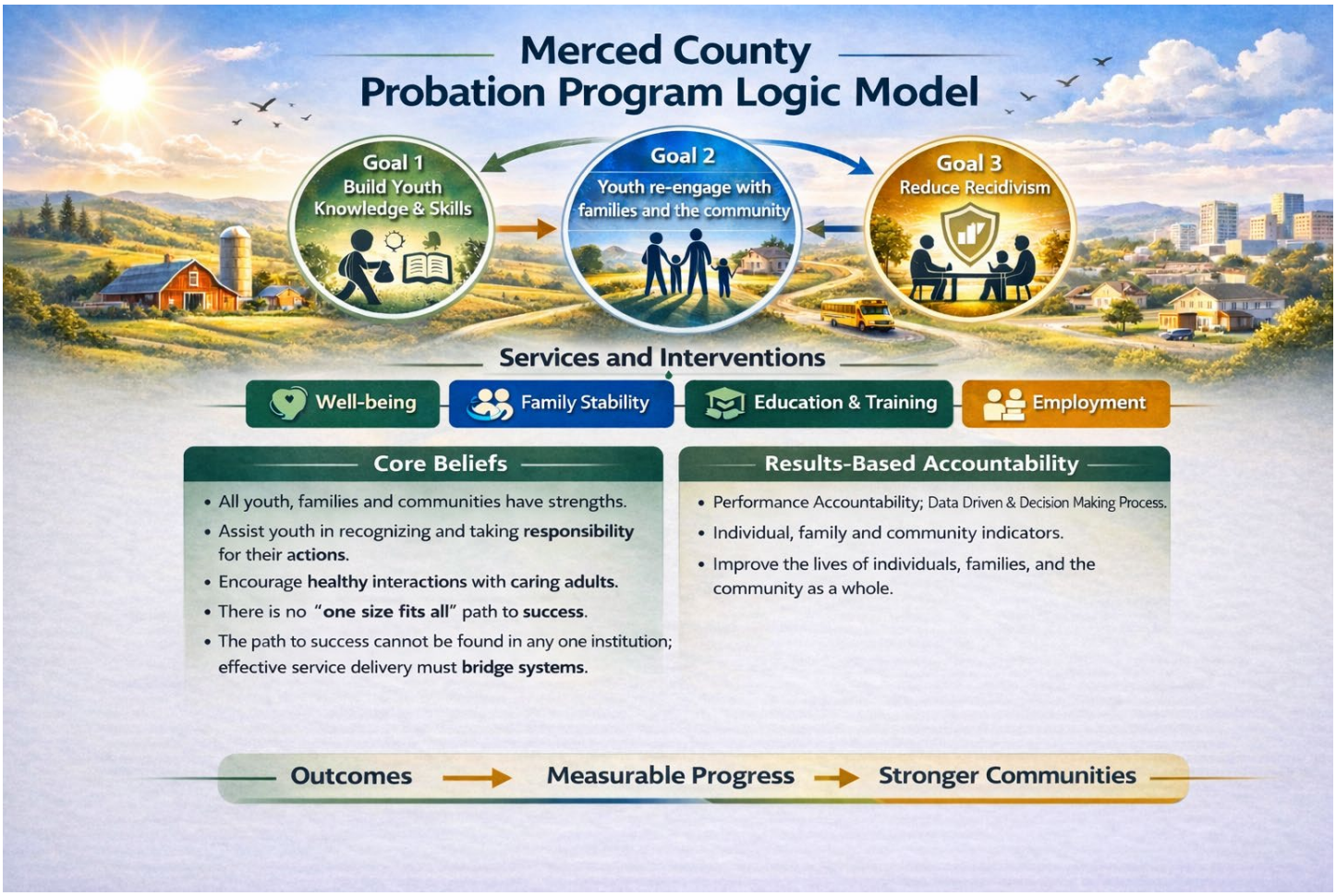
- The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program is a referral and collaboration process designed to prioritize youth who have been removed from their homes and or otherwise at risk, with an emphasis on those with special needs. Judicial officers refer cases for CASA consideration, prompted by requests from probation officers, attorneys, the youth, or district attorneys. All referrals require a court order. CASA reviews these cases based on capacity and mission alignment, with referrals possible at several stages of a youth’s delinquency case. Once a case accepted, CASA Advocates receives an official Order of Appointment, granting them necessary case information with Probation’s assistance. CASA Advocates conduct independent case reviews, monitor the youth, advocate for their best interests, and report to the Court regarding their findings. Probation Officers remain responsible for youth supervision and case planning. To ensure effective teamwork, CASA, Probation, and the Court will maintain regular communication and collaborate on services.

PART 3: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES (WELF. & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(2))

Provide a description of the facilities, programs, placements, services and service providers, supervision, and other responses that will be provided to the target population. Describe any progress

made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(2) and (d)(8)):

Young people leaving any secure treatment facility face many barriers as they reintegrate with their families and communities. Research indicates many young people return to unstable home environments, struggle to remain in school, lack the necessary skills needed for employment, and have a behavioral health diagnosis that can negatively impact the reintegration process. Effective service delivery will need to bridge different agencies, services, and supports to improve the outcomes for the target population when they reenter the community. As such, the Probation Department's Program Logic Model will be utilized.



This model provides an overview of our rehabilitative principles, services and interventions, and results-based accountability framework that is led by the Merced County Probation Department to reintegrate justice system-involved youth to their families and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to live successful, crime-free lives. This theoretical framework focuses on rehabilitation. Our Services and Interventions (Strategies) are evidence-based practices that focus on strengthening areas (pillars) to ensure youth successfully transition back into the community with the goal of reducing recidivism. The four primary areas of focus have been identified as Behavioral Health (Well-being), Family Stability, Education/Vocational Training, and Employment. These service areas are all interrelated and equally important.

The Probation Department will follow guiding principles when providing rehabilitative services to the target population utilizing:

An integrated system approach that engages the target population, their families, and communities:

- Each youth's risks and needs are identified utilizing our Residential Positive Assessment Change Tool (R.P.A.C.T.) and other facility assessments such as aptitude tests, Individualized Education Program (IEP), and behavioral health evaluations.
- A multidisciplinary treatment team will develop an Individual Rehabilitation Plan to identify the youth's unique needs, create treatment goals and actions, and mitigate potential barriers to reintegration.
- Pre- and post-release planning and coordinated transition services to enhance youths' contact with community-based programs, services, and support.
- Provide family services and support to ensure family and home stability and healing of damaged relationships.

Effective treatment and understanding of the stages of change:

- Evidence-based and promising services and interventions are delivered to improve youth outcomes.
- Interventions are developmentally sensitive and based on cognitive-behavioral concepts and strategies.
- Programs and services are strength-based, culturally competent, and trauma-informed.
- A caring environment where youth are treated with compassion and respect.
- Positive changes and achievements are supported and recognized.

Four Primary Areas of Focus for Program Logic Model:

I. Family Stability

Successful reintegration is more likely when youth have a stable living arrangement before their release from a secure facility. Stable housing is fundamental to sustaining family living, finding and keeping employment, and overall health and safety. Unfortunately, Merced County is one of the most impoverished areas in the nation, with a poverty rate of 18.7% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2024) and an unemployment rate of 9.6% (State of California Employment Development Department [EDD], 2026). Our county faces a lack of affordable housing and low educational attainment levels, according to information from the U.S. Census Bureau (2024). Due to these economic conditions, many Merced County residents struggle to meet basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, and transportation. Examples of these needs can prevent individuals from moving forward toward successful reintegration. These findings indicate that family strengthening is needed to foster improved familial relationships and functioning. As such, we strive to engage families, programs, and communities in building the following five key Protective Factors:

1. Enhance parental and youth resilience through individual, group, and family therapy and education via our partnership with Wellpath.

2. Provide activities and events that foster healthy social connections to their natural support systems.
3. Provide families with concrete support in times of need by referring them to safety net programs and services.
4. Facilitate parenting and youth development knowledge by offering comprehensive education to youth and/or their parents (caring adults).
5. Support healthy social & emotional development in youth by providing a caring environment where individuals are treated with compassion and respect.

II. Behavioral Health (Well-being)

Physical and behavioral health issues can make it more difficult for individuals to make progress toward a successful reintegration. These behavioral health issues often prevent individuals from being able to focus on school, work, and family. For youth to better focus and progress toward their goals, they must receive the behavioral health support they need to improve their lives. Our secure treatment facility has a clinical team of licensed Mental Health Clinicians through our partnership with Wellpath. Through our partnership with Wellpath, we deliver the following services:

- Behavioral Health Evaluations
- Individual, Group, and Family Therapy
- Psychotropic medication evaluations and on-going monitoring of youth who have been prescribed psychotropic medications
- Anger Management Counseling
- Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Education Programming.

Our secure facility also has a Probation Assistant and GEO Reentry case managers who facilitate cognitive behavioral and evidence-based programs and serve as mentors and caring adults to the youth. Please see Appendix A for a complete list of evidence-based and cognitive behavioral treatment programs.

III. Education and Vocational Training

As many youth served through Merced County Juvenile Court School enter the classroom for the first time deficient in credit, MCOE delivers learning programs that assist youth in recovering credit while working on grade level standards. Youth and families have the option to choose a 180-credit graduation plan, or complete A-G requirements to qualify for 4-year colleges/universities upon high school graduation. MCOE prioritizes working collaboratively with Probation, families, and the community to ensure that they are meeting the educational, social and emotional needs of youth attending school at Juvenile Hall. All curricula are aligned to California State Standards and instruction is delivered in multiple modalities to engage learners and promote confidence in their academic ability. Upon graduating from High School, youth are transferred to MCOE's Career Technical Education team who assist youth with completing the FAFSA, enrolling in Merced College or a four-year institution, and designing learning plans specific to career goals. Merced

County Probation partners with Rising Scholars at the Community College level and has now expanded to partner with the UC system's Incarceration to College program for youth interested in completing a bachelor's degree.

CTE Available:

- **Culinary Essentials (Offsite):** This program provides youth with hands-on experience, fundamental skills, and knowledge of food preparation, food and kitchen safety, sanitization, food costs, basic culinary terminology, proper use of kitchen tools and equipment, and customer service. This course allows students to earn a Food Handlers Card and ServSafe Certification. This program includes the completion of an Employment Portfolio and an internship with a local business, providing entry-level skills and training necessary to secure employment in the Food Service Industry.

- **Rise to Higher Grounds Café/Rise Program:** Youth participating in the Bear Creek Academy (BCA) Long Term Program (LT), or Youth Treatment Program (YTP) are enrolled in the Merced County Regional Occupational Program (ROP) Culinary Essentials program. Participation in the program is based on behavior, status within the BCA LT/YT program, and overall drive to partake in and contribute to the program's success. Youth receive employability skills training followed by paid work experience. Participants will be prepared for employment in the local labor market with their culinary training, food handler's certification card, experience in the mobile coffee trailer, and work experience with a local culinary establishment.
    Program Sequence:
    - Participants attend several weeks of Employability Skills Training facilitated by a credentialed Career Technical Education teacher and/or a Job Development Training Technician.
    - The training is held off campus at the Merced County Office of Education administration complex and/or Merced County Probation Department's Administrative Office to assist students transitioning from school to a sheltered work environment before placing them at local businesses for paid work experience.
    - Upon completing Employability Skills Training, students can be placed in the mobile coffee trailer, paid work experience program, or additional occupational training.

- **Welding:** In this course, youth will study fundamentals of mechanical and structural systems, and facilities as well as employing skills in welding and shop math. Youth will explore professional opportunities in the field of engineering and welding. Emphasis will be on safety, hand tools, gas and arc welding, sheet metal, fabrication, and machining operations. This is a full year course in the Material and Product Development Industry Sector for the CTE Welding and Materials Joining Pathway. Upon completion of this course, youth will be prepared to continue post-secondary training or entry level employment in the field.

- Prison Education Project (PEP): PEP has expanded educational opportunities for the in-custody population in California and four international correctional facilities. PEP has embraced a progressive and innovative approach to supplementing and expanding educational opportunities for the incarcerated population. By providing academic, life skills, and career development programming, PEP aims to educate, empower, and transform the lives of incarcerated individuals. PEP aims to create a "Prison-to-School Pipeline" and provide

in-custody students with the cognitive tools necessary to function as productive citizens. Their multi-layered approach enhances human development, reduces recidivism, saves resources, and allows participants to ultimately contribute to California's economic and civic life (PEP, 2023).

IV. Employment

We contract with the Merced County Office of Education to collaborate with employers to create career pathways for the target population. The JDTT is responsible for initiating and developing professional relationships with prospective employers to promote the education program and increase employment opportunities for youth. The JDTT solicits and accepts job offers and sets up recruitment profiles. Additionally, the JDTT provides networking opportunities between agencies, employers, and students, including semi-annual advisory meetings, job fairs, guest speakers, and other activities.

The Merced County Probation Department offers paid work experience opportunities for eligible youth who have completed an in-custody program through the RISE Program.

The RISE Program/Rise to Higher Grounds Café

This program provides participants with occupational training and/or paid work experience. The youth are provided with employability skills training, leadership development, placement in post-secondary education (to include career technical education and/or occupational skills), training, support services, adult mentoring, comprehensive guidance and counseling, and follow-up services for at least 12 months after completion of participation in the program.

PART 4: JUVENILE JUSTICE REALIGNMENT BLOCK GRANT FUNDS (WELF. & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(3))

Describe how the County plans to apply grant funds to address the mental health, sex offender treatment, or related behavioral or trauma-based needs of the target population. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(2) and (d)(8)):

As part of a larger institutional and community mental health strategy, the Probation Department and Wellpath continue to identify treatment needs that must be addressed by Title 15 Minimum Standards for Juvenile Facilities and are also in the best interest of the target population. In preparation for the DJJ realignment, the Merced County Probation Department and Wellpath developed a collaborative clinical team servicing the behavioral health needs of youth in the juvenile facility. They provide a culturally competent and trauma-based service approach when delivering services to youth.

Identified Services will include:

- Assessment of mental health symptoms and concerns in a confidential environment upon referral from facility staff, medical staff, or by way of self-referral.
- Individual therapy/rehabilitation at designated intervals as determined to be appropriate by the clinical team.
- Group therapy includes the following topics:

    - Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART).
    - Social Skills;
    - Interpersonal Skills;
    - Stress Management;
    - Decision Making;
    - Stages of Change (Substance Use).
- Family therapy
- Clinical case management, including linkage to substance use disorder services, psychotropic medication evaluation, appropriate follow-up services, and referrals upon release from the facility.
- Collaboration with, consultation, and communication of recommendations to probation staff and medical staff when permissible and in accordance with ethical and legal standards or with a signed release of information.
- Assessment of suicide risk in a confidential environment upon identification of risk and referral from facility staff, medical staff, or by way of self-referral.
- Crisis intervention and stabilization include, but are not limited to, an assessment of risk, de-escalation and management of crisis, and coordination of appropriate treatment and referrals, which may consist of recommending transport to the hospital for medical clearance or admission to an inpatient psychiatric facility.
- Regularly, but no less than daily, reassessing youth on suicide precautions to determine whether the level of precaution or supervision shall be raised or lowered.
- Reporting all incidents of known or intended self-harm to facility staff and facility administrators immediately upon discovery.
- Ensuring that youth who are removed from suicide precautions receive a follow-up assessment by a clinician within twelve (12) hours of removal.
- Working collaboratively with the assigned program specialist, who will act as a liaison for programmatic services.

<u>Psychiatric services identified will include:</u>

- Evaluations to determine the need for psychotropic medications.
- Medication management to include the monitoring of youth on psychotropic medications and adjustments to medication regimens as appropriate;
- Coordination of behavioral health services with clinician, facility staff, and medical staff;

- Coordination with a Mental Health Clinician regarding follow-up services for youth who no longer need psychotropic medications.

We also contract with GEO Reentry Services to offer cognitive behavioral and evidence-based programs that target behavioral and trauma-based needs. As previously mentioned, the Merced County Probation Department does not provide specialized intervention services such as sex offender treatment and/or females who have been committed to a SYTF. In the event the Juvenile Court orders specialized treatment(s), Merced County is participating in a state-wide consortium that will function as a conduit in seeking regional Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and/or contracts with another County that could provide services with like offenders.

Describe how the County plans to apply grant funds to address support programs or services that promote healthy adolescent development for the target population. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(2) and (d)(8)):

There are numerous programs and services provided to the target population that promote healthy adolescent development to include:

- Behavioral Health Evaluations: The behavioral health clinical team conducts an initial evaluation and provides ongoing services to youth who need therapeutic services.
- Individual, Group, and Family Therapy: The target population participates in Cognitive Behavior Group Therapy, focusing on many areas of reasoning and decision-making. Youth and families identified as needing family therapy receive additional services from our clinical team, who work varied hours to meet familial needs. Because of the facility's location (rural area), a room is designated for family therapy via Zoom if needed.
- Psychotropic Medication Evaluations: Youth who are identified as needing medication are seen by the psychiatrist for a medication evaluation. If medication is necessary, a plan is developed, and the individual's medication compliance and treatment progress will be continuously evaluated.
- Anger Management Counseling: Impulse control is typically an issue for most individuals in the criminal justice system. All youth who are found to need anger management counseling receive services either individually or in a group setting, depending on their need.
- Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Education Programming: Not all individuals who come into the juvenile facility need treatment for drugs and alcohol; however, we recognize it is essential to educate all youth on the dangers of abusing substances; therefore, any youth who is found not to need treatment, will receive educational programming.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy Interventions/Services: The target population receives various Cognitive Behavior Therapies via evidence-based curricula. Materials and training for CBT are quite costly, and we need to ensure variety due to the amount of time spent on the facility

Describe how the County plans to apply grant funds to address family engagement in programs for the target population. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(2) and (d)(8)):

Family engagement is critical for youth's overall success not only when they are in custody but also when they are out of custody. "Family" can include biological family members and extended and/or

fictive kin (including godparents and foster siblings). Equally important are other identified life-long connections, such as coaches, mentors, and teachers. Research has shown that individuals who have diverse support systems have better outcomes. Involving families and other supportive individuals in crucial decision-making activities facilitates identifying the services and resources an individual might need to succeed upon release.

The Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) and Child and Family Team (CFT) are decision-making bodies for youth and their families. Consistent with Systems of Care principles in the Child and Family Team Meetings, the MDT meetings are also family-driven, inclusive, family-centered, strength-based, and solution-focused.

Definitions-

- Family Driven: Reliance on the Family's expertise for selecting the team and resources. Planning and decision-making will include the entire family.
- Inclusive: What can be done to include the Multidisciplinary and/or Child Family teams, and what are their ideas?
- Family-Centered: Looking at each family as a whole while being culturally sensitive and competent; determining the family's hierarchy of needs; what stressors they have and what resources they have utilized in the past; non-blaming; empowering; providing hope and motivation.
- Strength-based: Build on and complement the family's strengths, their history of solving problems, and the natural resources available, viewing the family as capable and unique.
- Solution-Focused: Looking at what has worked in the past rather than on what hasn't worked; staying focused on solutions and exceptions to the problem rather than on the problem itself; viewing incremental change and goals as stairs rather than a wall.

An MDT Meeting occurs within the first 30 days of the youth's entry to the SYTF. The Individual Rehabilitation Plan includes objectives and time frames for the resolution of targeted needs for intervention. Periodic evaluations of progress toward meeting individual rehabilitation goals occur at least every 30 days or as needed. If there is a need to modify the Individual Rehabilitation Plan, an MDT Meeting can be scheduled to involve the entire team.

The Individual Rehabilitation Plan includes:

- Custody status
- Family information
- Children's information (if applicable)
- Behavior in custody
- Medical objectives
- Mental health objectives

- Educational objectives
- Substance use objectives
- Anger management objectives
- Gang/peer relationship objectives
- Social skill objectives
- Family conflict objectives
- Overall goals
- Assigned responsibilities for the youth, their parent/guardian, and facility staff
- Transitional Plan
- Recommendation to base line term or less restrictive program

Within 30 days prior to the youth's release from custody, a CFT Meeting is scheduled to discuss transitional planning. Development of the transitional plan includes input from the youth's family and/or supportive adults, such as applicable school staff, the assigned supervision Deputy Probation Officer, and Wellpath staff, when applicable. The Deputy Probation Officer assigned to the facility moderates the CFT-M/transitional planning meeting.

The transitional plan includes the following:

- Identification of existing community-based resources
- Medical and behavioral health referrals with linkage obtaining psychotropic medication (if applicable)
- Educational needs (if applicable)
- Linkage to employment resources (if applicable)
- Re-entry terms and conditions of supervision

Our Parent Cafés offer a safe, welcoming space for guided conversations that promote the 'Five Protective Factors.' It is more than just a meeting; it is a community-driven effort to share wisdom, build resilience, and create a brighter future for our youth and their families. We believe that a youth's success is deeply connected to a strong family support system. To make our Parent Cafés more accessible to everyone in Merced County, we have expanded our services to two areas: Breaking Barriers (Los Banos) and Pathways (Merced). Also, to address gaps in transportation services, we have included transportation at both centers. We focus on providing the following information to those who attend:

- The Protective Factors
- How to strengthen their relationship with their child
- Resources in the community

- Build a stronger community

Describe how the County plans to apply grant funds to address reentry, including planning and linkages to support employment, housing, and continuing education for the target population. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(2) and (d)(8)):

The Merced County Probation Department has adopted a Community Integration Model to reintegrate justice system-involved youth to their families and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to live successful, crime-free lives. Our Community Integration Model or "Bridge to Success" approach ensures staff work collaboratively with the youth and their families, as well as other significant supports, to develop Individual Rehabilitation Plans that consider all their needs and

are designed to assist with community reintegration. Our model consists of four main phases.

Phase I: Recommendation and Commitment

Any youth being considered for the SYTF are assessed to determine their risk level to ensure commitment to the SYTF is utilized as a last resort due to less restrictive alternative dispositions being unsuitable. Proposed section 875(a)(3) will specify new findings that the court must make when considering whether a commitment to the SYTF is the most appropriate disposition for youth.

If the court orders the youth committed to a secure youth treatment facility, the court must select a baseline term within the range set for the category that has been assigned to the Welfare and

Institutions Code section 707(b) commitment offense as provided in the secure youth treatment facility offense-based classification matrix.

Phase II: Intake Process

To prepare the target population for successful reintegration, planning for reintegration must begin from day one. All youth committed to our SYTF receive a variety of comprehensive assessments to identify risk factors, needs, and strengths to develop the Individual Rehabilitation Plan. The Residential Positive Achievement Change Tool (RPACT) identifies each youth's risk level and needs. The RPACT identifies not only the areas (domains) in which the youth are most at risk but also those with strengths (protective factors) that can be built upon to help turn their life around. Risk and protective factors in this instrument include both static and dynamic characteristics. The benefit of measuring both factors and characteristics is that a juvenile justice professional can better match the youth's current needs with the appropriate programs and services. This comprehensive assessment instrument measures the youth's risk and protective factors in the following 12 domains: Criminal History, School, Use of Free Time, Employment, Relationships, Family, Living Arrangements, Alcohol and Drugs, Mental Health, Attitudes/Behaviors, Aggression, and Skills. Assessment of criminogenic risk factors and treatment directed toward changing dynamic characteristics provides the best chance of reducing recidivism.

The RPACT may be used by non-clinical staff in juvenile intake, diversion, probation, detention, group home placement, and aftercare settings. The instrument is administered in a client interview setting and requires approximately 45 minutes.

Other facility assessments, such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) evaluations, aptitude tests, and behavioral health evaluations, will also help prepare the youth's treatment plan and rehabilitation program.

Phase III: Service and Individual Rehabilitation Plan

The scores from the RPACT are utilized to determine the dynamic factors that influence the youth's anti-social behavior, and it will provide the facts (evidence) needed to develop an Individual Rehabilitation Plan to address these prioritized criminogenic needs effectively. In a very focused way, the IRP helps probation staff and judges define the youth's unique behavioral problems and create goals and actions to resolve those problems.

This phase consists of periodic meetings and Court hearings to review the youth's rehabilitation progress and mitigate potential setbacks. This phase includes the following:

- Monthly meetings with the youth's Deputy Probation Officer to monitor their progress toward treatment goals and intervention services and to routinely conduct criminogenic risk/needs assessments.
- Monthly/Quarterly meetings with the youth's multidisciplinary treatment team to discuss treatment goals and potential barriers to the reintegration process.
- Bi-annual progress review hearings involving the Juvenile Court Judge, Superintendent, Probation Program Specialist, Program Manager, youth's family, and other treatment providers

determined by the Probation Department to evaluate progress toward their Individual Rehabilitation Plan. This allows the Judge to make an informed decision as to whether the baseline term of confinement needs to be modified.
- Finally, as previously mentioned, a transitional plan is developed by the Child and Family Team for reintegration back into the community.

Phase IV: Aftercare planning

A Deputy Probation Officer monitors youth who transition back to the community. The Deputy Probation Officer will have attended the Child and Family Team – Meeting and will be aware of the goals set for reintegration. In addition, the Deputy Probation Officer will also ensure the youth abides by the terms and conditions of community supervision. The Geo Reentry Services aftercare coordinator will meet weekly with the youth to ensure they meet their goals and receive ongoing support and guidance.

Aftercare planning/reentry services will occur in a newly developed Probation Department program called Pathways to Success. Pathways to Success program is modeled after successful reentry programs across the state and nation. The Pathways to Success program uses a multiagency collaborative approach to work with youth and their families needing different levels of care, services, and support. This center will offer wrap-around reentry support to youth transitioning from commitment programs.

Some program goals include assisting probation youth in reentering and remaining in the community (helping youth access and stay in their programs) and helping strengthen youth and their families. The Continuity of Care and other intervention services will be coordinated by the Probation Program Specialist, who will ensure smooth continuity of services is not interrupted. The Probation Department staff will ensure that warm handoffs and transportation occur—not just passive referrals to services.

The following aftercare components will necessitate improved outcomes for youth as they reintegrate:

- Continuity of services and programs such as mentoring, cognitive behavioral treatment (designed to address delinquent conduct), case management (linkages to support employment, housing, and continuing education), strengthening families, trauma and culturally responsive services, and system navigation, as necessary.
- Continuity of social connections and community engagement will be encouraged to develop positive relationships and create a sense of community. This component will be fulfilled with mentorship programs, community events, and family involvement and education through Parent Cafés.
- Monitoring the youth's progress toward individual rehabilitation plan goals while updating criminogenic risk/needs assessments (RPACT) at least every six months (or when there is a life-changing event) to identify risk factors related to re-offending as well as identifying strengths and/or protective factors that might mitigate those risk factors.
- Hold Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Meetings to discuss the youth's progress toward their Individual Rehabilitation Plan to mitigate potential barriers to completing the plan. Participants

will need to participate in the graduated phases of the program, which will consist of evidence-based programs and other supportive services offered in the center.

Probation Assistants, Probation Program Specialists, and community partners teach evidence-based programming. Youths' terms of probation may be terminated once they have successfully completed the aftercare planning portion of the programming.

Describe how the County plans to apply grant funds to address evidence-based, promising, trauma- informed and culturally responsive programs or services for the target population. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(2) and (d)(8)):

As previously mentioned, the Merced County Probation Department has an entire clinical team that addresses the social and emotional needs of the youth in our care. In addition, we employ peer support specialists who have previously been impacted in some way by the "system." All these providers and our probation officers provide services and interventions that are evidence-based, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive. Relevant services and interventions will include but will not be limited to:

1. Relationships – We work with youth to cultivate positive and healthy relationships. Family Therapy is encouraged, and we offer safe spaces for healing damaged relationships through therapy. Youth can engage in constructive and healthy events and activities to strengthen relationships between their families or other identified life-long connections and the community. Other caring adults (Probation staff, families, and service providers) also play an essential role in guiding youths' healing from trauma and equipping them with the protective factors to help them succeed.

2. Wellness (Self-regulation skills and social-emotional learning) - Cognitive-behavioral treatment strategies are implemented to discourage anti-social behavior, reinforce positive behavior, and enhance intrinsic motivation to change. Interventions are developmentally sensitive and based on cognitive-behavioral and trauma-informed concepts and strategies. Our services help the target population manage adversity and heal from the effects of trauma to be able to thrive. Some services include individual and group therapy.

3. Behavioral health and medical support: All youth are evaluated to determine the need for immediate mental health services. The clinical team screens youth for acute issues that need further intervention. All youth receive a complete physical exam within seven days of their arrival at our facility. Medical history data is reviewed during the physical examination, and follow-up treatment is established as necessary. Lab testing is conducted to check for contagious diseases, including HIV (with consent), pregnancy, and any other conditions necessitating chronic care (i.e., diabetes, asthma, etc.). All dental needs are addressed, including routine cleanings.

4. Education and Vocational Training: The most significant barrier(s) to overall success is typically a lack of education and/or vocational training to enter the competitive workforce. We allow the target population to attend post-secondary education and access quality Career

Technical Education programs to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to enter the local workforce.

Employment Assistance: The Job Development Training Technician (JDTT) collaborates with local employers and public entities to create career pathways for the target population. The JDTT is responsible for initiating and developing professional relationships with prospective employers to promote the adult education program and increase student employment opportunities. The JDTT solicits and accepts job offers and sets up recruitment profiles.

Describe whether and how the County plans to apply grant funds to include services or programs for the target population that are provided by non-governmental or community-based providers. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(2) and (d)(8)):

Through our partnership with Geo Reentry Services, and local providers, we offer additional youth programming and services that are evidence-based, individualized, culturally competent, and trauma-informed to address the unique needs of our youth.

GEO Reentry Services delivers evidence-based treatment and supervision programs for individuals on probation or parole and in residential, in-custody, and non-residential reentry centers. Cognitive-behavioral treatment is at the core of GEO Reentry Services' treatment and training, intended to change criminal attitudes, enhance social skills, and encourage interpersonal problem-solving. Combining research-based treatment and counseling services, GEO Reentry Services assists community correctional agencies with important community safety efforts. GEO Reentry Services provides in-custody and out-of-custody programs and services to our youth. GEO Reentry Services delivers the following programming and services:

• Individual Cognitive Behavior Intervention (ICBT)

• Youth Individual Success Plan (YISP)

• Juvenile Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT)®

• Forward Thinking Journal Series (The Change Companies®)

• Cognitive Behavioral Interventions - Substance Use Youth - (CBI-SUY)

• Trauma-Informed Program

• Victim Impact

• Family Reunification

• Nurturing Parenting

• Peer Mentoring

- Aftercare

In response to ongoing recommendations from our local evaluator, the Merced County Probation Department is prioritizing holistic well-being and community-integrated enrichment. By partnering with local experts, we aim to bridge the gap between our facility and the community, raising awareness of our youth's high needs while providing them with innovative rehabilitative resources. We are strategically investing our local funds into the following evidence-based, trauma-informed programs:

- **The ARTREE Arts Enrichment Program:** A multidisciplinary initiative at the Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex (IGJJC) focusing on Music, Dance, Digital Music Production, and Theatre. This program provides a structured outlet for self-expression and technical skill-building, culminating in a final performance for families and staff to celebrate the youth's growth.

- **Therapy Dog Interventions:** These sessions are designed to cultivate empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. By caring for and training animals, youth develop vital coping skills to manage anxiety and depression while building a sense of social responsibility and positive morale.

- **Holistic Mindfulness via Innovative Wellness:** Utilizing sound bath sessions and guided holistic practices, this program supports mental and physical well-being. By incorporating trauma-informed movement and reflection, youth learn to foster a sense of internal calm and personal empowerment.

- **The Theater Work Project** is a professional training program in acting, playwriting, and production led by theater artist and educator, Dawn Trook. This program incorporates elements of the Actors Gang Prison Project and Youth Project whose mission is "to establish a supportive community, offer participants tools for recognizing and managing their emotions, and create systemic change by centering the voices of those who have been system-impacted." It also uses practices and tools from Marin Shakespeare fest's Social Justice/Prison Programs and Trook's training and experience with performance and community-engaged theater. Using theater exercises and games that teach ensemble thinking, this program will give participants the opportunity to support each other in service of creating meaningful and uplifting theater experiences and performances. Besides learning creative collaboration, individuals will have the opportunity to harness their emotions, life experiences, and imagination to grow as a person while making impactful theater, whether during an informal exercise in the classroom or on stage with an audience. Theater has an unyielding capacity to create safe spaces where people can be heard and valued, two very core needs.

PART 5: FACILITY PLAN (WELF & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(4))

Provide a detailed facility plan indicating which facilities the county will use to house or confine the target population at varying levels of offense severity and treatment need. Include the following (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(4)):

- **Any less restrictive programs the county uses, and whether those programs are in facilities regulated by Subchapter 5 (commencing with Section 1300) of Chapter 1 of Division 1 of Title 15 of the California Code of Regulations**
- **Any facility improvements made to support long-term commitments**

- **How the county ensures youth safety and protection, including for youth of different ages, genders, special needs, and other relevant characteristics**

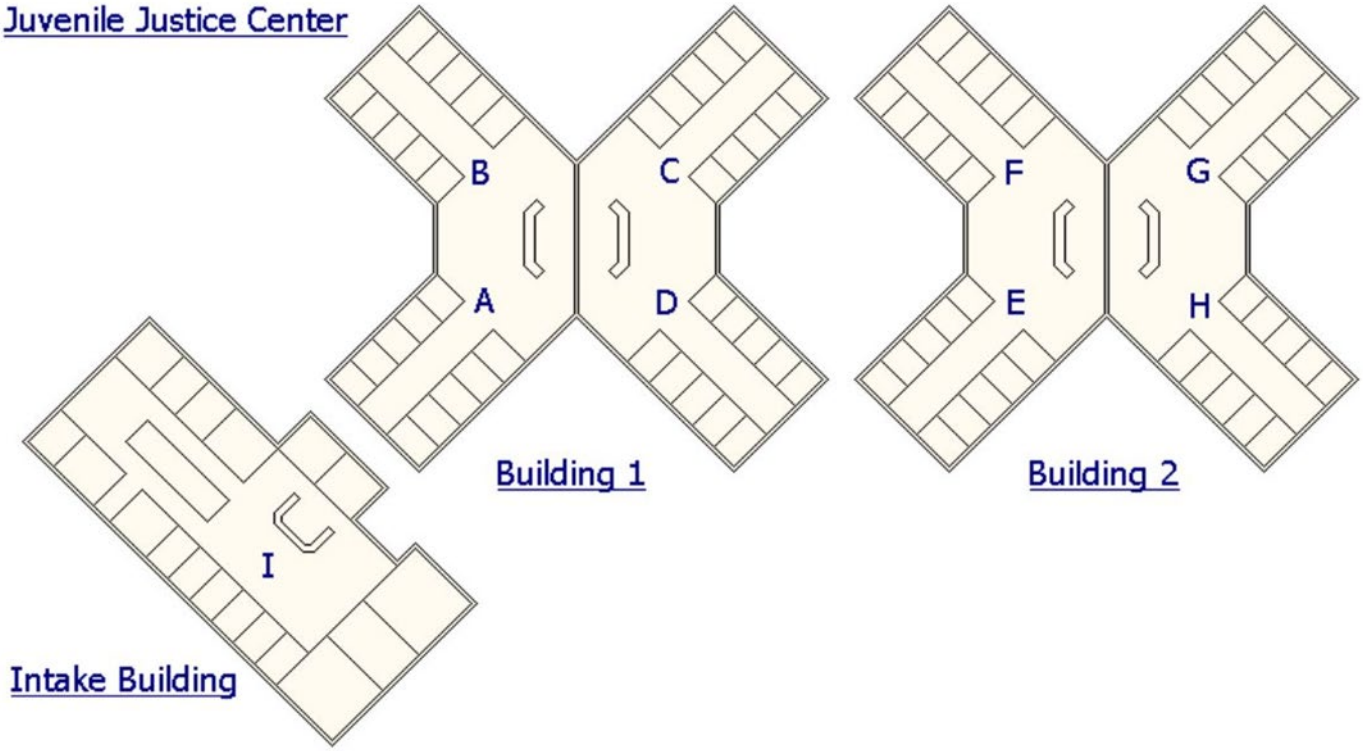
The Merced County Iris Garrett Juvenile Justice Correctional Complex has two (2) separate buildings for housing our target populations. They will be identified as building one (1) and building two (2). Each building has two separate housing units consisting of two wings in each housing unit. Each wing can house up to 15 youths; each unit could house up to 30 youths. Although the facility design allows us to house up to 120 youths, the probation department is budgeted to house a maximum of 90 youths. As the need arises, we utilize our housing units to serve the target population. Utilization of housing consists of separation based on age/criminal sophistication while also keeping in mind the need for those youth who may have special needs or behavioral issues. It should be noted that due to ongoing construction in E and F wings (developing dormitory style rooms), youth are currently housed in G and H wings.

Building 1

- Pre-Adjudicated housing and/or housing for post-adjudicated youth transferred to adult court.
    - A-wing: General Population Unit Ages 14-18
    - B-wing: Administrative Separation, Self-Separation, Separation Program Unit (Reserved for youth who are having programmatic issues and/or have been assigned for separation by Behavioral Health or the Medical Provider)
    - C-wing: Maximum Security Unit Ages 14-17
    - D-wing: Maximum Security Unit Ages 18-25

Building 2

- Post-Adjudicated housing only
    - E-wing: SYTF 14-17
    - F-wing: SYTF 18-25
    - G-wing: Bear Creek Academy
    - H-wing: Administrative Separation, Self-Separation, Separation Program Unit (Reserved for youth who are having programmatic issues and/or have been assigned for separation by Behavioral Health or the Medical Provider)
        - ❖ Behavioral Health Assessments will help determine placement in this unit. Youth will be assigned to the appropriate level of care regardless of age.
        - ❖ The Separation Program Unit will provide a comprehensive and therapeutic program to treat youth with behavioral health needs.



Our vision for a fully established facility remains a comprehensive plan that includes a robust array of educational, vocational, and employment services for youth to build their portfolios while housed in our secure setting. Upon completing their commitment period and being released, youth transition immediately into our "Pathways to Success" Reentry Center. This center is now in its second year of operation. These aftercare services provide a full-functioning support system for both youth and their families to ensure a stable foundation during community reintegration. For those requiring housing assistance after release, a cornerstone of our strategy remains our partnership with the Merced Rescue Mission, which offers family-like settings focused on healing and job assistance. Furthermore, we are currently developing an "in-progress" less restrictive service: a "step-down" tiny home model. This innovative program will allow youth to transition into an independent living situation in their own tiny homes while receiving intensive self-sufficiency support from the Pathways to Success team. Strategically located within walking distance of the Deputy Probation Officer's building, this model will ensure direct community access and aftercare housing assistance while maintaining the necessary oversight and professional guidance.

For now, The Bear Creek Academy (BCA) program serves as a step-down program for secure track youth. The BCA is a less restrictive program focusing on transition services that enhance youths' contact with community-based programs, services, and support. The BCA program is an academy setting offering evidenced-based program elements that teach youth new patterns for dealing with stimulus, which previously resulted in anti-social and delinquent behavior. The BCA program has rehabilitative-driven programming with a concentrated focus on the individual youth's identified treatment needs and education/vocational training with family support to increase overall success with community reintegration, thus reducing recidivism.

The Merced County Probation Department is committed to providing a facility design that encourages rehabilitation. We recognize that re-designing a supportive space as "homelike" as possible will evolve in phases since our current design does not have these design principles, and funds have

been limited. Building a new building (college-like campus) will take some years; therefore, the following phases will be used for immediate and long-term facility planning.

Immediate Unit Features

The Merced County Probation Department continues to make simple improvements to building two (2), including but not limited to painting and redesigning E and F units and adding new artwork, revamping the honor room (earned privilege room), installing flexible furnishings, adding a computer room (community area), and provided a new (secured) tablet program that allows youth to have better access to communication with loved ones, education, and age-appropriate entertainment content. The computer room will offer a better educational resource and career training space, where youth can access the College Transition Advisor and Job Development Training Technician for assistance and advice. The youth will be able to walk into the computer room, similar to a “collegelike environment”, to access soft skills training, career technical education training, college, and tutoring.

The honor room is a homelike place where youth can practice autonomy and independence. This space is furnished with cooking equipment, refrigerators, television, couches, bean bags, ping-pong table and a foosball table. Upon receiving their Food Handler’s Certificate, youth can budget and cook homemade meals. Eligible youth can participate in the honor room weekly for two (2) hours and spend their leisure time playing games, watching movies, and learning basic life skills, such as cooking and cleaning.

A therapeutic counseling room has been revamped to serve as a safe space where youth can access mental health clinicians and will serve as a private, de-escalation space. Fidget toys, stress balls, aromatherapy, and writing supplies are available for youth to access while privately meeting with clinical staff.

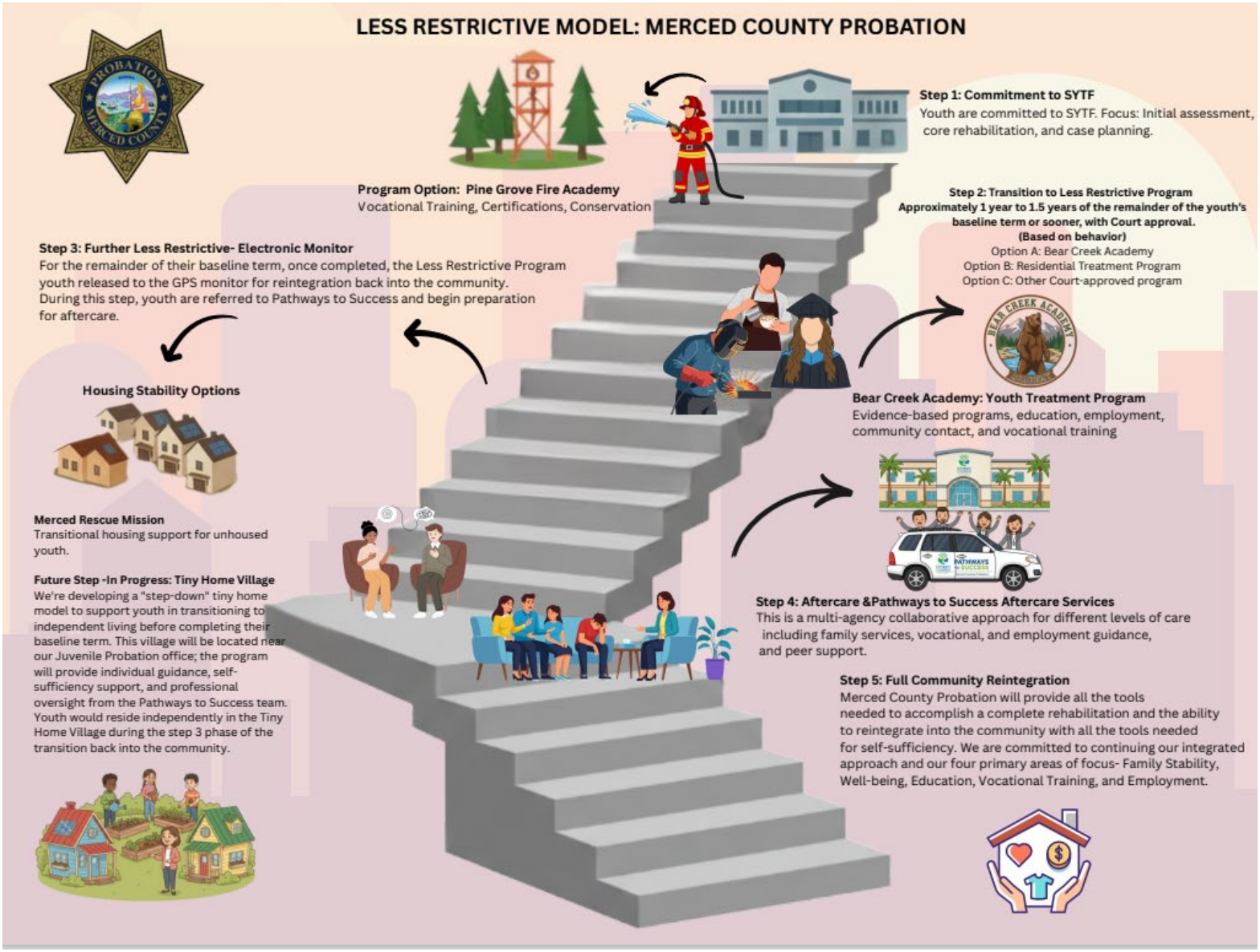
The E Wing is currently undergoing a redesign, transitioning from a traditional layout to a modern, “dorm-like” residential design. This reimagined space allows youth to live as roommates, fostering peer accountability and social growth within a hands-on rehabilitative environment. By providing direct access to a communal kitchen and laundry facilities, the E Wing empowers youth to take ownership of their daily routines, cultivating the essential self-sufficiency skills and personal responsibility required for a successful transition to independent living.

The Merced County Probation Department is committed to creating spaces that foster rehabilitation and encourage positive interactions between youth and staff. Looking at long-term planning, we envision a vocational center that supports learning and training programs. This center would offer several certification training programs through our partnerships with our local education department and community college. As secure youth can transition into a step-down or reentry program, they will have the opportunity to access additional programming in the community to assist in the continuum of care process at Pathways to Success.

Designing a supportive and secure campus requires great forethought, resources, and careful planning. Unfortunately, many counties, including Merced County, have not had the funding to create state-of-the-art buildings that exist in larger counties and places such as the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). Creating this type of facility design will require additional funding that SB 823 is providing to counties. Most SB 823 funds have been utilized to develop and expand evidence-based programs and services that help youth acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to live successful,

crime-free lives. Nevertheless, Merced County Probation recognizes that effective planning and service delivery must bridge different stakeholders, agencies, services, and supports.

Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(8)):



Since the previous annual plan submission, Merced County Probation has successfully moved to the delivery service phase of the Less Restrictive Model, moving from a theoretical framework to active implementation. This model is designed as a "step-down" toward community reintegration, prioritizing vocational training, behavioral health, family stabilization, employment and vocational training.

Current Implementation and Youth Progress

Of the [redacted] currently committed to the secure track (SYTF), the department has successfully utilized the specialized pathways illustrated in our model:

- Pine Grove Fire Academy: One youth has been placed in this vocational program. This aligns with the "Program Option" highlighted in our model, providing the youth with certifications and conservation training to build marketable skills for future employment.
- Youth Treatment Program (Bear Creek Academy): A second youth has successfully transitioned from SYTF to the Bear Creek Academy Youth Treatment Program This "Less Restrictive" placement was utilized to complete the youth's baseline term, serving as a critical bridge between secure detention and the community and allowing the youth to have access to community programs such as the Rise to Higher Grounds CTE program.

Future Developments

As illustrated in our current model, the county continues to develop the Tiny Home Village (Housing Stability Options). This "step-down" tiny home model will further enhance Step 3 of our process, providing unhoused or high-needs youth with independent living support and professional oversight from the Pathways to Success team before they reach full community reintegration.

PART 6: RETAINING THE TARGET POPULATION IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM (WELF & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(5))

Describe how the plan will incentivize or facilitate the retention of the target population within the jurisdiction and rehabilitative foundation of the juvenile justice system, in lieu of transfer to the adult criminal justice system. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(8)):

The Merced County Probation Department continues to work within the parameters of the legal system to ensure youth entering the Juvenile Justice System are given opportunities to succeed at the lowest level of intervention possible. Partners within the Juvenile Justice System include the Merced County Juvenile Court, the Merced County District Attorney, and the Merced County Public Defender. These partners work closely to ensure fair, consistent, equal, and individual treatment for each youth.

Each case is assessed and evaluated before Court recommendations are made to ensure the best practices and services are directed to each youth. The Merced County Probation utilizes the PACT risk/needs assessment tool to assess the level of risk of reoffending, identify criminogenic needs, and guide services. This allows incorporating goals related to youths' court orders into their program to ensure youth are on track to meet achievable goals of being law-abiding and self-sufficient community members. Working within the existing laws, only offenses eligible for transfer to the adult system would be considered. When considering Court recommendations on those cases, the underlying principle applied to the Court process will be that appropriate youth cases should remain in the Juvenile Justice System whenever possible.

The Merced County Probation Department will continue to operate rehabilitative programs and refer youth to community-based services when appropriate to reduce youth recidivism and mitigate the need to transfer cases to the Adult Criminal Justice System. Only when the Juvenile Court makes findings that services within the Juvenile Justice System are not appropriate to rehabilitate a youth

will a case be transferred to the Adult Criminal Justice System. The goal is that this program will be adequate in security and service provision to be a robust alternative and thereby limit the need for cases to be transferred to the Adult Criminal Justice System in all but the most serious of cases.

PART 7: REGIONAL EFFORT (WELF & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(6))

Describe any regional agreements or arrangements supported by the County's block grant allocation. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(8)):

As previously stated, Merced County will serve youth locally unless substantial case factors indicate the youth would be better served in another way. Youth committed to this program are not only at risk of further exposure to the Criminal Justice System, but they are at much higher risk of becoming disenfranchised with the community to which they will ultimately return. Family structure, family visits, positive peer and mentor involvement, and community service are keys to successful reintegration into the local community. Local programming, vocational training, higher education, and community ties are valuable to a youth's chances for success when released from the program. Merced County is committed to prioritizing both the family bond and commitment to their community for these youth, and local programming provides the best opportunity.

Regionally Contracted Specialized Services for Youth

- **Sex Offender Services:** In the event the Juvenile Court orders a youth to receive sex offender treatment services, Merced County is participating in a state-wide consortium that will function as a conduit in seeking regional Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and/or contracts with another County who could provide group-based services with like offenders. With the low numbers of sex offenders from Merced County, it is possible for it to be in the best interest of the youth to get services from another County capable of serving more youth with similar needs, allowing for the group counseling dynamics needed in sex offender treatment.

- **Programs and Services for Females:** As previously reported, female youth have historically been committed to current DJJ programs at a very low rate. Therefore, female youth programming may be better suited where additional like-gender youth can program together to avoid isolation or stigmatization. In the event the Juvenile Court orders a female youth to a Secure Track Program, Merced County is participating in a state-wide consortium that will act as a conduit in seeking regional Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and/or contracts with another County that could provide group-based services with like offenders. In either case, an individualized rehabilitative plan will be developed specifically for the youth that is suitable to both meet the youth's needs and is appropriate for longer-term care. Ensuring all youth have optimal opportunities to be placed in a program that best suits their needs is prudent.

PART 8: DATA (WELF & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(7))

Describe how data will be collected on youth served by the block grant. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(8)):

The Merced County Probation Department utilizes a web-based SaaS (software as a service) solution that enables the department to coordinate, communicate, record, and track each step of a youth's supervision process. Built in features allow for streamlined case management, while multiple layers of security provide system protection at a centralized data center, application, and user levels that is Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) compliant and meets Amazon's AWS GovCloud requirements.
The system allows for full case monitoring and reporting capabilities for both adult and juvenile clients. Additionally, the system was developed with institution management in mind. The system is scalable and flexible, allowing seamless tracking, recording, moving, and reporting. Moreover, the system allows for:

• Integrated forms generation
• Document management
• Reduced missed events by sending automatic appointment reminders
• Integration with third-party assessment providers
• Reports generation (Reports can be shared with agencies within the County)

Different measurement tools and data sources will be utilized to measure desired outcomes.
Data will be maintained in our case management system to retrieve client characteristics reports, attendance records of counseling sessions and rehabilitative programs, and data from case management records.

The Merced County Probation Department routinely reports information in the JCPSS system annually through the CPOC annual report and collects monthly statistical reports from Probation Officers. This information is used to direct resources and help guide decision-making for the Department's Management Team.

The Merced County Probation Department has contracted with an independent data consultant to develop and evaluate different measurement tools to determine whether we achieved a change and produced the desired outcomes. In most evaluation designs, a mixed-method approach applies quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data includes available descriptive data of participant and non-participant demographics, risk indicators, calculations of program output and participant exposure, and tabulations of participant and non-participant legal outcomes. Qualitative data includes focus groups and interviews exploring provider and participant experiences and participant pro-social attitudes. Three preliminary areas of focus are:

1) Assessment of data integrity
- Systematic data on participants and programming. This is necessary to ensure the accuracy and reliability of data for assessing program fidelity and program outcomes.

2) Assessment of program fidelity
- Identifying program objectives implemented as intended and focus group data on participant experiences.

3) Measurement of program outcomes

- Examining the primary long-term outcomes of program impact on recidivism and pro-social attitudes. Recidivism and the increase of pro-social attitudes will be measured using individual-level data.
  - Client Satisfaction Survey - we will utilize this survey to help us understand and report clients' satisfaction levels with our services, identify clients' needs, and discover what clients have learned.

Describe outcome measures that will be utilized to measure or determine the results of programs and interventions supported by block grant funds. Describe any progress made on this element since the previous annual plan submission (Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(8)):

The residents of Merced County expect safe communities, and the Merced County Probation Department, along with partnering agencies, are committed to ensuring their safety. The Merced County Probation Department has the fundamental obligation to contribute to public safety by actively encouraging and assisting youth to become law-abiding citizens while exercising reasonable, safe, secure, and humane control in its institutions and effective supervision and interventions in the community.

The Merced County Probation Department is strongly committed to program monitoring and quality improvement. Programs and services are monitored to determine if they are productive and should continue to be a part of the facility's range of services. In addition, various planning and activities are utilized to measure whether lives are being changed. Individual, family, and community indicators are examined to determine whether our services and programs are changing lives and conditions.

Outcomes: Working with families, communities, schools, and employers, we hope to:

- Increase youth pro-social skills and new ways of thinking
- Re-engage youth with families and the community
- Reduce recidivism

Measurement Tools: Different measurement tools will be used to measure desired outcomes. These measurement tools include:

  - Client Characteristic Report (Tyler Supervision – Case Management System)
  - Client Satisfaction Survey
  - Follow-Up Survey

The Merced County Probation Department is committed to collecting and learning from research-informed best practices to improve public safety results. Additionally, we are committed to providing high-quality services and programs that will be culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and strength-based.

Through the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council's comprehensive multi-agency plan, identified resources and strategies will provide an effective continuum of responses for delinquency prevention and intervention and the supervision, treatment, and incarceration of youth. Outcomes will be measured objectively, standardized, conveyed to the public, and subsequently utilized to guide future decision-making. Outcomes will include program participation, program completion, recidivism reduction, and client satisfaction. Focusing on "what works," results can be achieved while ensuring value for the resources dedicated to these grants.

PART 9: OTHER UPDATES: DESCRIBE ANY PROGRESS ON ELEMENTS SINCE THE PREVIOUS ANNUAL PLAN SUBMISSION: (WELF. & INST. CODE § 1995 (D)(8))

Provide a description of progress made regarding any plan elements and any objectives and outcomes in the prior year's plan, to the extent that they have not already been described above.

From July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025, we have accomplished and enhanced the following areas of services:

A primary achievement in the prior year was the national recognition of the Rise to Higher Grounds program, which was honored as the recipient of the 2025 Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) Business Education Partnership Award. This prestigious award, accepted by Chief Henn and Deputy Chief Rodriguez, celebrates the dedicated work of our staff and our vital partnership with the Merced County Office of Education. By providing direct employment and teaching essential self-sufficiency skills to youth at Bear Creek Academy, Rise to Higher Grounds has become a national model for empowering justice-involved youth through meaningful career pathways and community collaboration.

In addition to our vocational successes, we have significantly expanded the academic opportunities available to our residents through a new collaboration with Merced College and the Rising Scholars program. A key accomplishment this year was the successful transition to in-person community college classes held within the facility. This initiative provides our youth with access to a more traditional, normalized school classroom setting, featuring live instruction from college professors. By bringing a collegiate environment directly into the Hall, we are not only supporting the academic growth of our students but also fostering the confidence and skills necessary for them to continue their education upon reentry.

From July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025:

- [redacted] graduated High School.
- Nineteen (19) youth participated in college and received 1,740 tutoring hours from the College.
- [redacted] attended an in-person college class (Intro to Communications).
- Forty (40) youth completed soft skills training and career portfolios.
- Fourteen (14) youth received Food Handler Certificates.

- [redacted] had DMV Appointments to obtain their California ID and/or complete the written test.
- [redacted] participated in the Rise to Higher Grounds Coffee Cart.
- Two Hundred Ninety-One (291) case plans were completed.
- Fifteen (15) IRPs were completed.
- Fifteen (15) MDTs were conducted with youth and their families.
- Twenty-Five (25) CFTs were conducted with youth and their families.
- Nineteen (19) youth participated in Graffiti Abatement Program

PART 10: PRIOR-YEAR EXPENDITURES-SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES/IMPACTS: (WELF. & INST. CODE § 1995(D)(9))

Please use the table provided below to summarize prior-year expenditures in accordance with Welf. & Inst. Code §1995(d)(9), which requires counties to report:

- Total expenditures of block grant funds;
- Whether these expenditures were consistent with the plan described in subdivision (a); and
- How the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment target population described in Section 1990.

Please itemize expenditures by each subject area described in Part 4 of the **2025** JJRBG County Plan Template.

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
Education & Vocational Training MCOE **1995(d)(3)(D)**	$211,394	Yes	This contract supports our rehabilitative model by supporting higher education and professional development for the youth. Through this investment, we have expanded our services to include a dedicated college expert and career advisor who works individually with each youth to strengthen their career paths as they graduate from high school. Furthermore, these funds have enabled us to integrate youth into CTE programs.	These funds improved re-entry readiness by streamlining the transition to post-secondary education and boosting community college enrollment. Last fiscal year, 19 youth attended community college classes, both online and in person. Additionally, our youth earned 14 Food Handler Certificates, expanding their access to the *Rise to Higher Grounds* program and enhancing their competitiveness for entry-level employment upon release.

[1] This table corresponds to Part 4 of the JJRBG County Plan Template and fulfills the reporting requirements of WIC §1995(d)(9) by itemizing expenditures according to the five areas of need or development for realigned youth described in WIC §1995(d)(3)(A)–(E).

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
Probation Program Specialist **1995(d)(3)(B)**	$136, 375	Yes	We have funded a dedicated Program Specialist to oversee the evidence-based programs and quality of the services at the juvenile hall facility. She is responsible for the daily programming schedules, ensuring a balance between education, well-being, and pro-social activities. Her supervisory experience allows her to ensure the fidelity of all programs and program providers as well as the revamping of our Behavioral Management Program.	There have been proven improvements in the target population resulting from changes to the Behavioral Management System, which is overseen by this position. Youth participation in group leader roles has increased, and the number of incident reports has dropped from 45 to an average of 15 per month, driven by simple changes such as the availability of incentive items and pro-social programs.
Peer Support Specialist **1995(d)(3)(B)**	$33, 040	Yes	This position balances mentorship with accountability. By funding this position, we can fill a gap that traditional juvenile institutional officers often cannot. The Peer Support position allows for more programmatic and relatable interactions with youth, creating a leadership role in which this position facilitates real-life lessons by teaching youth self-sufficiency skills such as	Since this position interacts with the youth through life-skills programs and everyday life lessons like the Honor Room (reentry readiness program), they are able to create hands-on modeling experiences for the youth. This has also created a level of communication where we are able to learn more about the needs of our in-custody youth. This position is perceived by the youth as a liaison to express

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
			cooking and managing a household environment. **Looking toward the 2026- 2027 cycle, we have reclassified this role into a Probation Assistant position.	their needs and wants for different programs. The reclassification of this position will add a level of case management, ensuring that the bond created during mentorship is leveraged to keep the youth on track with the IRP.
Staff Service Analyst **1995(d)(3)(A)-(E)**	$101,750	Yes	The expenditure for the Staff Service Analyst has innovated our data reporting on our juvenile institution. By using funds for this position, we have shifted our internal practices from simple record-keeping for our annual plan to a more data-driven reporting style. The Analyst works closely with our outside data evaluator to track program outcomes and ensure that our department remains aligned with the expectations of BSCC and OYCR.	This position has facilitated a systemic shift from passive record-keeping to proactive, data-driven oversight. By transforming raw data into actionable information, the Staff Service Analyst ensures continuous quality improvement within the facility while maintaining transparency with the subcommittee and the community. Furthermore, this role serves as a critical mechanism for accountability, performing 'checks and balances' by synthesizing performance data from all service providers to ensure program fidelity

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
				and alignment with our strategic goals.
Art Instructor **1995(d)(3)(B)**	$4,763	Yes	We have expanded our facility's programming to include specialized art options that connect our youth with local professional talent. This partnership-driven approach ensures that our services are grounded in the local community. The creation of monthly painting workshops offers a high-quality, pro-social activity that significantly improves the well-being of our long-term residents, replacing passive time with active, skill-based engagement and emotional expression.	We have improved youth outcomes by framing this art program as a merit-based incentive, which promotes pro-social engagement and behavioral compliance. The program also fosters a positive relationship with the District Attorney's Office, where the youth's work is regularly displayed. This partnership promotes a narrative of rehabilitation and success, ensuring that our justice partners are actively engaged in the positive milestones achieved by the target population.
Transitional Housing **1995(d)(3)(D)**	$4,194	Yes	This funding has bridged the gap between incarceration and community success by providing reliable transitional housing for our most vulnerable youth. Through a partnership-driven approach, we now offer Enhanced Care Management (ECM) and independent living skills directly within the housing	We have significantly reduced housing-related recidivism by ensuring our youth are never released into homelessness. This investment guarantees rapid access to safe housing and localized support networks, creating a foundation of stability that allows youth to focus on their

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
			environment. This ensures that youth are not only sheltered but are also actively engaged in specialized services that promote stability, community connection, and personal accountability after their release.	rehabilitative goals and community engagement.
GEO Programing **1995(d)(3)(A)-(C)**	$992,292	Yes	This funding ensures all structured activities are Title 15 compliant and evidence based. By utilizing GEO's high-fidelity rehabilitative services, we have moved toward a best-practice model that prioritizes measurable outcomes for youth. This change ensures that our rehabilitative efforts are consistent, professionalized, and aligned with the highest state standards.	This change has improved outcomes by delivering validated cognitive-behavioral curricula. This expenditure has led to a stronger rapport and engagement between the youth and facilitators.
Fresno County Secured Track **1995(d)(3)(A)**	$108,800	Yes	This expenditure ensures that our county remains compliant with court orders, especially regarding sex offender programs that are unavailable in our county. This change also ensures that we can quickly respond to the needs of our target population and build a strong relationship	This program improved outcomes by providing local services to a secure-track youth during the last fiscal year. This program ensured that the youth received a specialized program addressing the root causes of problematic sexual behaviors rather than

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
			with our neighboring Fresno County Probation Department, enabling us to send our youth there for this type of program.	relying on incarceration alone.
Data Evaluation **1995(d)(3)(A)-(E)**	$29,480	Yes	This expenditure for a dedicated Data Evaluator has changed the way in which we do business by ensuring that we follow two important categories: One- that we make changes to programs and services based on data-driven information provided by the data evaluator, and that two- we center our decisions based on youth voices were our target population can provide their own perspective and lived experiences.	This method has changed the way we do business by transforming youth feedback into actionable program enhancements and by creating more interactive data presentations and recommendations from the evaluator, which keep our community informed about changes in our facility and whether our realignment model continues to be effective.
GTL Tablets **1995(d)(3)(C)**	$144,000	Yes	This is an innovated system for our secure track population by providing a regulated platform for youth to maintain contact with their support system.	This service has changed outcomes by strengthening the protective factor of family engagement and by removing barriers to communication. This system has improved emotional stability and has been noted in the evaluation results as a positive tool for communication

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
				between families and the young people in our care.
Consortium	$0	N/A	No funds were used as we did not have a female population that needed a specific program and services for females.	N/A
Pathways to Success **1995(d)(3)(B), (C)**	$81,752	Yes	This expenditure has ensured that Merced County has a continuum of care and has expanded our responsibility to provide a multi-tiered approach to services that have been proven effective. We continue to provide coordinated prevention, targeted interventions, and robust aftercare support.	This program continues to provide a positive bridge between the facility and our community. This center has created a safety net not only for our youth receiving services through SB 823 funds, but also for our local schools, at-risk populations, and parents seeking support to build protective factors for their families.
Incentives (Graduation, Parent Engagement, etc.) **1995(d)(3)(B), (C)**	$29,583	Yes	This expenditure allows our facility to focus on a strength-based approach and positive reinforcement strategy. These funds allow our facility to continue developing daily practices that incentivize positive changes and reward behavioral improvements.	This is effective as it allows the department to increase youth motivation and internalized accountability. Youth look forward to their graduations, weekly behavioral management program snacks, and incentives, which have caused a

Expenditure Subject Area[1]	Total Expenditures ($)	Did you meet the goals described for this expenditure subject area? (Yes/No)	Please describe how protocols, services, partnerships, or practices have changed as a result of this expenditure subject area.	Describe how the expenditures improved outcomes for the realignment of target population.
				significant reduction in behavioral incidents.

Instructions to add more rows:

To add additional rows to the table, place your cursor in the last row and last column, then press Tab. This will automatically insert a new row below. Alternatively, right-click in the table, select Insert, and choose Insert Rows Below.

Merced County Probation Department, SB 823 Program Evaluation

Summary of Findings for 2024-2025 Evaluation Activities

February 2026

Prepared by Community Initiatives for Collective Impact[2]

INTRODUCTION

The Merced County Probation Department evaluates its SB823 programs and services to understand and improve their implementation and outcomes. Community Initiatives for Collective Impact (Ci4Ci) served as an external evaluator for the Probation Department during the 2024-2025 program period. Ci4Ci works with department staff to develop and implement the SB823 evaluation. This participatory approach is used from measurement development to regular review and reflection to ensure the use of evaluation findings. Lessons from the evaluation are used throughout the year. They are reflected in the Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant (JJRBG) plans and reports, as well as in routine local meetings with Probation.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, the evaluation focused on the Quarterly Assessment of Youth Outcomes, a method developed in prior years to evaluate the program with youth in custody. The assessment includes a private, in-person, individual interview with the youth by trained Ci4Ci staff. During this report period, the assessment was adapted and expanded for use with aftercare services. The current report includes findings from multiple quarterly assessments for youth in custody and the first assessment of youth in aftercare.

METHODS

[2] Please contact Stergios Roussos, Ph.D., MPH with questions at sroussos@ci4ci.org, 209-489-9913

The Quarterly Assessment of Youth Outcomes was co-developed by Ci4Ci and Probation staff, drawing on existing, validated methods for assessing programs for youth in custody and aftercare. A copy of the tool and description of its development is available from Ci4Ci upon request. Every 3 months, Ci4Ci interviews youth to understand their experiences, outcomes, satisfaction, and recommendations regarding the program's services and activities. The interview questions are developed around the program's four interrelated primary areas of focus: Behavioral Health (Well-being), Family Stability, Education/Vocational Training, and Employment. The measurement tool includes ratings based on a 5-point scale and open-ended items. Interviews were conducted by trained Ci4Ci staff. Aftercare interviews were conducted by Probation's staff and university interns following training and supervision by Ci4Ci. Each youth was interviewed privately at the residential or nearest aftercare facility, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes.

Qualitative and quantitative methods are used to analyze the interview findings. All interviews are de-identified, transcribed, and entered into SPSS. Quantitative analyses include descriptive and correlational statistics. Thematic analysis is used for qualitative data. Individual quotes are identified to illustrate key findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses. For this summative report, one scale variable was created from the survey items for four components: Health and Wellness (e.g., physical, mental, and spiritual health), Family (e.g., relationships with family), Friends (relationships with non-family caring adults), and Life Skills (e.g., skills important for successful community integration). The scale variables were assessed for construct validity and internal consistency (all Cronbach's alpha values were greater than 0.70). More information about the development of measures and analyses is available from Ci4Ci upon request.

Analyses for youth in custody were conducted across three assessments: Winter 2024 (November), Spring 2025 (March), and Summer 2025 (June). Analyses for youth in aftercare were conducted for one assessment: Summer 2025 (conducted in June).

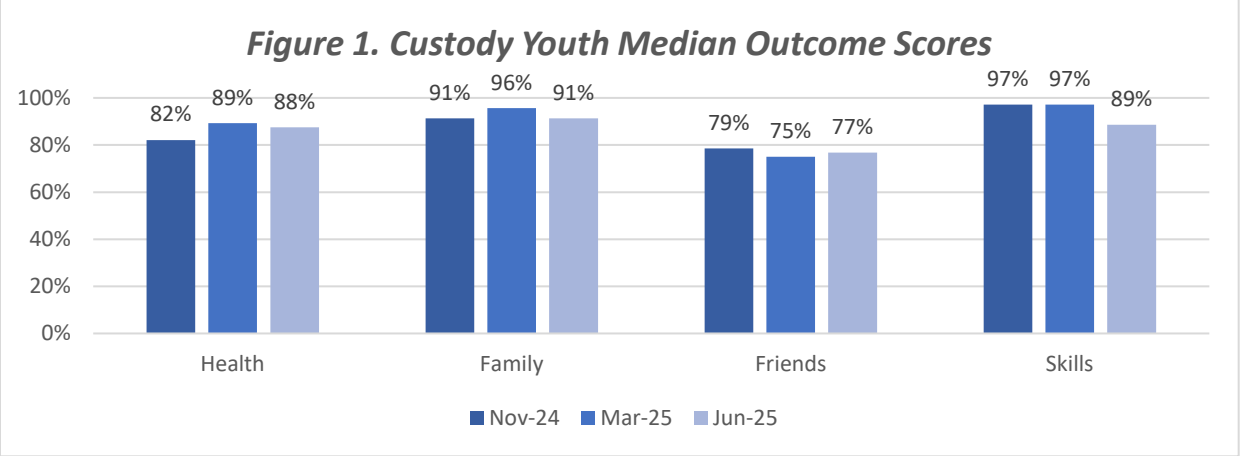
RESULTS

The results for youth in custody and youth in aftercare are reported separately, starting with youth in custody. While the quarterly assessments are similar for both types of services, they should be considered separately and not used to compare changes over time. The assessments engage different youth (e.g., aftercare youth are older) and reflect responses in a very different context (e.g., out of custody, in the community)

Findings for Youth in Custody

The three quarterly assessments included 51 interviews with 38 participants. All interviews were conducted in English. Participants were nearly all male ([redacted] females) and 17 years old on average (range: 14 to 20). Most youth identified as Latino/Hispanic (73%), with the remaining as African American ([redacted]), and White/Caucasian ([redacted]).

Figure 1 shows the median scores (i.e., 50% of participants) for the scale variables across the Health, Family, Friends, and Life Skills assessment areas. Findings were consistent over time, with moderate-to-high scores for Health, Family, and Life skills and lower scores for Friends.



Health and Wellness

Median Assessment Scores:

November 2024, 82% | *March 2025, 89%* | *June 2025, 88%*

During the November 2024 assessments, youth shared what mattered to their health and how best to support it. Food (e.g., variety, quality) was among the most frequently reported factors supporting their health. Many youth criticized the meals at Probation, though they appreciated the snacks. Many youth said physical activity is important to their health. Some youth indicated challenges related to mental health. Drawing, writing, listening to music, and talking to family were all mentioned as ways to support their mental health.

> *"Playing volleyball makes me feel normal. I know I'm a criminal, but playing with others here makes me feel more normal and less awkward." – Participant comment*

In March 2025, food was no longer the most frequently reported factor. This finding illustrates the Probation team's responsiveness to youth input from the evaluation. Changes were made to improve the quality of meals. Youth highly emphasize the importance of maintaining and improving their physical well-being through physical activities and substance abuse rehabilitation. One youth praised the facility for providing outdoor gym equipment. Social stimulation with peers and family was also key to maintaining youths' health. The changes to food and exercise equipment provided may explain the increased outcome scores.

By June 2025, physical exercise remained a key part of the youth's health and wellness. However, unlike previous sessions, most of the youth now found a strong recognition of mental health and the relevant resources. Therapy services were not the only aspect of mental health. Youth also reported that "being checked on" and having time out of the cell helped their mental health. Activities such as drawing, writing, and music were also appreciated.

The most common factors that got in the way of maintaining their health were negative peers, lack of activities, family issues, and being incarcerated. Other factors mentioned by the youth were the emotional impact of going to court.

> *"[What's important for my health] is therapy. Having goals like overcoming my anti-social behavior, bettering my family relationships, and being able to speak to [a therapist]." – Participant comment*

Family Relationships

Median Assessment Scores:
November 2024, 91% | *March 2025, 96%* | *June 2025, 91%*

Family members are often a vital factor affecting youths' health and successful integration into the community. Family members can be a source of positivity and support, as well as conflict and negative influence. Across the three assessment periods, most youth reported feeling positive and joyful at the thought of reunification with their family. These comments complement the high score of family relationships. Some youth reported feeling nervous about reunifying with family members.

> *"I am excited but nervous from being in here for so long. It will be a lot on my shoulders since I am the oldest man in the house. I want to teach my siblings better." – Participant comment*

> *"Trying my best to respond to my grandma when I can, even if she struggles with [the tablet]." – Participant comment*

Youth indicated that constant communication was key to maintaining a strong relationship with their family, but being incarcerated has limited communication. The tablets were indicated as the most helpful support provided by the facility. Although the facility has provided tablets for daily communication, many youth reported grievances with the system. Information requirements created barriers for families who spoke another language and for other members who were too young or lacked the requested documents, such as an ID. Call time was another concern. The most frequent requests among youth were to increase the number and duration of calls and simplify the approval process for calls. Although youth had alternative forms of communication, such as phone calls, letters, and in-person weekly visits, tablets provided the most consistent communication. This reliance on the tablet for communication may have fueled the criticism of limiting tablet use.

> *"The tablets have helped. It does suck that there is a time limit…It would be nice to increase the time– Participant comment*

Friends: Caring Relationships Outside of Family

Median Assessment Scores:
November 2024, 79% | *March 2025, 75%* | *June 2025, 77%*

The term "caring people" refers to people outside one's family who offer positive or caring relationships. The people that youth turned to for support outside their families included peers, fellow inmates, facility staff, program staff, and romantic partners.

The measure of relationships with friends showed the lowest scores throughout the year. Youth were asked how they may handle relationships with people outside of their family who may not be positive or caring towards them. About 67% of participants stated that they did not care to repair such relationships or that it was not worth their time. The remaining youth said they try to talk, be more understanding, and get the other person to be more understanding towards them.

"They [friends] like to judge me, but if I can talk to them, then I can get them to understand me." – Participant comment

Many youth said communication, trust, and loyalty were important aspects of maintaining their caring relationships. More communication and empathy would help them strengthen those caring relationships. Other factors that strengthened their caring relationships were sharing activities and opportunities to socialize. Incarceration, long distances, and inconsistent communication from caring people hindered the formation of strong caring relationships with people outside their families. Trust issues from prior experiences were also a challenge for the youth. These factors may explain why caring relationships with friends consistently have the lowest median scores.

"It's hard to find the balance as people outside are living different experiences from me." – Participant comment

Due to prior trust issues and a lack of consistent communication in previous relationships, youth have come to rely on the consistent presence of staff and fellow inmates for their caring relationships. As one youth discussed, "the constant guidance from them [Probation staff] helps me focus on the good and the attainable." The findings for Friends - Caring Relationships Outside of Family indicated gaps in the youths' lives that may be filled through relationships with a reliable, relatable adult.

Life Skills for Community Integration

Median Assessment Scores:
November 2024, 97% | *March 2025, 97%* | *June 2025, 89%*

The assessments asked youth to reflect on their preparation for a successful return to their community. Community integration was described as learning to take care of oneself, including feeding, housing, and transporting oneself, building supportive relationships, being employed, continuing their education, and other activities or skills for personal responsibility.

Many youth asked to learn skills for meeting more people who could support their personal and professional development, social skills (e.g., how to hold conversations), and self-control. The factors that would most interfere with successful integration were negative peers and going back to a negative home or family environment that could promote relapse. For example, one youth believed they had the skills to integrate well into their community, but were unsure they could use them when they returned.

> *"Coffee cart showed me how to follow rules the right way, how to please and communicate with your customer." - Participant comment*

The Probation Department's services and support most valued by youth were GEO programs, educational services, and work-experience programs. These included Life Skills from GEO, the coffee cart activities, forklift courses, graffiti clean-up, and high school and college courses. Praise for the activities that developed life skills was consistent throughout the year's assessments. In later sessions, Wellpath became another well-received program for youth. Probation contracts with Wellpath to enhance parental and youth resilience through individual, group, and family therapy and education.

In March and June 2025, youth recognized and praised the increase in the number of Probation monitoring staff. This increase in staff enabled a greater variety of activities, such as gardening, which the youth requested. However, toward the end of this reporting period, the youth noted limitations in the programming. These life skills programs introduce vital skills to youth in custody. Yet, youth indicate they may not be able to perform these skills upon returning to the community. One youth expressed wanting more than what was included in the current programming, explaining that "the help I need now is advice on how to be a man." The assessments for life skills suggest considering how programs are arranged based on the time a youth has been in custody, the time they will remain in custody, and their age and developmental stage.

> *"For me, there is not much more they [Probation programs] can do. For the kids that are here longer, let them have more programs and entertainment."*
> *- A longer-term Participant comment*

Other Recommendations

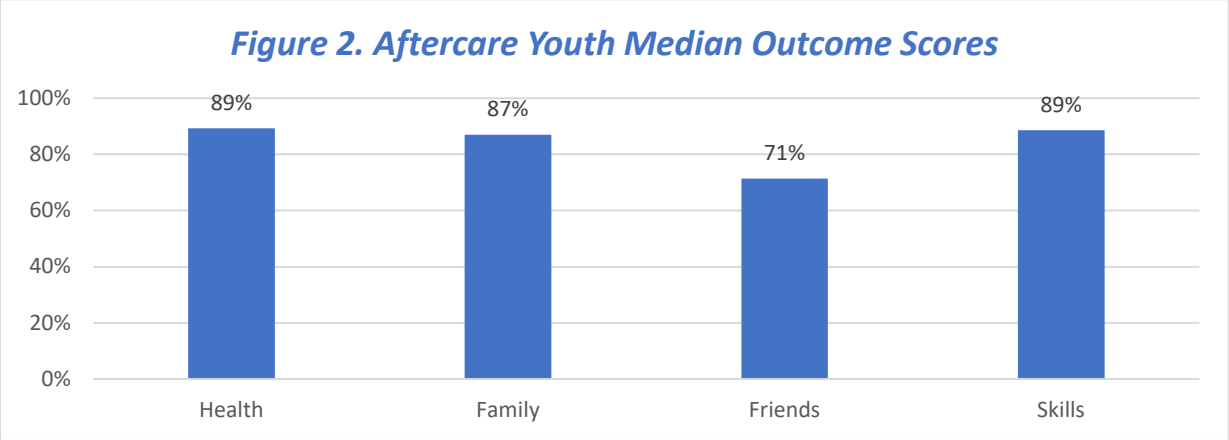
Each assessment included a closing general question for any other recommendations for how the Probation Department could better support them. Recommendations included:

- Access to more hygiene products.
- Increase outside communication.
- Greater variety of interactive activities and programs.
- More time outdoors
- Allow access to release resources sooner

Findings for Youth in Aftercare

Toward the end of this report period, one assessment was conducted with youth in aftercare. A quarterly assessment was completed with 14 participants. All interviews were conducted in English. Participants were nearly all male ([redacted]). No other demographic information was collected for this session. However, based on information from the youth in custody, most participants were of Latino/Hispanic ethnicity and older than the youth in custody (e.g., 19 and older).

Figure 2 shows the median scores for the scale variables across the assessment areas: Health, Family, Friends, and Life Skills. Findings were consistent over time, with moderate-to-high scores for Health, Family, and Life skills and lower scores for Friends.



Health and Wellness

Median Score: 89%

Physical exercise was a key part of youths' daily routine when out of custody. It was mentioned by nearly all aftercare youth. It was a habit built during their time in custody that they continued to use to maintain their health, both physically and mentally. Other health and wellness factors were having motivational support and using coping strategies to manage their emotions. Motivational support included family, staff check-ins, and pet care.

"Working out has helped me keep my mind and body healthy." - Participant comment

Factors that got in the way of their health were a return to substance use, procrastination, and other unhealthy habits. Youth noted that programs that provide coping mechanisms for dealing with these issues are important. One example was writing pro-and-con lists. These skills alleviated overwhelming emotions that may have led to unhealthy habits.

Family Relationships

Median Score: 87%

Youth in aftercare indicated that communication was key to maintaining a strong relationship with their family. However, once released from custody, they struggled to spend quality time with family members. One youth said what matters most is being able to express issues and concerns and be heard by their family. Documented barriers to family relationships were recovering time lost from incarceration and dealing with the trauma from incarceration. Family therapy services provided by program staff may alleviate these barriers.

"[What matters] Spending quality time…and allowing time and space to heal." – Participant comment

Friends: Caring Relationships Outside of Family

Median Score: 71%

All youth reported that communication, loyalty, and trust were the most important aspects of maintaining caring relationships with friends. These aspects may be difficult to re-establish as youth return to their community. Once released from custody, they lose access to the familiar and trusting figures from the residential facility. They may have difficulty finding good friends in the community. Youth explained that they isolate themselves, lack trust in others, and are not fully willing to enter more caring relationships. This has led some youth to associate with negative peers, resulting in conflict and disciplinary action. Mentoring and coaching programs and activities are known to address these challenges, and may be led by program staff.

"I isolate myself, not wanting to drag others with me." – Participant comment

Life Skills for Community Integration

Median Score: 89%

Youth were asked to consider how successful their transition to their community has been. Many felt confident in their skills to take care of themselves. However, a major barrier many youth faced was access to employment. Barriers to employment included a lack of work experience, permit requirements, transportation difficulties, and a criminal record.

"When I go to job interviews, I struggle because of a lack of work experience." – Participant comment

Despite the struggles with employment, many youth appreciate the other programs provided by aftercare. Nearly all youth praised the aftercare staff for their one-on-one check-ins. GEO provided many key lessons, such as self-control and coping mechanisms. These programs and services made the youth feel supported and that they were bettering themselves for their community.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The program evaluation summary for this year's reporting period offers lessons to improve services and outcomes for youth in custody and aftercare. For both program areas, youth reported the importance of having enough staff to provide services and staff who care about youth. Basic needs, especially nutritious, tasty food options and the equipment and opportunities for physical activity, were vital to physical and mental well-being. Understanding how to communicate with family was important for youth in custody and aftercare, both when family members were supportive and when they may have had a negative influence. In custody, having more time to communicate with family and with more family members is prized. In aftercare, youth and family members may struggle to find time for each other and may need help to strengthen their relationships.

Relationships with friends were assessed among the lowest of all outcome areas (although still moderately strong). Youth in custody and aftercare valued training on how to communicate and navigate relationships with peers overall, especially on how to avoid negative influences and to find and develop more positive friendships. Opportunities for mentoring and coaching were welcome, both in custody and aftercare. Services and outcomes for life skills supporting community reintegration were rated as moderately to highly effective. Youth in custody believe they are prepared for release, but are unsure whether they can apply the skills they learned while in custody. Once in aftercare, youth remain confident in their skills but struggle to find employment due to stigma and limited work experience. Youth want more hands-on training and real-world opportunities to practice the skills learned in classroom settings. Youth who have been in custody longer and may have more time remaining in custody report needing different types of skills training that build on their experiences and competencies. The results from this report period demonstrate learning and improvement from youth and Probation staff. The Probation team illustrates responsiveness to lessons from the evaluation to improve services. This strong capacity for evaluation and learning will lead to exponential improvements in the work of Merced County Probation with youth and the community.

OUR IMPACT

These photos showcase our students enrolled in CTE programs like welding, our newest alumni from Fresno City College and our high school graduation.

These photos highlight the diverse pro-social activities available to our youth, ranging from restorative sound baths and creative paint nights to energetic field days. These non-structured opportunities are designed to encourage exploration, allowing our youth to discover new interests and develop positive social connections in a supportive environment.

Recognizing that food is a central part of our students' lives, we cultivate a healthy relationship with nutrition through our on-site garden. Here, youth experience the reward of planting and harvesting their own produce. We balance this focus on wellness with moments of pure fun, celebrating 'National Food Days' and hosting vibrant Food Festivals that bring our community together.

References

GEO Reentry Services (2023). *An Industry Leader in Reentry Services.* Retrieved from An Industry Leader in Evidence-based Treatment | GEO Reentry Services

Prison Education Project (2023). *Welcome to The Prison Education Project.* Retrieved from HOME | Prison Education Pro (prisoneducationproject.org)

U.S. Census Bureau (2024). *American Community Survey 5-year estimates.* Retrieved from *Census Reporter Profile page for Merced County, CA* <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US06047-merced-county-ca/>http://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US06047-merced-county-ca/

Youth.gov. (2022, March 7). Reentry. Retrieved from https://youth.gov/youth-topics/juvenile-justice/reentry

State of California Employment Development Department. (2026, January 23). *Monthly labor force data for counties: December 2025 – preliminary* (Report 400 C). Labor Market Information Division. http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov