



# Elevating Youth Voices: Interviews With Young People in the San Francisco Juvenile Hall

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## Executive Summary

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San Francisco’s Department of Children, Youth and their Families (DCYF) is committed to advancing equity and healing trauma by bringing together government agencies, schools, and community-based organizations to provide care and supportive services to strengthen our communities in thriving and through all stages of life.

Research shows that juvenile detention centers are not typically developmentally supportive environments. The science of adolescent development identifies ways that youth-serving programs and contexts can create and facilitate developmentally supportive environments that leverage the opportunities of adolescence to support positive youth development and thriving.

In 2021, the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department established as a priority to, “Center the voices, experiences, and well-being of young people and their families” and began pursuing a collaborative research partnership to survey and interview young people in Juvenile Hall to share their experiences. In 2022, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) was identified by DCYF and the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) to lead this effort to describe the perspectives of young people detained in Juvenile Hall. Specifically, we were asked to focus on the developmentally appropriate nature of the physical environment, programming, and relational connection with staff, family and loved ones, as well as other supportive adults.

Our study utilized semistructured interviews with youth detained in the Hall. We analyzed transcripts using thematic analysis to identify young people’s experiences of the Hall as a developmental context. At a high-level, we found that:

- Youth identified ways the Hall did and did not meet basic needs.
- Young people described a great deal of variation in rules, and inconsistencies of rewards and consequences, and their application.
- Most young people identified program(s) offered in the Hall that they viewed positively, but expressed a lack of choice about participation in programs or education.
- Young people experienced significant challenges engaging with family members and loved ones on the phone, virtually, or via in person visits.
- Many young people viewed at least one staff as caring and respectful towards themselves and others; but views were split about the extent of fair treatment of young people by staff.

## Introduction

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In 2019, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed legislation to close the San Francisco Juvenile Hall by December 31, 2021. The Board established a Working Group to develop a plan to meet this goal by strengthening and expanding community-based alternatives to detention, and to “provide a rehabilitative, non-institutional place or places of detention, in a location approved by the Court, which is available for all wards of the Court and persons alleged to come within the jurisdiction of the Court” (Juvenile Hall Closure ordinance, 2019) The Close Juvenile Hall Working Group submitted its final report, including 39 proposals regarding the creation of a non-institutional place of detention and expanding community alternatives to the Board in November 2021; however, the Board has not yet identified an alternative to Juvenile Hall. As of the writing of this report, the Juvenile Hall has not been closed. Regardless of the future of the hall, the voices of youth currently detained in the Hall provide critical insights into the conditions that can inform both how to improve the current environment, as well as potential next steps for San Francisco’s Juvenile Hall.

Youth in detention in San Francisco, like all young people in the city, have access to programming funded through the Department of Children Youth and Their Families (DCYF), which supports cross-agency and community-based youth and young adult services. Since 2018 the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) has been working with DCYF as well as the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department to provide a mixed-methods evaluation that includes, among other things, this investigation into youth experiences in the Juvenile Hall.<sup>1</sup> One focus of the evaluation activities is on DCYF’s capacity to enhance equity of access to supports that enable thriving.

In this report, we share findings from our first qualitative evaluation of DCYF-funded Justice Services in the San Francisco Juvenile Hall. In the context of the continued existence of the Hall, AIR was tasked by DCYF and the Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) with describing how youth experience their time in the Juvenile Hall and use their voices and first-hand expertise to inform recommendations for improvements. We organize youth perspective’s using the framework of the Hall as a developmentally appropriate environment, including the capacity of the Hall’s physical space and staff to meet young people’s basic needs, provide consistent rules and boundaries, and cultivate appropriate social norms. The study team further examined the capacity of the programming provided within the Hall to facilitate youth development, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Other partners in the broad evaluation include the San Francisco District Attorney, the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department, and the San Francisco Adult Probation Department .

capacity of the facility to engender supportive relationships with family and loved ones as well as other supportive adults.

To elevate the voices of young people who were detained in the Hall, our study team conducted semistructured interviews with 30 young people who were detained between November 2022 through March 2023.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the study, there were young people age 12-21 detained or committed in the Hall who may have been asked to participate in the study.

Growing research indicates that examining young people’s perspectives on their experiences constitutes an integral component of ensuring that youth services support their development (Jagers et al., 2019; Ozer et al., 2020; The Wallace Foundation, 2022). To share these perspectives, the study team analyzed transcripts using thematic analysis to identify young people’s experiences of the Hall as a developmental context. Specifically, we explored young people’s perspectives about the Hall as a developmentally appropriate environment and young people’s experiences of opportunities for development and supportive resources and relationships.

At a high-level, we found the following:

- Youth identified ways the Hall did and did not meet basic needs. Most young people felt emotionally and physically safe in the Hall, with some limitations. Youth also described challenges in physical conditions (e.g., poor quality food and hygiene products, discomfort sleeping), while reporting mostly positive experiences with health care.
- Young people described a great deal of variation in rules, and inconsistencies in rewards and consequences, and their application. While some youth shared positive perspectives on the reward system, others identified differential treatment and unfair punishments.
- Overall, most young people identified program(s) offered in the Juvenile Hall that they viewed positively. However, they also expressed a lack of choice about their participation in programs and education.
- Young people experienced significant challenges engaging with family members and loved ones on the phone, virtually, or via in-person visits. Barriers included the Hall’s limiting schedules for phone calls and visits, punishments that removed privileges, and families’ own schedules.

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<sup>2</sup> Whereas the majority of the young people in the Hall (and of those interviewed) are under age 18, the Hall does support young adults (aged 18 and over) who were detained following a conviction which occurred when they were under 18 years old, or were arrested for conduct that occurred when they were under 18 and therefore under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. Importantly, most of these young adults have been committed to Juvenile Hall as a result of the closure of the state's youth prison system (Division of Juvenile Justice) and realignment of state responsibilities to counties. The study team interviewed some young adults to ensure full coverage of the experiences of young people in the Hall. For this reason, we use the terms “youth,” “young people” and “young person” interchangeably throughout this report to refer to the young people we interviewed.

- Overall, many young people viewed at least one staff as caring and respectful towards themselves and others. Young people’s opinions were more split about whether staff were consistently fair in their treatment of young people.

The remainder of report is organized as follows: The Background section summarizes the relevant literature on key learning from developmental science related to youth and young adult thriving as well as the extent of their application in juvenile justice. In the Methodology section, we provide rationale and detail on the analytical strategy. In the Findings section, we present the results of the analysis in detail, organized into five sections: (1) meeting basic needs, (2) consistent rules, boundaries, and social norms, (3) opportunities for individual development, and (4) supportive relationships with family and loved ones, as well as (5) supportive relationships with other caring adults. We conclude with an interpretation of the findings and a discussion of the limitations of the analysis. In the final section, we discuss our suggestions for future directions and recommendations.

## Background

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Adolescence is a time of significant developmental change and opportunity. Brain development is ongoing across adolescence, with asynchronous development of regions of the brain that have implications for young people’s decisions and behavior (NASSEM, 2019). In tandem, cognitive development leads to critical changes in perspective taking and abstract thinking (NASSEM, 2019). Finally, in parallel with expanding social relationships including family, peer, school, and community contexts, youth navigate and grapple with their changing sense of self in society at transition to adulthood, engaging in developmental tasks related to identity, purpose, autonomy, and agency (Benson et al., 2007; NASSEM, 2019). Yet adolescent development does not occur in a vacuum: Developmentally appropriate contexts that provide rich, culturally relevant opportunities and resources promote positive, optimal development toward thriving (Benson et al., 2007; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020).

While adolescence is a time of opportunity, systemic inequities and other forms of adversity threaten young people’s access to developmental resources needed for thriving. Racism, socioeconomic inequities, and experiences of trauma all affect young people’s social ecology, depleting their access to resources, relationships, and supports that promote optimal development.

Detention and incarceration further exacerbate structural disparities in access to resources. Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color (BIPOC) are overexposed to police contact and experience more aggressive policing (Campos-Manzo et al., 2020; Hinton, 2016), and therefore are more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system (Abrams et al., 2021; Office of Juvenile

Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2022). Once detained, young people are disconnected from school, career, and family which can further undermine their mental health, relationships, and wellbeing (Beaudry et al., 2021; Cauffman & Steinberg, 2012; Cavanagh, 2022). And upon reentry, young people who have been detained experience detrimental outcomes, especially if they are BIPOC (Holzer et al. 2006).

**Thus, there is a growing need and responsibility for youth-serving systems, including juvenile justice agencies, to intervene to promote equitable adolescent thriving, for detained young people, formerly detained people, and for young people who are disproportionately likely to be detained in the future.**

However, much evidence points to the ways that juvenile detention centers are typically not developmentally supportive environments, or are in fact harmful to young people's well-being (e.g., Beaudry et al., 2021; Cauffman & Steinberg, 2012; Cavanagh, 2022; Heldman, 2022). DCYF and JPD have partnered with AIR to examine youth experiences and the developmental science to identify strategies to make San Francisco's Juvenile Hall as supportive as possible. The science of adolescent development identifies ways that youth-serving programs and contexts can create and facilitate developmentally supportive environments that leverage the opportunities of adolescence to support positive youth development and thriving.

### ***Developmentally Supportive Environments***

***Research demonstrates that positive developmental environments should provide the necessary ingredients for optimal youth development and thriving.*** Developmental environments facilitate **safety for young people and promote health and well-being**. They ensure basic safety from physical harm and violence as well as from psychological and emotional harm and violence by facilitating safe peer group interaction and preventing unsafe interactions (Benson et al., 2007; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020). Developmental environments also provide the conditions to support well-being (e.g., nutrition, sleep, mental wellness).

Similarly, environments that provide **developmentally appropriate structure and social norms** also support optimal youth development. Structures that provide limits and boundaries, rules and expectations, and age-appropriate monitoring can work together to communicate clear and consistent processes in youth settings (Benson et al., 2007). Environments that support young people in regulating their emotions promote broader positive youth development (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Lerner et al., 2012). At the same time, disparities in the ways that rules are presented and interpreted for students based on their racial/ethnic background and socioeconomic status can have tremendous repercussions in their experiences in school and in out-of-school time settings, which in turn can influence their later trajectory, including the likelihood of justice system contact (Fabelo et al., 2011; Osher et al., 2022).

**Opportunities for individual development**, such as education and programming in schools and communities, should promote leadership, belonging, and agency in a developmentally appropriate manner while attending to cultural relevance and responsiveness (Berk et al., 2018). Programs should focus on skill building and social belonging and should be spaces where youth autonomy and voice matter (Benson et al., 2007); particularly in the context of detention centers, programming should provide young people with the tools to thrive once they are released. **Social, physical, intellectual, and emotional skill development** should be foundational so that young people can prepare to continue their education, employment, and psychosocial well-being (Benson et al., 2007; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020). To this end, programming should foster a sense of social belonging and mitigate unnecessary isolation. Instead, research shows that youth programming should create environments that foster connectedness and engagement (Benson et al., 2007).

In particular, youth programs should provide **culturally relevant content, use culturally responsive strategies**, and promote opportunities for youth to explore and foster their own ethnic, racial, and cultural identity (Benson et al., 2007; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor & Rivas Drake, 2021). Culturally relevant content can include histories, traditions, and beliefs of multiple cultures to enhance cultural knowledge or engaging with culturally diverse community resources (Simpkins et al., 2017). Culturally responsive strategies can cross all aspects of youth program structure and staff, including how policies and practices promote inclusivity that is welcoming to young people and their families and how they prevent bias, discrimination, and marginalization (Simpkins et al., 2017).

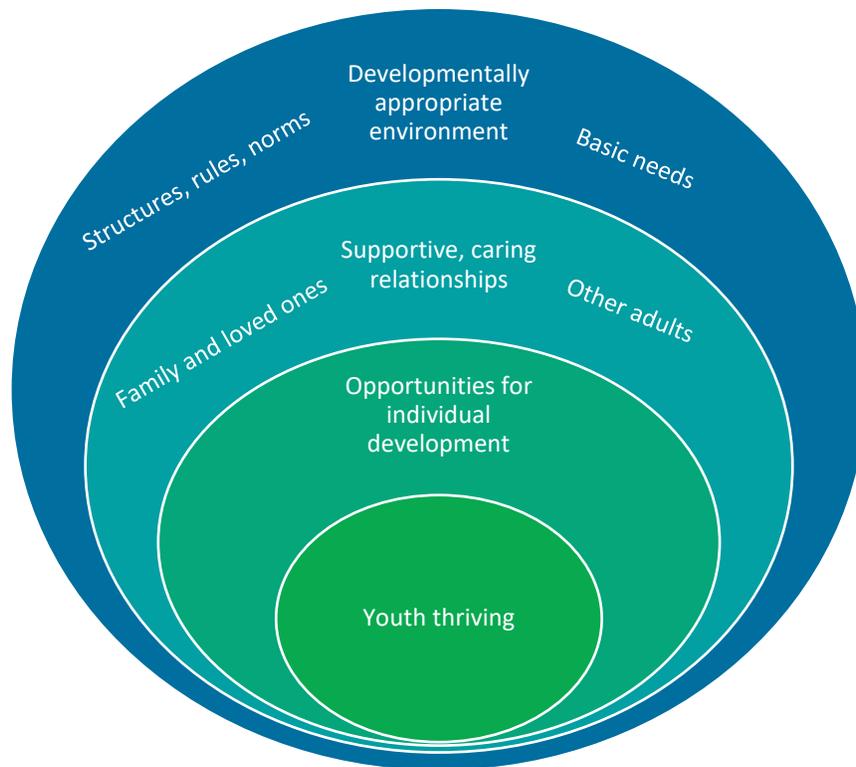
The process of choosing and participating in programming should take youth choice into account and should foster **youth agency and autonomy** (Larson et al., 2007). For example, programs can support autonomy development via role modeling as well as encouraging and providing access to resources, relationships, and experiences (Davis & McQuillin, 2022). Offering opportunities for youth to choose what they want to explore is essential for strong identity development, including having a strong sense of who you are and a strong connection to others (Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020). Youth development literature suggests that youth can be important actors in their own development and they have the ability to choose opportunities that serve them best (Benson et al., 2007; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020).

**Supportive family relationships** are a critical resource throughout childhood and into adolescence. This includes relationships with parents and caregivers, grandparents, siblings, and as young people move into young adulthood, romantic partners (Benson et al., 2007; Lantos et al., 2022). While young people may become increasingly involved in new peer, school, and community relationships in adolescence, the fundamental importance of the family context does not diminish (Osher, Cantor, et al., 2020; Smetana & Rote, 2019). Such relationships may be

defined by warmth, secure attachment and responsiveness, and developmentally appropriate discipline (NASEM, 2019; Osher, Cantor, et al., 2020; Smetana & Rote, 2019). As such, continued access to positive family relationships is important, even when young people are detained.

Finally, forming and sustaining **supportive relationships with caring nonparental adults** has long been shown to lead to positive youth development outcomes across multiple studies (Benson et al., 2007; Bowers et al., 2015; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020; Raposa et al., 2019). Relationships that show warmth, closeness, connectedness, good communication, care, support, guidance, secure attachment, and responsiveness are more likely to lead to youth well-being and thriving (Benson et al., 2007; Raposa et al., 2019). Having a close and supportive relationship with natural mentors, adults that youth encounter in their daily lives who support and show care, allow youth to confide in them and ask for guidance during difficult emotional periods. In fact, youth who build trusting relationships and are able to confide in mentors reported greater self-confidence and personal development (Bowers et al., 2015; Griffith & Jiang, 2020). In addition, strong, supportive relationships with other adults can essentially help compensate for weaker, strained relationships with family members and can mitigate the negative effects of parent treatment (Kogan & Brody, 2010).

### Exhibit 1. Characteristics of Developmentally Supportive Environments That Promote Thriving



## ***Applying Developmental Science in Juvenile Justice***

With all-time low numbers of youth in correctional facilities in San Francisco and nationally (Abrams, 2013; Annie B. Casey, 2020), there is growing momentum to reconsider juvenile detention in ways that honor the scientific evidence on adolescent development (Abrams, 2013; Cavanagh, 2022; Heldman, 2022). Yet limited changes have been made to integrate adolescence science (Heldman, 2022). This means that in most states, youth are still being detained and incarcerated in juvenile correctional facilities, even when youth detention may be contradictory to the aims of positive youth development (Cavanagh, 2022).

Unlike other youth-serving environments, juvenile justice facilities did not develop with the primary goal to promote youth well-being (Heldman, 2022). For one, youth detention is nonvoluntary, in clear opposition to science on adolescent development. Further, the punitive system is misaligned with normative brain development, while disconnecting young people from their social context (Abrams, 2013; Cavanagh, 2022). Unique legal constraints govern how youth and young adults may be confined, and mandate the need for surveillance that is not developmentally appropriate (Cavanagh, 2022; Lantos et al., 2022). For these reasons, juvenile justice settings lack both the priority towards youth development, as well as the flexibility to support key developmental needs (Lantos et al., 2022).

In addition, young people who are detained have unique experiences of trauma and mental health that may be exacerbated by detention. Youth who are detained are more likely to have co-occurring incidents of both prior trauma and mental health concerns (Beaudry et al., 2021; Borschmann et al., 2020; Duron et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021). Further, longitudinal research suggests that juvenile detention is associated with worse mental health later in life, compared to those who are first incarcerated as adults (Barnert et al., 2019). Thus, young people who are detained may experience additional co-occurring and interrelated challenges with prior trauma and mental health that make confinement even more harmful. Informed likewise by science on adolescent development and trauma, there is growing acknowledgement and uptake of trauma-informed approaches in juvenile justice settings (e.g., Branson et al., 2017; Ford & Blaustein, 2013), but implementation does not mirror young people's need.

At the same time, staff in juvenile detention facilities are dealing with particular stressors and constraints, including high-stress environments and staffing shortages (Sheppard et al., 2022). Juvenile halls across the country are experiencing significant staffing shortages due to many factors. There is less interest in working in incarcerated settings due to the punitive nature of incarceration and its negative effects on youth such as isolation (Beard, 2023). COVID 19-related illnesses among staff and their families also play a role with staffing shortages (Kids Forward, n.d.) as well as low pay (Livengood & Howerton, 2022). Staffing shortages in juvenile halls are associated with a variety of harmful outcomes for incarcerated youth (Wolff et al.,

2020, Kids Forward, n.d.). Youth in juvenile halls with staffing shortages are more likely to stay incarcerated for longer periods of time which prevents them from accessing supportive services (Kids Forward, n.d.). Staffing shortages lead to operational confinement where there is not enough staff on hand to monitor youth. As a result, youth are required to stay in their rooms for long periods of time which is associated with exacerbated mental health challenges (Lehr, 2022). Moreover, as policy shifts toward alignment with the science of adolescent development, staff (and policies guiding staff procedures and training) may not receive training related to youth development or social emotional learning (Cavanagh, 2022). Taken together, juvenile justice systems, and specifically youth detention and correctional facilities, face unique challenges in moving to support youth development and thriving.

### ***Understanding Youth Perspectives in Juvenile Justice***

In June 2022, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Administrator Elizabeth Ryan outlined the call to action well: “Young people understand their own needs, wants, and expectations. They know the best ways to frame messages intended for their peers, and the best forums for delivering them” (Ryan, 2022). Prior research with youth who have been detained highlights the importance of supportive relationships with family and staff, opportunities for skill building, and supportive environments and structures that meet their basic needs (Barnert et al., 2015; Osseck et al., 2010).

Hearing the perspectives, experiences, and feedback of young people is crucial to designing and delivering youth services and programs that equitably promote health and well-being (Jagers et al., 2019; Kirshner et al., 2005; Ozer et al., 2020; Quijada Cerecer et al., 2013). Further, using qualitative methods allows the evaluation team to amplify the voices of youth with knowledge and lived experience who are directly affected by inequities (Balazs & Morello-Frosch, 2013). The current report uses qualitative methodology to elevate the perspectives of youth currently experiencing detention.

## **San Francisco Juvenile Hall Context**

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Just as nationally, policy makers and communities are reconciling juvenile justice systems in practice with the evidence base on PYD/developmentally appropriate environments, the state of California and San Francisco has also grappled with these changes. In 2019, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed legislation to close the San Francisco Juvenile Hall by December 31, 2021. The Board established a Working Group to develop a plan to meet this goal by strengthening and expanding community-based alternatives to detention, and to “provide a rehabilitative, non-institutional place or places of detention, in a location approved by the

Court, which is available for all wards of the Court and persons alleged to come within the jurisdiction of the Court” (Juvenile Hall Closure ordinance, 2019) The Close Juvenile Hall Working Group submitted its final report, including 39 proposals regarding the creation of a non-institutional place of detention and expanding community alternatives to the Board in November 2021; however, the Board has not yet identified an alternative to Juvenile Hall. As of the writing of this report, the Juvenile Hall has not been closed.

CA legislation from 2020 closed the state’s youth prison system (Division of Juvenile Justice [DJJ]), and in doing so shifted the responsibility for young people with sustained charges for the most serious offenses from the now-closed state facilities to counties in a so-called DJJ Realignment. This realignment means that since July 1, 2021, judges can no longer commit to DJJ, and the county is responsible for custody, care, and supervision for young people who are ages 14 to 25, found to have committed a serious offense<sup>3</sup>. The court may send young people to a Secure Treatment Facility, a locked residential county facility, like the Juvenile Hall. In San Francisco, the population affected by the DJJ realignment are mostly young people who are living in the community either placed on probation or in out of home placement. A small number have been court ordered to the Juvenile Hall.

The current study focuses on young people detained in the Juvenile Hall. According to JPD, in 2022, the average daily population was 16 young people in the Hall. For gender (using binary options available for most of 2022), the average daily population was 12% girls and 88% boys. In terms of race and ethnicity, the average daily population for 2022 was as follows: Black 69%, Latinx 19%, Asian American/Pacific Islander 6%, Other/Unknown 6%. In terms of age, the average daily population was as follows: 6% were 14 years old or younger, 13% were 15, 19% were 16, 31% percent were 17, and 31% were 18 years or older. Finally, the case status for the average daily population included 69% Pre-Adjudicated/Pre-Disposition and 31% Committed (including both Juvenile Hall and Secure Youth Treatment Facility Commitments).

## Methodology

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AIR collaborated with DCYF and JPD to plan and approve the recruitment and interview process with young people currently in the Juvenile Hall. We presented the data collection plan to the San Francisco Juvenile Court, Public Defender’s Office, and San Francisco Bar Association Conflict Defense panel, including defense attorneys who represent youth detained in the Hall.

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<sup>3</sup> Serious offenses include: WIC 707(b) offenses (including murder, attempted murder, arson, robbery, rape, kidnapping, assault by any means of force likely to produce great bodily injury, and several other serious and/or violent acts) and PC 290.008 offenses (a range of sex offenses that require registration as a sex offender).

Finally, we received a court order extending the AIR study team access to the Juvenile Hall. In addition, the interviews were approved by AIR's Institutional Review Board and by JPD.

Prior to each interview, AIR researchers contacted parents of eligible youth under age 18 who were currently in the Hall. Researchers described the study, its purpose, and what their child's participation would entail, including the audio recording of the interview. Parents were asked to provide passive consent (meaning parents would notify researchers if they did not want their child to participate). Otherwise, a court order gave JPD's chief the authority to provide consent. For youth aged 18 and older, researchers obtained informed consent prior to beginning the interview. For youth under 18, researchers engaged in a parallel assent process prior to the interview with young people whose parents had not opted out.

Interviews were conducted from November through February using a mix of in-person and virtual methods. One interviewer who is fluent in Spanish also conducted interviews in Spanish at youth request. Youth housed in the quarantine unit (where youth are housed for the first 10 days of their detention due to COVID-19 public health orders) were also included in the interviews. In total, we interviewed 30 youth in 40 separate interviews. One short interview was discontinued due to poor audio quality, and the data were not able to be used. In order to prevent inadvertent reidentification of youth, we do not provide demographic information for youth in the Hall, including age group, race/ethnicity, and gender. We also omitted other details that could potentially reidentify young people (e.g., specific medical conditions, incidents at the Hall). Pursuant to AIR and JPD's data use agreement, JPD Research & Planning staff also conducted a review of this report to address any re-identification concerns prior to release to JPD management and line staff, DCYF, and the public.

To recruit youth, we created and distributed a recruitment flyer to inform youth about the interview opportunity. We also worked with staff in the Juvenile Hall to publicize our visit via word of mouth. We then scheduled specific time windows for interviews with each unit. When AIR researchers arrived, either in person or virtually, to the unit, youth were invited one by one to a private room with a door that closes in the unit to learn about the study and decide whether they wanted to participate. In the case of in-person interviews AIR interviewers and individual youth were the only people in the room. In the case of virtual interviews, a laptop computer was set up by Hall staff and connected to the researchers' Zoom meeting; youth entered the room with the laptop one by one to learn about the study and decide whether to participate. In virtual interviews, AIR interviewers verbally confirmed with youth that the door was closed and that they were the only ones in the room before the interview began.

The interviews varied in length from 10 minutes to 60 minutes. Interview audio was recorded with a video call application or with an audio recording device. AIR interviewers used a

semistructured protocol for each interview, enabling them to select among potential probing questions that could be asked following the key overarching questions (e.g., the protocol allowed asking questions out of order or omitting questions that were irrelevant given previous responses). Youth were encouraged to choose the topics and order of interest and were allowed to start and stop the interview as they chose. Youth were also invited to speak on multiple occasions. The interview protocol included 19 open-ended questions, along with follow-up probes, that were designed to address the following research questions (see Appendix A for the full protocol). The interview protocol was translated to Spanish by a fluent speaker, and reviewed by a native speaker.

#### Research Questions

What are youth perspectives and experiences living in the Hall?  
Experiences and opportunities for personal development  
Experiences and perspectives of physical environment  
Experiences and perspectives of phone calls and visits  
Experiences and perspectives of rules/grievance process  
Experiences and perspectives of staff  
Experiences and perspectives of safety  
Recommendations for improvement

To support JPD in assessing trends over time, AIR included several closed-ended questions with multiple-choice responses in addition to the semistructured interview questions. These survey items were designed collaboratively between AIR and JPD to pilot the potential for ongoing, less labor-intensive data collection on youth experiences in the Hall. Findings from the closed-ended items were occasionally in conflict with the open-ended questions and therefore we display the results in Appendix B (with descriptive statistics), but do not interpret them. We further recommend future investigation into the discrepancies of the data collection efforts using cognitive interviews or item validation.

AIR researchers took additional steps to protect youth privacy and confidentiality. During data collection, AIR researchers did not share information from interviews with JPD staff, or which youth had agreed or declined to the interview. Audio recordings were de-identified, and assigned a participant identification number during analysis to protect youth privacy.

### Our Analytic Approach to Interview Data

Youth agreed for interviews to be recorded. AIR staff sent interview recordings to be transcribed by a transcription company and then analyzed. Trained AIR staff read the transcripts to identify and code both a priori (deductive) and emergent (inductive) themes and patterns. For a priori coding, the research team developed codes using existing information

from the literature about youth experiences in juvenile detention. For emergent coding, the team also identified new codes as they surfaced in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Once initial coding was completed, our team used an iterative process of coding and consensus via team discussions and dialogue to identify themes presented below. Because of the semistructured nature of the interviews, often the themes we identified and coded were revealed by some interview respondents but not mentioned by others. To examine the pilot closed-ended questions, AIR calculated percentages and frequencies of young people’s responses.

## Findings

### ***Section 1: Developmentally Appropriate Environment—Meeting Basic Needs***

Developmentally appropriate environments should meet young people’s basic needs, including safety, a place to sleep, nutritious food, and space to be alone.

**Most young people feel emotionally and physically safe in the Hall. However, young people shared some limitations on how emotionally open they feel they can be due to the nature of the facility. In terms of physical conditions, young people described positive experiences with mental health care and physical health care. However, they also identified important challenges including poor-quality food, discomfort sleeping in the Hall, and poor-quality hygiene products. They also identified limitations for their ability to spend time alone or time outside.**

### **Safety**

**The vast majority of youth interviewed felt physically safe in the Hall.** Most of the youth interviewed did not share any concerns about their physical safety. A few of them shared that the youth get along in the Hall and rarely fight with each other, positively impacting their sense of safety. As one of them points out, ...” because it's nobody in here that's really a threat. Everybody chill. Everybody gets along in here.” A couple of youth did not feel safe in the Hall. One of them started feeling physically unsafe after an emergency in the Hall. The youth described a long lag between the beginning of the emergency and when Hall staff intervened which made them feel physically unsafe. Another youth spoke about their concern for their physical safety if a youth with mental health issues enters the Hall because they could get physically violent.

**Most youth described feeling emotionally safe.** One youth shared that they feel emotionally safe because the youth treat each other with respect and that youth can talk to Hall staff whenever they need to. They feel more emotionally safe in the Hall than outside it.

“There's different things you can do in here to talk with people. It's honestly a positive environment, more than the outside is. The kids in here, we respect each other. Staff, if you have a problem or you just need to talk to someone, you can talk to the staff or you

**Several youth expressed satisfaction with the mental health care that they receive in Juvenile Hall.**

SPY therapists visit youth multiple times per week, and youth are assigned a therapist to work with. Youth spoke about how they always have someone to connect and check in with if needed. A few youth mentioned that SPY provides quality services. For SPY, Spanish-speaking youth reported they had services available in Spanish, and that the quality was good.

Youth raised a couple concerns as well. One youth expressed that they were fearful about expressing their true feelings to mental health care staff. If they express anything deemed problematic, staff will constantly check on them (every 15 minutes). They felt that they were not able to be their 100% authentic self because they felt like they would have no privacy. Another youth briefly mentioned that they were having a difficult time building a relationship with their therapist. One youth mentioned that they did not think there were not enough therapists from SPY to provide consistent, quality care.

can call ... and somebody will come up to talk to you. So there's a lot of different ways to express your feelings and also feel safe, too. There's always reassurance as well.”

**However, many youth described not being able to show their emotions or what they really feel in the Hall.**

One youth put it simply: “Nah, I just be like, you can't really show your emotions in here.”

Another young person shared that they didn't often feel emotionally safe: “'Cause I feel like they don't take my feelings into consideration sometimes. And when I voice something and say it, nobody wants to nip it in the bud right then and there. And that's what be getting me mad.”

**Conditions and Environment**

**Overall, youth found the food provided at Juvenile Hall to be mediocre or poor.**

Some youth communicated that the food made them quite sick. One youth shared: “Well, one, when they give us expired apples.... We get expired apples. Expired fruits, old fruits. The food, we eat the same. Well, we don't eat the same thing, but it's just like the food, it's just not healthy. I mean it's healthy, but it's like it's not good.” On the flip side, several youth shared that they couldn't complain or were grateful for the food; one young person shared that the food was better than another jail they had been in.

**A few youth spoke about how Juvenile Hall does not serve enough food and that the food itself is not filling.**

Despite the reported lack of quality, some youth determined that the food at Juvenile Hall is better than at other secure facilities. One of them shared: “Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's nasty. But you got to eat it. But I feel like it's better food out there, but I feel like this juvenile's got the best food. We actually get real food, like cooked food. Some juveniles get plastic in the wrapper food. So I feel like, can't go wrong with it. Nothing bad about it.”

**A majority of youth expressed discomfort sleeping in the Hall**, including due to the physical conditions. For example, several youth shared aspects of the physical room, from the concrete bed frame, thin mattress, and covers to the sink being unclean, that affected their ability to relax and sleep. One youth shared: “Our beds are, we use yoga mats to go to sleep. These very thin mats. And then right underneath the mat, it is concrete. So it's like we always have regular ... back pain.” Other youth who reported not sleeping well described it more generally that “it’s jail,” not home. Youth also described lack of options after going to their rooms for the evening, in contrast with home; a couple said there’s nothing you can do. However, some youth reported feeling comfortable sleeping in the Hall, such as this young person, who said: “I mean I sleep regular. I feel like I get more sleep than here, than outside. Because I'm not on a video game, I'm not on Instagram, talking on my phone, all up all night. I feel like I get my real sleep. Get my real sleep.”

**One very common theme shared by many interviewees is that the hygiene products that Juvenile Hall provides are of very poor quality.** On the whole, youth were dissatisfied with the hygiene products, and some youth shared that they had skin reactions and other side effects from products. One youth shared: “I don't like it. It breaks my body out. When I go home, I have stuff around my mouth, like rashes. Rashes on my back, my legs, everything.” However, sometimes youth are able to obtain better quality hygiene products, as one youth described it: “Some people have relationships with the staff, good relationships and they can ask different things and they'll bring it. That's why they get it.” A lot of youth mentioned that a good amount of youth in the Hall receive better quality hygiene products from staff. Several youth mentioned that having strong relationships with the staff and having been in the Hall longer were factors in getting better quality products.

**Several youth expressed general satisfaction with their physical health care at Juvenile Hall.** For example, one youth mentioned that the Hall doctors respond quickly: “I've only seen the doctor once since I've been here because I haven't requested to go again. But I'm going to put in a sick call today to do that and they'll usually answer like that, really fast.” However, a few youth spoke of very negative experiences interacting with the physical healthcare system. One youth mentioned that it took a long time to receive medical care needed, leading them to feel unwell. Another youth shared that they were offered treatment that was ineffective. Finally, another youth shared that one nurse would not dispense medications and other products when the nurse gets mad.

**Most youth found it possible to take time alone when they wanted.** However, many noted that this was possible only in their rooms. Further, a couple noted limited choices about how they could spend their time alone, inherent to Hall conditions. For example, one of the young people described the limitations of alone time like this: “... the only time I would be able to take time to myself is when I go to my room. That's the only time I could get some sort of privacy.”

And you still really don't get that anyways, because you're in a cell with glass windows and somebody walks by your room all the time and looks at you.”

**A majority of youth said that they rarely or never went outside.** As one youth put it, “We never go outside... It’s hard because everything is indoors now, so we can go right there... There’s no view, there’s nothing you can see that will calm you down. All you see is just concrete walls.” Some youth and those who indicated that they spend at least some time outside described the opportunity to go outside to the small outdoor area on their unit or the gardening program. Asked how often they can go outside, one young person shared: “Rarely. Well, out there it's not really that much space but they let you go out there.” On the other hand, in the quarantine unit, multiple youth shared there were even fewer options to spend time outside.

In addition, closed-ended questions relevant to meeting basic needs are displayed in Appendix B1.

## ***Section 2: Developmentally Appropriate Environment—Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms***

Developmentally supportive environments provide consistent structure, including rules and consequences that are applied fairly, boundaries and limits that are age appropriate, and social norms that outline expectations for behavior.

**Youth described a great deal of variation in rules, rewards, and consequences. Some youth noted unfair treatment due to gender and race, mirroring broader structural inequities. In addition, youth provided positive perspectives of the reward system, while others expressed anger and frustration at what they viewed as unfair punishments. Most youth had not filed a grievance but were doubtful about the efficacy or fairness of the process.**

**Youth provided an array of examples of the rules, with varying amounts of agreement** (suggesting variability across units/over time). Youth described that some of the rules were similar to other youth-serving environments (e.g., raise your hand, listen to staff, no fighting or play fighting); others were unique to the secure environment, focused on controlling youth movements and preventing escalation of violent incidents.

“But some staff be weird. Some staff will give you zero points just because they be mad. Or they'll blame you for something you ain't do. So they'll just take your points off. Say if somebody yells out they door, the boys, they'll take every single boy's points away, but they wouldn't take the girls' points away.”

**Youth also shared mixed perspectives on the extent to which rules were enforced consistently.** Several youth shared that in their experience the rules were consistently applied for everyone. One youth described it as follows: “It’s for everyone...They treat all the kids the same. The rules is just follow the instructions. Your time will be easier. Simple as that.”

However, a number of youth explicitly shared they found the rules to be applied inconsistently, varying by how long they had been in the Hall, the unit, and the staff on duty. Some youth said staff were more lenient with girls than boys. One young person gave an example of inconsistent treatment based on gender described in the text box on the left. Another example was provided by a young person: "... it was boys and girls [in our unit] just a minute ago and it was boys and girls. But they had to switch it because I felt like the girls was getting special treatment. They get into arguments, they get time to chill out, cool down outside a hour. If it was the boys, they would've sent us straight to our room but now they got their own unit and stuff."

In addition, one youth shared an example of differential application of the rules by racial/ethnic group, where staff treated Latinx youth worse: In addition, one youth shared an example of differential application of the rules by racial/ethnic group, where staff treated youth in one group worse: "I feel that there's a selection of kids that they choose who to let the rules pass by with. And for me, I'm one of those kids. They won't treat me fair, I don't know why it's like that. But I feel like it's a racial thing toward us."

**Most youth described a reward system where young people earn points daily**, leading to multiple tiers based on point totals, and corresponding privileges (e.g., tablets, MP3 player, additional time for phone calls or virtual visits). One youth described the system as follows: "So [the reward system has] four levels. Go up levels and you get more stuff like your tablet, MP3 player, stuff like that. You get rewarded for being good." Youth in the quarantine unit did not consistently describe the same reward system. Youth also reported receiving other rewards like snacks or a good note to the judge. Several youth shared that they liked the positive reward system.

**Youth described a wider array of negative consequences that deviated from the point system.**

Youth communicated that the most common punishment was being sent to their room. Another common punishment cited by youth was to have points removed in the merit system. In addition, youth shared that they might lose privileges as a punishment, such as phone calls and virtual visits. For example, one youth shared that they experienced staff removing phone call privileges as punishments for breaking rules. When two youth in a unit fight, youth described some staff taking away phone call privileges for everyone in the unit, no matter who was involved in the incident. As described in greater detail

Many youth described experiencing group punishment, where all youth present on the unit would be punished in response to the actions of other youth. One youth described this:

"Someone breaks the rules, I mean, everybody don't want to... Like, two people fighting, right now, they going to make everybody go in their rooms. And that it's like it falls on everybody. It don't fall on them two. It falls on everybody."

in the supportive family relationships section, this leads to removing important developmental supports as a punishment even if youth weren't directly culpable for the misbehavior.

Other punishments described by youth included separating youth, writing youth up, going into lockdown, and in more severe circumstances, youth shared that staff might "call a condition." (Conditions are incidents that disrupt the day-to-day activities of the Hall which require extra staff intervention.) Finally, whereas youth interviewed in November shared consistent access to virtual visits, some youth interviewed in January and February shared that they did not have access to virtual visits. One youth interviewed during these later months explained that virtual interviews were no longer allowed by Hall staff. Overall, many youth shared anger and frustration about the various punishments, particularly those they viewed as unfair or unwarranted. For example, one youth shared: "I get really mad because I don't like being in my room. I really don't like being in a room like that."

**While most youth hadn't filed a grievance, several voiced concerns or doubts with the process.** Most youth stated that they had never filed a grievance and the ones that had communicated that they did not experience any changes. Some youth directly addressed any issues with staff themselves, instead of using the grievance process. These youth found it more productive to voice their complaints to staff at the Hall.

Most of the youth who were asked about their beliefs about the grievance process believed it was ineffective. Four of these youth expressed not feeling comfortable voicing their complaints in the Hall. If something went wrong, they would not tell anyone or file a grievance. Three youth believed that if they submitted a grievance, Juvenile Hall would not be able to resolve it in a timely manner. Several youth emphasized that if youth did submit grievances, they felt that nothing would happen, and that staff would not use their feedback to improve the Hall.

For closed-ended questions relevant to providing consistent rules, boundaries, and social norms, see Appendix B2.

### ***Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development***

Educational and programmatic activities can provide meaningful opportunities for adolescent skill and knowledge development as well as for young people to explore their interests.

**Overall, most youth identified programs they viewed positively. However, youth also expressed a lack of choice or alternatives for either programs or education, describing them both as compulsory at times.**

Youth stated that they engaged in the individual development activities, like education and programs, offered at the Hall by requirement (for secondary education) as a way to fill their

time and to reduce boredom (for programs). Spanish-speaking youth reported that educational materials were available in Spanish and that some educators spoke Spanish, but in some cases they had to try to follow along in English. In addition, older youth have the option to pursue postsecondary courses. Multiple youth in the quarantine unit described receiving a self-directed packet of educational materials, but no instruction.

Youth described an array of programming in the Hall. The Beat Within, Power Source, and the Sunset Youth Services Digital Arts and Technology Program were the most frequently mentioned programs during interviews. Youth also mentioned programs including religious services, yoga and art classes, as well as a program for managing emotions. Multiple youth in the quarantine unit, however, reported that they had access to much more limited programming than other units. For example, one young person shared their experience: “Really, right now it’s just school, church. I think that’s really it. That’s all I’ve really got gotten to see right now.”

Sunset Youth Services was the most popular program among the youth interviewed. Youth appreciated the opportunity to create their own music with control and independence. One youth described their experience in the program and how it fostered independence.

“...when kids was rapping, the lady let me take control of it. And I was doing good. She was just telling me, “You’re doing good at this” I was doing everything I like.”

**Many youth described their participation in programs and education to stay busy or due to a lack of other options in the Hall.** Motivation to engage with these activities, especially programming, did not seem to be intrinsic; rather they were motivated by the need for entertainment and activity in the Hall. One young person shared the following: “Well, for most of the program I participate. I don’t even know how to explain it. It’s just like, it’s really nothing to do in here except for [school] and program or rec. So when there’s nothing to do, you do the program.”

“Either it’s when they notice that we’re not interacting or not wanting to do the activities, we kind of get forced to do it. It’s a mandatory thing. And I just feel like sometimes it shouldn’t be mandatory, and if it is mandatory, at least it could be... I feel like they should ask us, ‘**How you feeling today? Do you guys want to do this program?**’ Okay, if you guys don’t, you gotta stay here, and if you guys don’t go, you can go to the gym.”

Although participating in programming is technically voluntary, some youth shared some factors that make it seem mandatory. In some cases, youth expressed that they had to stay in their rooms if they did not participate. In addition, youth were incentivized to participate because participation went into a report seen by a judge, which could make them look more deserving of release. As a result of all these factors, youth felt angry and constrained when they experienced pressure to

participate in programming.

**Although most youth participated in programming to fill their time, some youth stated that they learned a lot and were engaged.** Some youth mentioned that they received snacks like chips as a reward for completing the Beat Within program, which served as an incentive for participation. Some of these youth liked Beat Within because it is a relatively easy program to complete. A couple of youth spoke about another program (they did not remember the program name) where a justice-involved individual spoke about their experiences and how they changed their life for the better after incarceration. One youth spoke about how they had a good relationship with this individual and how their story was impactful:

I feel like our relationship is good, because they speak tracks. They always tell us what they went through. It's like our story.... They was like, they got out, they changed themselves, changed their whole thing. They stopped doing what they were doing. Now they're a good person.

Inviting speakers to share life experiences is an element of culturally responsive programming, particularly culturally responsive interactions, because it can help foster relationships between adults and youth (Simpkins et al., 2017).

**Finally, youth expressed that their input was rarely taken into account by the Juvenile Probation Department when deciding on programs.** Overall, youth shared that that JPD rarely took youth input into account when they decided which programs to host. Youth stated that staff sometimes asked youth about which programs they preferred but rarely followed through with bringing in interesting programs based on youth preference. Youth expressed that because programs are essentially chosen for youth, they do not get strong opportunities to explore their interests. One youth explained this lack of youth input:

They'll never come ask our insight on what programs we want to do, nothing. It's just they set up a program, they say that it's a program coming through and we got to do it, because it's expected for us to rehabilitate ourselves and that's what the judge want to see for people like us to go home.

Programming can offer spaces for youth to experience social belonging and skill building, so tailoring programs to their needs and interests could be an important way to facilitate these aspects of positive youth development. Overall, multiple youth in the quarantine unit shared that they had even fewer options for programming because they can only participate virtually. Youth described an array of interests and programs they wished to see, including greater sports programming, technology, cooking, and trade certification for young adults, which can be critical opportunities for youth agency and autonomy development

Closed-ended questions relevant to opportunities for individual development are displayed in Appendix B3.

#### ***Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones***

Warm, responsive family relationships are a fundamental resource throughout adolescence. For young people who are detained, continued access to positive family relationships is important. This is only possible through phone calls and visits when youth are detained.

**For such an important developmental resource, youth shared that they experienced significant challenges engaging with family members and loved ones on the phone, virtually, or via in-person visits. Barriers cited by youth included Hall-determined schedules, punishments that remove privileges, and limited time for family members to call or visit due to their own schedules.**

We asked youth about their loved ones they were closest to. Most youth identified family members, a majority named their mothers as well as siblings, fathers, and grandmothers. Another few youth reported being closest with their friends and significant others.

#### **Almost all youth shared that they faced barriers to speaking with loved ones on the phone.**

Many youth discussed the limited amount of time you can spend talking to loved ones on the phone in the Hall. Multiple youth shared that on their units, they had two phones, which many of them said was not enough to accommodate all youth who wish to talk with their loved ones. Youth pointed out that in the time available for phone calls (typically the afternoons and early evenings after classes), there were often not enough time slots for everyone to talk on the phones available on the unit; this was exacerbated in more crowded units, where some youth shared they were allowed 10–15 minutes at the most. Units that house those under 18 specifically have this issue because there are more youth in those units. One youth explained: “It’s different the more people you have in the unit. Because if everybody ask for a phone call, they got to do certain time limits and stuff like that. But the smaller the unit, the more freedom you get.”

Several youth shared that their parents were in another country, which required parents to make an international phone call in order for the young person to be able to talk to their family. In those cases, youth stated that they were not able to receive local calls from their loved ones in San Francisco (e.g., friends, cousins). One youth shared it’s only through their mother’s phone calls that they were able to hear secondhand from their cousins.

Finally, one youth discussed a lack of privacy with phone calls. Because the phones are located in common areas, people around the unit can hear potentially sensitive conversations. This youth felt uncomfortable about this.

In addition, youth under 18 shared having more restrictions for when they were allowed to talk and who they were allowed to talk to. Before 3:30 PM, some youth shared they were only allowed to call their lawyer or their probation officer. Further, youth mentioned those under 18 have a call list that their parents approve of followed by their probation officer. Youth stated that family members can go on this list, but it is harder to add friends. They shared that there was some variation in how this was applied, however. For example, one youth spoke about this and mentioned that some staff will let youth speak with any loved ones they wanted to speak to. A youth mentioned that their probation officer denied including a close family member on their call list.

A few youth identified their 8:30 pm curfew and elements of their schedule as barriers. One of them explained that because their parents were mostly available after 8:30, they did not have the time to speak with them. A few youth had family members who were busy and did not have much time to talk on the phone, which is a major barrier. One youth shared,

“There’s a lot of kids here, and we don’t have the option to speak to [loved ones]. We don’t get to speak to them for a long period of time; we only get 5, 10 minutes on the phone. And it’s rec, so it kind of sucks.”

Besides the amount of youth in the Hall and limited time, several youth considered the rules and rewards system to be another barrier. Youth expressed that phone calls are rewards that youth are not automatically entitled to and that they do not have a right to a phone call until they get enough points. Some youth shared that those who are “better behaved” get more time to connect with loved ones.

**Youth stated that they had fewer opportunities for in-person visits, and virtual visits were inconsistently available over the period of the study and across units.**

In addition to phone calls, youth had access to virtual and in-person visits to see loved ones. Youth mentioned that virtual visits were inconsistently available over the period of the study and across units. Youth identified an array of barriers to virtual visits, including logistical considerations, the removal of the privilege, and family members’ schedules not being aligned with the Hall’s. Youth shared that in-person visits were more consistently available across youth and units, but more limited (and unavailable to youth in the quarantine unit). In several cases, youth shared that they had not yet had an in-person visit because they had not been there long enough, they were waiting for permission, or their loved ones were not available during the visit schedule. One youth mentioned that their unit manager took away virtual visit privileges

Youth shared that barriers to in-person visits included some similar logistic considerations as well as the limitations of in-person visits compared to normal connection with family and loved ones. As one youth shared, visits felt different than their regular interactions with their loved ones:

“I’m not at home in person seeing [loved ones].... It’s just different. I don’t know. At home, seeing them in person, get to hug them, touch them, stuff like that. Different. To eat with them, stuff like that. I don’t know. It’s different.”

from their entire unit after a fight: “No, we’re not allowed to have virtual visits.... One day, there was like... I don’t know, I forgot what happened, but the unit manager was like, ...you guys can’t have visits virtually...for some reason.”

Finally, youth in the quarantine unit did not have access to in-person visits. One young person communicated that youth are tested daily in the unit, and staff are allowed to test less frequently while leaving the unit each day to return to their homes: “Yeah, I don't get that because when we get here we get COVID tested and then still it come back negative. We still got to be here 10 days and they keep testing us, keep testing us and then the staff said they get tested only if they feel like that they have symptoms or something.” The youth continued to suggest that by this logic, in-person visits should also be allowed with a negative COVID test.

Closed-ended questions relevant to supportive relationships with family and loved ones are displayed in Appendix B4.

### ***Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults***

Relationships with a nonparental caring adult have been demonstrated to support positive developmental outcomes. In the context of juvenile detention, staff have the potential to foster such caring relationships with young people.

**Overall, many youth shared that they viewed at least some staff as having caring and respectful relationships with youth. Youth opinions were more split about whether staff were consistently fair in their treatment of youth.**

**For the most part, youth had positive relationships with some or most of the Hall staff and many staff treated them with respect.** Many of the youth interviewed identified at least one Hall staff member who expressed immense kindness toward them and genuinely cared about their well-being, although other staff did not. Some staff took the time to build trust with youth and were attuned to their needs as human beings. A couple of youth specifically spoke about the trust they had built with Hall staff. Because staff offered kindness and respect, these youth felt comfortable sharing anything that was going on with them without judgment. One of these youth spoke about how staff members gave them life advice. One young person shared the following example:

Majority of the staff, they actually care, and they want us to, I want to say, be as happy as you can be inside here. So they will try and make you comfortable and try strongly to work with you. But there are some staff who just don't give a f\*\*\*, and they will just not care what you have to say or what you think about. But from majority of the time, for me, the staff always cares for me.

Youth shared that staff showed support for youth in a variety of ways, and that some staff made the effort to give youth helpful resources to make their experience in the Hall more comfortable. Some youth reported that staff gave them better quality hygiene products because the standard ones often made youth break out. A couple of youth spoke about how staff hosted game nights in the Hall and that staff played alongside youth. As another example (with detail in the box to the right), the youth described how staff's responsiveness made them feel supported during a challenging situation.

One important piece of positive relationships is responsiveness, the ability to attend to a youth's needs in a timely manner. One youth shared that a staff member responded to an urgent situation rather quickly with great care and support for well-being. The young person shared,

"Well, one staff, yesterday, he came to check on me. .... And I felt like somebody was there for me."

**Other youth spoke about how they and others had negative interactions with staff and that staff did not treat them with respect.** As mentioned previously, one youth indicated that some nursing staff treated them disrespectfully, and would not treat youth with respect if they thought youth had an attitude. However, a few youth mentioned that other youth often treated the staff with disrespect. One youth described it in this way: "Staff be trying they hardest not to get into it with kids, but say you keep pushing the staff buttons, they will kind of treat you different. Kind of. Not really, but kind of."

**In addition to care and respect, youth expressed split opinions when discussing fair treatment by staff.** Some youth agreed that everyone was treated the same but others indicated differential treatment. In an alarming example, one youth mentioned that staff treat Latinx youth worse. This goes against culturally responsive programming principles and reinforces

Yeah, some of them are racist too. They're racist to Hispanics. A lot of them are racist to people that don't speak English. They make fun of them, telling them to go back to their country, like, "I don't know why you came here." They be talking crazy.

structural disparities prevalent in and beyond the Hall. Any youth-serving programming needs to foster environments where social identities are respected and even celebrated (Simpkins et al., 2017). This youth explained: "Yeah, some of them are racist too. They're racist to Hispanics. A lot of them are racist to people that don't speak English. They make fun of them, telling them to go back to their country,

like, "I don't know why you came here." They be talking crazy."

As described in the discussion of rules and consequences, one area that youth saw unfair treatment was in terms of inconsistent application of rules, rewards, and consequences. Some youth described the different ways staff favored some youth (including themselves) over others. For example, one youth described how they were able to access additional hygiene products due to their relationship with staff:

Oh yeah, my hygiene's good. I got dove, I got some Colgate, I got a towel. I'm not going to lie, if you do good, you can ask the unit manager, "Oh, can you give me some soap? Some Dove soap or some Old Spice? See I'm doing good." "All right, I'll see what I can do. Bring it back the next week." So our hygiene stuff is pretty good. And everybody shares with each other, so we all get good hygiene.

Another youth indicated that youth could avoid losing points if they had strong relationships with staff members. Youth stated that some staff took away points from youth even if the youth did not break any rules. As mentioned previously, several youth pointed to differential application of rules and consequences by gender, such as staff taking points away from male youth but not from female youth, even if young people of all genders broke rules.

A couple of youth spoke about how fairness of treatment is essentially dictated by which staff were present at the Hall on a given day. Youth shared that staffing at the Hall can be relatively inconsistent. Youth shared that staff who work more consistently in units seemed to treat the youth with more kindness and fairness. As one youth explained, "There's not a lot of permanent staff designated for this unit.... With that being said, though, the few people that are somewhat consistent in here, I definitely feel that they're very supportive and caring."

For closed-ended questions relevant to supportive relationships with other caring adults, see Appendix B5.

## Discussion and Future Directions

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### Discussion of Findings

In this report, we presented findings on the perspectives of young people detained in the San Francisco Juvenile Hall via qualitative interviews with 30 youth and young adults. Specifically, we explored young people's perspectives about the Hall as a developmentally appropriate environment, their experiences of opportunities for development, and supportive resources and relationships.

In our analysis, several themes emerged around youth perspectives of key strengths and areas for improvement for the Juvenile Hall as a developmentally supportive environment with the necessary opportunities, resources, and relationships.

**Developmentally Appropriate Environment—Meeting Basic Needs:** Young people described the degree to which the Hall environment met their basic needs. Although most youth shared that they felt emotionally and physical safe in the Hall, several youth shared limitations on how emotionally open they felt they could be due to the nature of the facility. In terms of meeting basic needs, young people also identified that the Hall had poor-quality food, uncomfortable sleeping conditions, and poor-quality hygiene products (e.g., Bob Barker brand). Research evidence aligns with young people’s observations: for example, prior research demonstrates that adolescents experience a delayed sleep schedule that is better aligned with later sleeping and waking times (Hagenauer et al., 2009). Allowing the youth to stay up a little later will allow them more time to socialize and build relationships with others as well as partake in activities meaningful to their development. In addition, research shows that time outside is associated with youth well-being (Jackson et al., 2021).

Young people did describe positive experiences with mental health care. This aligns with evidence that mental health promotion is a key public health priority in adolescence. However, youth identified several conditions of the Hall that may affect their mental health, including youth ability to take time alone (and for some, the fear of time alone) as well as barriers to spending quality time with family and loved ones. While most youth were overwhelming positive about the existing SPY services, several youth shared that they did not use it; others shared that their family was unable to visit, meaning they lacked a critical source of social support. Further, youth who are detained may be more likely to face additional co-occurring mental health challenges and prior trauma, and this may be exacerbated by confinement. These challenges are unique to juvenile detention and correctional facilities and may be linked to why juvenile detention is harmful for young people’s mental health (Seiter, 2017). Given this, research points to innovative approaches that juvenile detention centers can take to promote mental health including opportunities to engage with mentors inside the Hall, or coordinating programming with community-based mentors, such as partnerships with local universities to engage students as peer mentors (Pitzel et al., 2021).

**Developmentally Appropriate Environment—Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms:** Young people shared many ways the Hall and its staff did not provide consistent rules, rewards, consequences, or social norms. What youth described is inconsistent with developmentally supportive environments (Benson et al., 2007; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020). Youth stated that at times, the consequences appeared to remove fundamental rights or violate the institution’s policies, such as limiting or removing youth access to phone calls or

visits, and using group sanctions. Particularly for young people who are exposed to the juvenile justice system, creating structure, and consistent rules, expectations, and consequences must consider higher exposure to prior trauma (Duron et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021), which in turn may lead to negative emotional regulation (Villalta et al., 2018; Young et al., 2019), such as hypervigilance, hostility, and anxiety. In education, research recommends responsive approaches, such as programs to boost developing emotion regulation ability and training educators and staff about the effects of adversity and stress on the brain (Martin & Ochsner, 2016); such approaches could also be employed in juvenile detention settings.

**Opportunities for personal development:** Overall, most youth identified programs they viewed positively. One of the programs that multiple youth preferred, Sunset Youth Services, created opportunities for decision making and leadership through music making. This program is an example of developmentally responsive programming (Simpkins et al., 2017). Programs have the potential to support youth thriving through promoting opportunities for autonomy, supporting youth spark and interests, promoting skill development, and promoting youth identity development, as a host of research demonstrates (Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020; Simpkins et al., 2017). Youth expressed particular interest in opportunities for workforce development certificate and training programs, which aligns with literature describing the importance of access to such educational and training programs for young people who are incarcerated (Ameen & Lee, 2012; Flatt & Jacobs, 2018).

However, overall, young people also described limited choice or alternatives for either programs or education, describing both as compulsory at times. Further, youth did not mention examples of programming that focused on racial, ethnic, or cultural identities, or gender identity and sexual orientation. Research indicates that authentically engaging youth in programs that interest them and resonate for them, and embrace their cultural, racial, ethnic, and other social identities, are culturally responsive (Simpkins et al., 2017). Youth know what programming is best for their development and having freedom to choose programming will aid in identity development (Benson et al., 2007; Osher, Cantor, et al., 2020).

**Access to supportive relationships with family and loved ones:** For such an important developmental resource, youth experienced significant challenges engaging with family members and loved ones on the phone, virtually, or via in-person visits. Several youth shared challenges due to the Hall's limited schedule for visits and phone calls, as well as their family's schedules. Some youth shared challenges about consequences/punishments that remove access to family visits and phone calls. Prior research suggests that continuity and access to supportive relationships is critical, even more so due to the challenges young people face in detention (Cavanagh, 2022). In addition, creating opportunities for family engagement in

programming and rehabilitation for youth who are detained could leverage existing relationships in ways that support youth (Cavanagh, 2022; Heldman, 2022).

**Access to supportive relationships with other caring adults:** Overall, many youth experienced caring and respectful relationships with staff. Prior research indicates that positive relationships with staff that support youth in multiple ways were associated with positive outcomes (Marsh & Evans, 2008; Marsh et al., 2010). Yet young people also identified inconsistent and unfair treatment of youth. Youth witnessed negative differential treatment toward youth from certain racial minority groups. This goes against culturally responsive programming principles (Simpkins et al., 2017) Any youth-serving programming needs to foster environments where social identities are respected and celebrated (Simpkins et al., 2017). These findings point to the pivotal role of staff and the need for training that promotes positive, supportive relationships as well as culturally relevant and responsive practices and programming (Cavanagh, 2022; Lantos et al., 2022). First, staffing matters. Staff who work consistently in the Hall get to know the youth better and tend to foster more positive, supportive relationships which is crucial for youth well-being during incarceration (Benson et al., 2007; Raposa et al., 2019). Further, research suggests that juvenile justice systems must integrate systems-wide hiring, training, and accountability systems to support staff to provide culturally competent, developmentally appropriate (Maltrese et al., 2023; NASEM, 2019; Osher, Pittman, et al., 2020), and leverage community-based partnerships to bring culturally appropriate programming to detention centers (Vergara et al., 2016). Research further indicates that providing young people with an ecosystem of developmentally appropriate and culturally affirming supports can facilitate the conditions for thriving (Cantor & Osher, 2021; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Jagers et al., 2019).

## Youth Recommendations

Next, we present the most common recommendations shared by young people in interviews, across five key areas of developmentally supportive environments (Benson et al., 2006).

### ***Meeting Basic Needs***

Youth had five recommendations for improvements in the Hall which align with the request to meet their basic needs:

- Improve food quality, specifically giving youth larger portion sizes, dietary accommodations, and better seasoning. Youth also requested that if youth express that they need better or different food, to listen and honor their requests, especially if they have any dietary restrictions.

- Increase young people’s access better hygiene products than the commonly used Bob Barker brand. Some youth shared that they were able to obtain better quality hygiene products (e.g., Dove), but access to other brands was not consistent or equitable.
- Provide better quality bed/bedding, especially for youth who experience pain when sleeping in the Hall, even if the current bedding meets Hall standards. Several youth requested that the Hall obtain mattresses that are thicker than the ones you currently have so youth have a smoother sleeping experience.
- Change Hall curfew from 8:30pm to later. Many youth expressed frustration and boredom because they had to stay in their rooms; some shared that it was challenging for their mental health and well-being.
- Organize more trips and activities outside. Youth shared that they had few opportunities to spend time outside on a consistent basis (e.g., a small concrete area on their unit). Many youth identified the gardening program as an example of an outdoor activity, but cited that it was infrequently available to them.

### ***Consistent Rules and Structure***

Youth identified two recommendations for creating more consistent rules and structure:

- Identify alternative punishments to being sent to room. Many youth expressed that being sent to their room as a punishment was challenging or made them feel alone.
- Do not apply punishments to the entire group of youth for the actions of a few youth. Young people identified this punishment as unfair, and requested that other alternatives be used when possible.

### ***Personal Development Opportunities***

Youth had three recommendations for improvement related to opportunities for personal development:

- Seek youth input about their interests to inform programming. Youth shared additional programming that aligned with their interests include sports programming covering a variety of sports and activities, such as soccer, football, basketball; cooking programs; programs that allow outdoor visits; and programs that allow youth to use technology.
- Increase access to trade certificate and workforce programs that will provide young adults with concrete employment options upon release.
- Create more opportunities to access programming and educational services in the quarantine unit, whether virtually or by using daily testing to allow face to face engagement.

### ***Other Supportive Adults***

Youth shared three recommendations to improve their experiences with other supportive adults in the Hall, namely staff:

- Ensure adequate staffing to allow for greater flexibility in activities (e.g., leave the unit to go to the basketball court or go to the gym). According to youth, some activities occur infrequently or not at all because there are not enough staff to facilitate certain activities.
- Provide more support for staff. Many young people shared that they noticed when staff experienced stress at home, or that youth perceived there to be staffing challenges due to retirement or staffing shortages. Youth shared they felt that these external stressors affected staff and their ability to show up for youth. In turn, they saw this as influencing the quality of their relationships with staff.
- Staff should not exhibit racist speech or actions. Youth noted instances where they experienced or witnessed racist behavior and speech from staff, and that this was unfair to young people from targeted groups.

### ***Family and Loved One Support***

Finally, youth made four recommendations to ensure greater access to family and other loved one's support:

- Allow more opportunities for phone calls. There were many ways that youth suggested that phone calls could be made more accessible with small adjustments. For example, many youth requested that the Hall allow longer daily schedule for phone calls and longer length of calls.
- Allow more opportunities for in-person visits. Youth recommended that the Hall address barriers to allowing young people to speak with loved ones, including addressing slow permissions process and allowing additional people beyond immediate family. For visits, youth recommended that additional days be added for in-person visits.
- Allow in-person visits in the quarantine unit. Youth suggested this could be achieved with daily testing requirements.
- Identify additional opportunities for social support and mental health promotion, especially for youth who experience less contact with supportive family members.

### **Limitations**

The current study highlights themes from youth narratives of their experience in the San Francisco Juvenile Hall. Although the themes identified provide rich context to understanding the Hall, they are not intended to be generalizable to other juvenile detention centers. However, there may be learnings or insights that are useful in similar contexts. In addition, a

major limitation we encountered in conducting this study was the degree of surveillance, which is legally required by the Hall, and how this may have interfered with youth comfort and willingness to disclose their experiences with researchers. In addition, we were not able to share the results directly with young people and get their feedback, or solicit additional recommendations from youth in that process.

## **Future Directions**

Despite drastic reductions in the incarceration of young people, youth are still detained and incarcerated. Our findings align with prior research that youth detention as currently practiced may be contradictory to the science of adolescent development. With current momentum towards transforming juvenile detention, including in the state of California, there is tremendous opportunity to make concrete practice and policy changes to make such environments as developmentally supportive as possible (Cavanagh, 2022; Heldman, 2022). Changing juvenile detention facilities to be more supportive requires change at multiple levels, including local policy and practice, and broader state and federal laws (Heldman, 2022). At the local and institutional level, our findings also highlight that elevating youth voices is a crucial piece of making changes that will result in greater results and meaningful advances, along with considering policy changes and staff development.

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# Appendix A. Interview Protocol

## Introductory Questions

We are going to start with some questions to help me get to you know you a little better.

1. How are you doing right now?
2. When did you begin your stay here?
3. Have you been detained in this or any other juvenile hall before?
4. Today is [day] [time of day]. If you were not at Juvenile Hall, what would you be doing right now?

## Programs

Next, I will ask you some questions about the programs that you have access to here. The five response options are Never, Rarely, Often, Always, or Unsure/I don't know. Pick one option that best fits your thoughts. As a reminder, you can always skip a question if you don't feel comfortable answering.

How often are you able to access programs that interest you?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often are you able to access any programs?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often would you say you feel good about your relationship with the program staff here?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

5. Tell me more about your experience with these programs.
  - Probe: How did you hear about or get involved with these programs?
  - Probe: Tell me about the kind of relationships you develop with staff who lead these programs.
  - Probe: Are there barriers to participating in the programs you're interested in?
  - Probe: Are there services or programs you wish were here? If so, what are these?

## Education and Classes

6. Do you go to school here? If so, tell us about your school or classes. (SKIP IF THEY DON'T HAVE ANY CLASSES)
  - Thinking of the classes just mentioned, please answer the following questions with the same response options.

How often do you feel like you are learning in your classes?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often do you feel engaged in your classes?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

7. Tell me more about your experience in classes.

- Probe: What about your experience makes you feel like you are/are not learning or engaged?
- Probe: Is there anything you would change?

8. START HERE IF NO CLASSES: In what ways do you get to explore your own interests (e.g., art, sports, cooking, reading, tech, gardening, music) during your time here?

## Environment

The next questions are about your experiences here at Juvenile Hall. The five response options are the same: Never, Rarely, Often, Always, or Unsure/I don't know. Pick one option that best fits how you feel. Again, you can always skip a question if you don't feel comfortable answering.

How often do you feel comfortable sleeping here at night?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often are you satisfied with the food here?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often are you satisfied with the hygiene products you have access to (like shampoo or soap)?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often are you satisfied with your access to mental and physical health care?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

Now I will ask you about how often certain things happen. You can respond with the same response options. Pick one option that best fits your thoughts.

How often are you able to take time to yourself (alone time) when you want to?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often are you able to spend time outside when you want to?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

9. Tell me more about your experience here whether that has to do with your comfort sleeping, with the food, with the hygiene products, or with your physical and mental healthcare, as well as with the amount of alone time and time you get to spend outside.

- Probe: Is there anything you would change about any of these?

**Rules**

*Now I will ask you about the rules here. You can respond with Never, Rarely, Often, Always, Unsure/I don't know.*

<b>How often are the rules enforced consistently here (as in the same for everyone)?</b>	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
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10. Can you give an example of some rules that you have here?

11. What happens when you follow the rules?

- Probe: How do you feel when that happens?

12. What happens when you break the rules?

- Probe: How do you feel when that happens?

**Phone Calls and Visits**

*Now I will ask you about people in your life. Who in your life are you closest with? This could include friends or family.*

Thinking of your loved ones, what are your thoughts on how often the following things happen? You can answer with Never, Rarely, Often, Always, or Unsure/I don't know. Pick the option that best fits your experience.

<b>How often can you talk with loved ones on the phone?</b>	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
<b>How often can you visit with your loved ones?</b>	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

13. For phone calls, is there anything that keeps you from being able to talk to them as much as you want?

- Probe: Would you like to talk on the phone with loved ones more or less often?

14. For visits, is there anything that keeps you from being able to visit with them as much as you want?

- Probe: Would you like to visit with them more or less often?

### Complaint Process

Now I will ask you some questions about your experience with how concerns are handled at the Hall. You can use the same response options. Pick one option that best fits your thoughts.

How often do you feel comfortable voicing your concerns about how things are at the Hall?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
If you were to file a complaint, how often do you think your concerns would be resolved quickly?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

15. Have you ever made a complaint? If yes, how did the process of making/filing a complaint work?

- Probe: Did things change the way you hoped? Did anything else happen after you made the complaint?

### Staff Treatment

In this last section, I will ask some questions about what it is like to stay in Juvenile Hall. Remember there are no right or wrong answers. The five response options are the same: Never, Rarely, Often, Always, or Unsure/I don't know. Pick one option that best fits your thoughts. As a reminder, you can always skip a question if you don't feel comfortable answering.

How often do you feel staff here care about you?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often do you feel staff here treat you with respect?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often do you feel staff care about everyone here?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

16. Can you tell me more about your experience with the staff here?

17. Can you tell me more about how others are treated?

## Safety

How often do you feel physically safe here?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know
How often do you feel emotionally safe here?	Never	Rarely	Often	Always	Unsure/ I don't know

18. Can you tell me more about your experience with physical and emotional safety here?

### What would you do differently?

19. This is now my last question. If you were running this place, what would you do differently?

Those are all the questions I have for you.

Are there any questions you wished I had asked you or any other feedback you want to share about your experience here at Juvenile Hall?

**Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me. I hope things work out for you.**

## Appendix B. Descriptive statistics for closed-ended questions

**Exhibit B1. Descriptive information for closed-ended questions for Section 1:  
Developmentally Appropriate Environment – Meeting Basic Needs**

	Mean	SD	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Often (2)	Always (3)	Don't know/ unsure	Missing
How often do you feel comfortable sleeping here at night?	1.79	1.93	24%	14%	7%	21%	3%	31%
How often are you satisfied with the food here?	1.33	0.82	10%	41%	24%	7%	0%	17%
How often are you satisfied with the hygiene products you have access to (like shampoo or soap)?	1.54	1.32	31%	3%	21%	28%	0%	17%
How often are you satisfied with your access to mental and physical health care?	2.68	1.46	0%	7%	34%	41%	3%	14%
How often are you able to take time to yourself (alone time) when you want to?	2.44	0.77	0%	14%	21%	52%	0%	14%
How often are you able to spend time outside when you want to?	2.13	2.34	14%	17%	34%	7%	7%	21%
How often do you feel physically safe here?	2.5	0.69	0%	7%	21%	41%	0%	31%
How often do you feel emotionally safe here?	2.3	0.86	3%	7%	24%	34%	0%	31%

**Exhibit B2. Descriptive information for closed-ended questions for Section 2: Developmentally Appropriate Environment – Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms**

	Mean	SD	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Often (2)	Always (3)	Don't know/ unsure	Missing
How often are the rules enforced consistently here (as in the same for everyone)?	2.57	0.66	0%	7%	21%	52%	0%	21%
How often do you feel comfortable voicing your concerns about how things are at the Hall?	1.94	2.13	17%	10%	14%	17%	3%	38%
If you were to file a complaint, how often do you think your concerns would be resolved quickly?	2	2.07	3%	21%	21%	3%	3%	48%

**Exhibit B3. Descriptive information for closed-ended questions for Section 2: Opportunities for individual development**

	Mean	SD	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Often (2)	Always (3)	Don't know/ unsure	Missing
How often are you able to access programs that interest you?	2.57	2.31	7%	10%	31%	17%	7%	28%
How often are you able to access any programs?	2.3	1.81	7%	7%	34%	17%	3%	31%
How often would you say you feel good about your relationship with the program staff here?	2.76	1.58	0%	7%	24%	38%	3%	28%
How often do you feel like you are learning in your classes?	2.53	0.51	0%	0%	28%	31%	0%	41%
How often do you feel engaged in your classes?	2.47	0.62	0%	3%	24%	31%	0%	41%

**Exhibit B4. Descriptive information for closed-ended questions for Section 4: Supportive relationships with family and loved ones**

	Mean	SD	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Often (2)	Always (3)	Don't know/unsure	Missing
How often can you talk with loved ones on the phone?	2.2	0.76	0%	17%	34%	34%	0%	14%
How often can you visit with your loved ones?	1.88	1.83	17%	14%	34%	14%	3%	17%

**Exhibit B5. Descriptive information for closed-ended questions for Section 5: Supportive relationships with staff**

	Mean	SD	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Often (2)	Always (3)	Don't know/unsure	Missing
How often do you feel staff here care about you?	2.32	0.82	0%	14%	17%	34%	0%	34%
How often do you feel staff here treat you with respect?	2.58	0.61	0%	3%	21%	41%	0%	34%
How often do you feel staff care about everyone here?	2.29	0.92	3%	7%	17%	31%	0%	41%

## About the American Institutes for Research

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# Youth Experiences in the San Francisco Juvenile Hall

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## Juvenile Probation Commission

Maura Shramko, PhD, Qualitative Lead | Candace Hester, PhD, Project Director

November 8, 2023

# Agenda

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1. Overview
2. AIR Background: Mission and Portfolio
3. Youth Interviews: Methods
4. Youth Interviews: Findings
5. Questions and Answers

**The mission of the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world.**

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# AIR's Research, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance

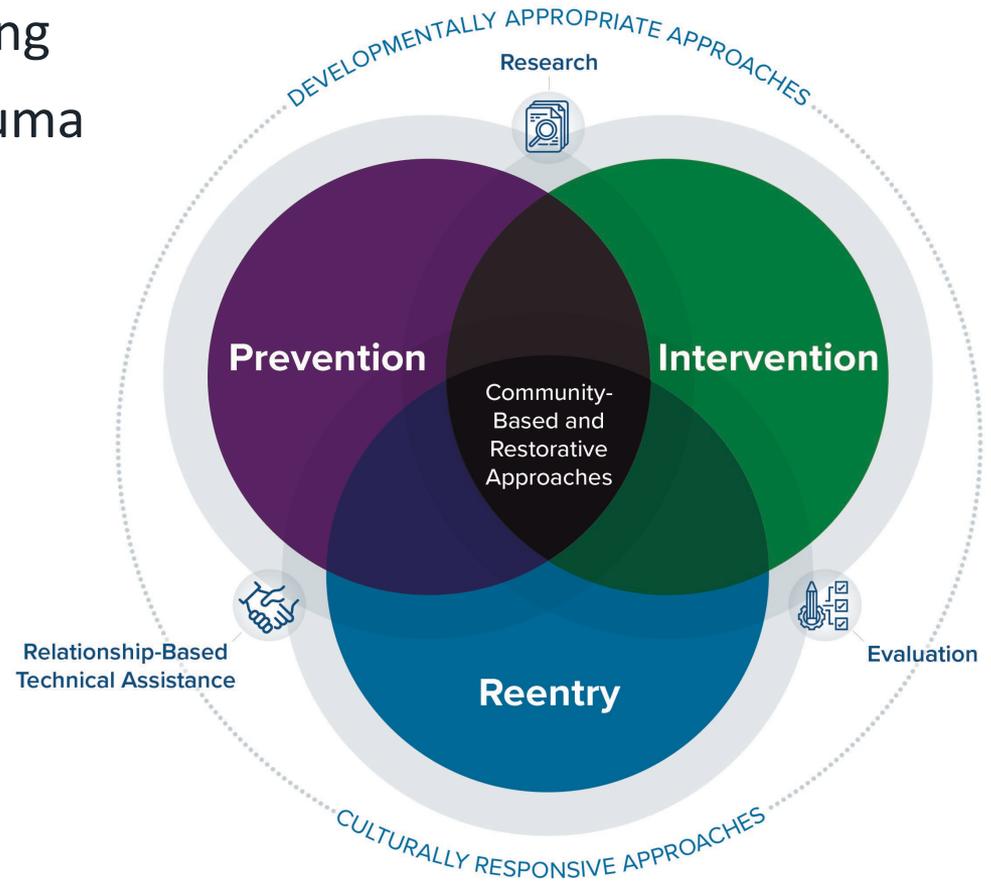
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What does it include?

- rigorous research design and analysis,
- measurement and surveys,
- needs assessment, monitoring, and continuous improvement services,
- knowledge translation and dissemination, and
- participatory approaches.

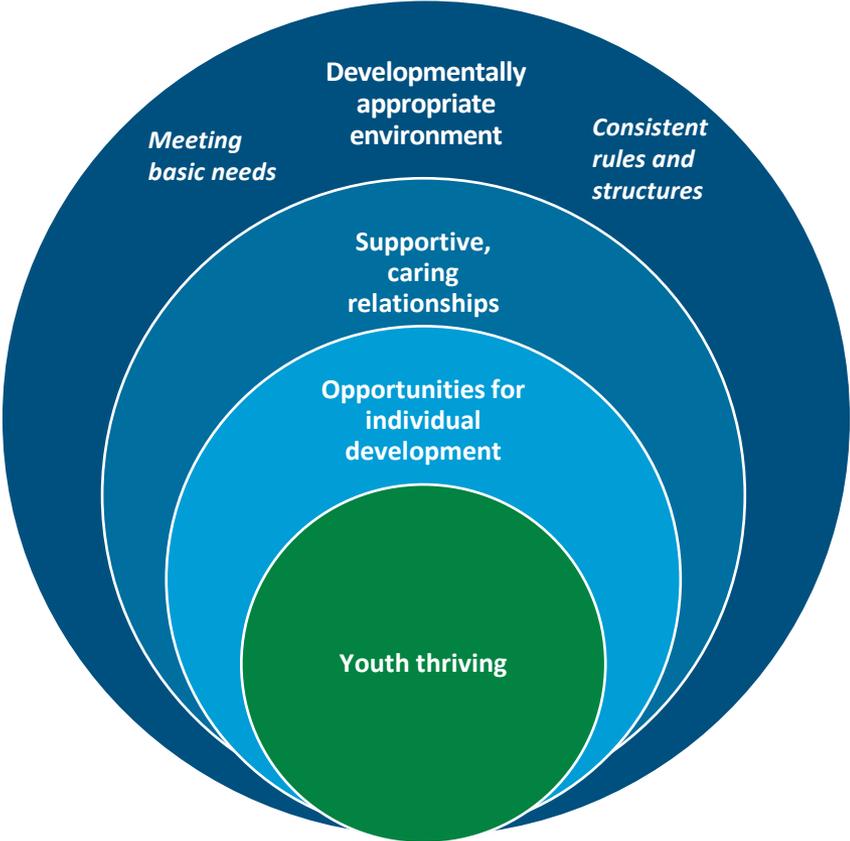
# AIR Portfolio for Advancing Justice

AIR advances justice by addressing the root causes of harm and trauma to promote safety, dignity, and thriving.



# Developmental Lens

How do juvenile detention centers support youth development?



Benson et al., 2007

# Method and Data Collection

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Youth Interviews at San Francisco Juvenile Hall

# Data Collection

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- Thirty youth in 40 separate interviews from November 2022 through February 2023.
- We used in-person and virtual data collection methods.
- Conducted in English and Spanish.
- Youth housed in the quarantine unit were interviewed virtually.
- We obtained parent consent and youth consent/assent, and received a court order authorizing our data collection process.

To protect anonymity, we do not provide demographic information for youth in the Hall.

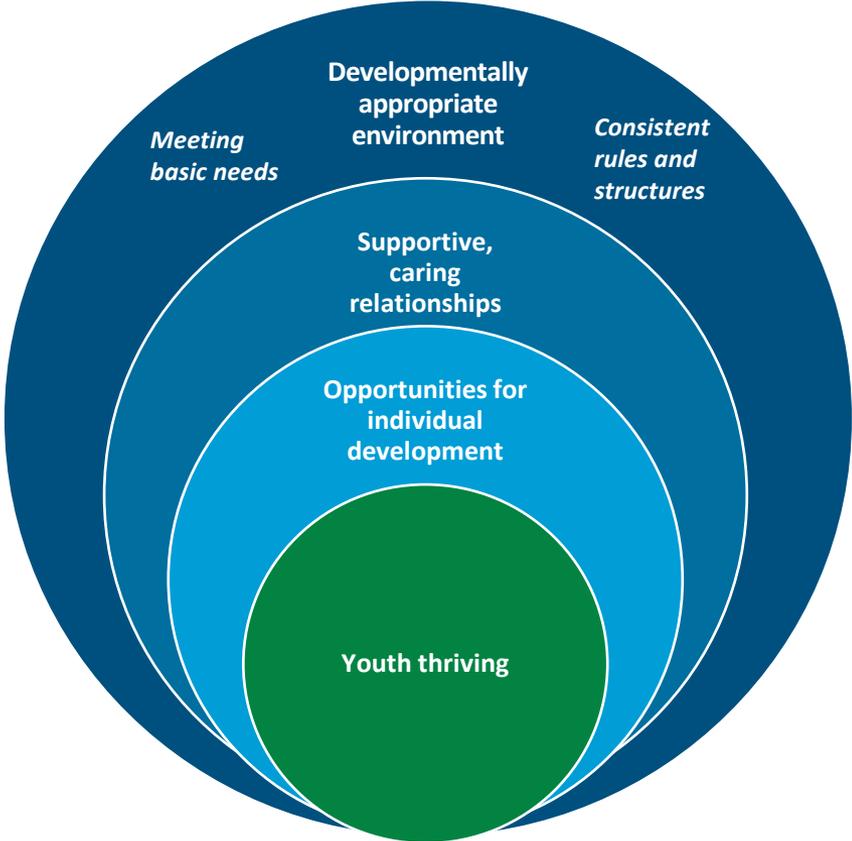
*Note.* <https://nicir.org/noab/>.

# Findings

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## Youth Interviews at San Francisco Juvenile Hall

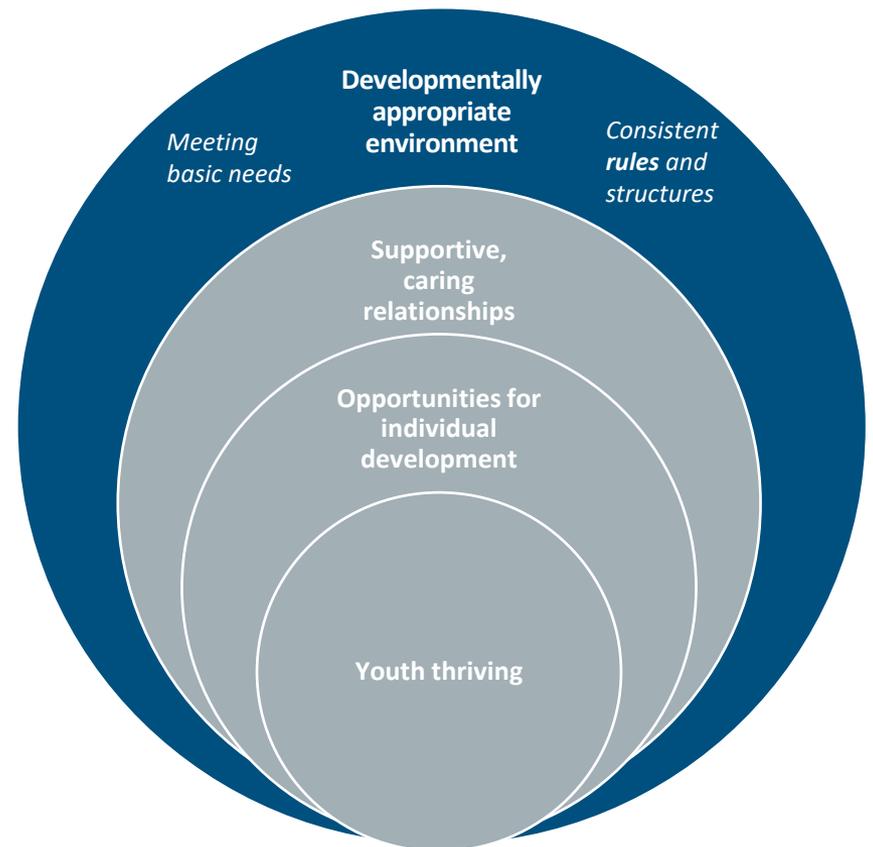
# Developmental Lens



Benson et al., 2007

# Meeting Basic Needs

Developmentally appropriate environments should meet young people's basic needs, including safety, a place to sleep, nutritious food, and space to be alone.



Benson et al., 2007; Osher et al., 2020

# Meeting Basic Needs—Physical Safety

---

Most youth reported feeling **physically safe**:

- One youth shared that:
- “[N]obody in here that’s really a threat. Everybody chill. Everybody gets along in here.”

A couple of youth did not feel safe in the Hall.

- Example: Felt physically unsafe after emergency due to experience with care.

# Meeting Basic Needs—Emotional Safety

---

Most youth reported feeling **emotionally safe**:

- “It’s honestly a positive environment, more than the outside is. The kids in here, we respect each other. Staff, if you have a problem or you just need to talk to someone, you can talk to the staff or you can call . . . and somebody will come up to talk to you. So, there’s a lot of different ways to express your feelings and also feel safe, too.”

On the other hand, many youth also described limits to that emotional safety, sharing that they don’t feel comfortable sharing their emotions in the Hall.

- One youth shared: “I just be like, you can’t really show your emotions in here.”

# Meeting Basic Needs—Mental and Physical Health Care

---

Several youth expressed general satisfaction with their **mental and physical health** care at Juvenile Hall.

Youth did report some challenges with physical health care:

- amount of time to receive care,
- offer of treatment not perceived to be effective, and
- nurse withholding medication as a punishment.

# Meeting Basic Needs—Food

---

Overall, youth perceived **the food** provided at Juvenile Hall to be mediocre or poor.

- A few youth spoke about how Juvenile Hall does not serve enough food and that the food itself is not filling.
- On the flip side, several youth shared that they couldn't complain or were grateful for the food.

# Meeting Basic Needs—Sleeping

---

Most youth expressed discomfort **sleeping** in the Hall, including from the physical conditions.

- One youth shared:
  - “Our beds are, we use yoga mats to go to sleep. These very thin mats. And then right underneath the mat, it is concrete. So, it’s like we always have regular . . . back pain.”
- Other youth who reported not sleeping well described it more generally that “it’s jail,” not home.

# Meeting Basic Needs—Hygiene

---

On the whole, youth were dissatisfied with the **hygiene products**.

- Some youth shared they had negative reactions to the products:
- “I don’t like it. It breaks my body out. When I go home, I have stuff around my mouth, like rashes. Rashes on my back, my legs, everything.”
- However, sometimes youth can obtain higher quality hygiene products.
- As one youth described it:
- “Some people have relationships with the staff, good relationships and they can ask different things and they’ll bring it. That’s why they get it.”

# Meeting Basic Needs—Time Alone

---

Most youth found it possible to take **time alone** when they wanted it. However, many noted that this was possible only in their rooms.

One youth described the limitations of alone time like this:

- “The only time I would be able to take time to myself is when I go to my room. That’s the only time I could get some sort of privacy. And you still really don’t get that anyways, because you’re in a cell with glass windows and somebody walks by your room all the time and looks at you.”

# Meeting Basic Needs— Time Outside

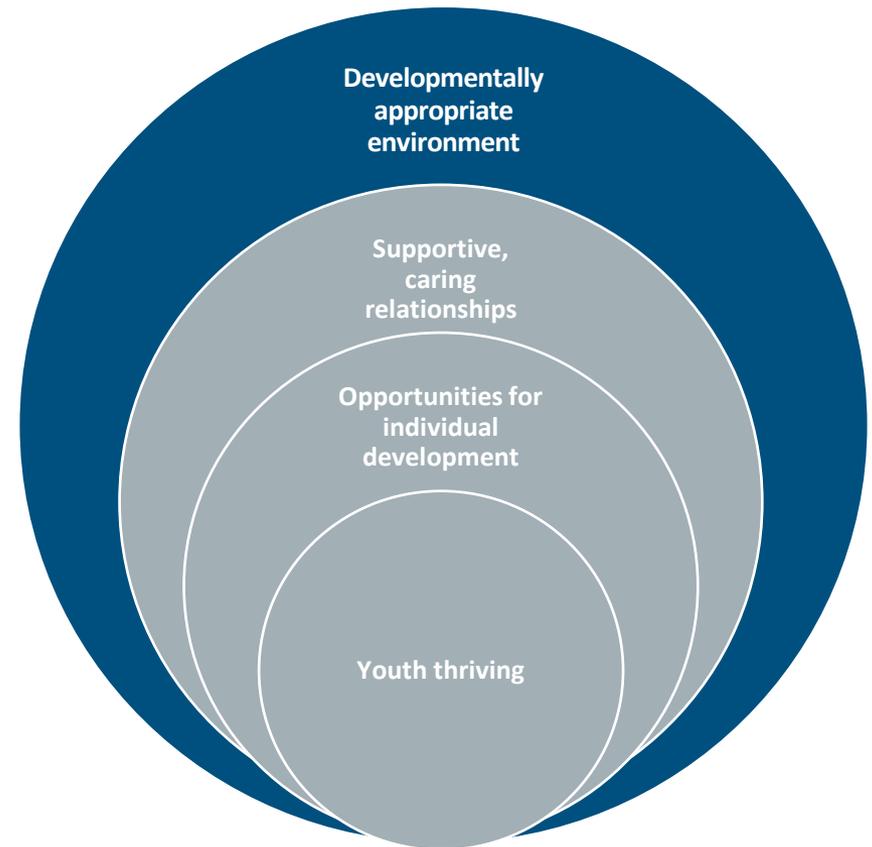
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- A majority of youth said that they rarely or never spent **time outside**.
- As one youth put it:
- “We never go outside. . . . It’s hard because everything is indoors now, so we can go right there. . . . There’s no view, there’s nothing you can see that will calm you down. All you see is just concrete walls.”



# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

Developmentally supportive environments provide consistent structure, including rules and consequences that are applied fairly, boundaries and limits that are age appropriate, and social norms that outline expectations for behavior.



Benson et al., 2007; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Lerner et al., 2012

# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

---

Youth provided an array of examples of **the rules**, with variation across interviews.

- Some rules were common in other youth-serving environments:
  - Raise your hand, listen to staff, no fighting or play fighting.
- Other rules were unique to the secure environment:
  - Controlling youth movements, preventing escalation of violence.

## Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

---

Most youth described a **reward system** where young people earn points daily, leading to multiple tiers based on point totals.

- The top tiers reportedly had corresponding privileges:
  - Tablets, MP3 player, additional time for phone calls or virtual visits
- One youth described the system as follows:
- *“So [the reward system has] four levels. Go up levels and you get more stuff like your tablet, MP3 player, stuff like that. You get rewarded for being good.”*



# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

---

- Youth described a wider array of **negative consequences** that deviated from the point system.
- Commonly reported punishments included:
  - Being sent to their room.
  - Losing points in the merit system.
  - Losing phone call or virtual visit privileges.

# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

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- Many youth described receiving group punishment.
- One youth described it as follows:
  - “Someone breaks the rules, I mean, everybody don’t want to.... Like, two people fighting, right now, they going to make everybody go in their rooms. And that it’s like it falls on everybody. It don’t fall on them two. It falls on everybody.”

# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

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Youth also shared mixed perspectives on the extent to which rules were enforced consistently.

- One youth described:
  - “It’s for everyone...They treat all the kids the same. The rules is just follow the instructions. Your time will be easier. Simple as that.”

# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

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Some youth shared differences in treatment and application of rules.

For example, one young person gave an example of inconsistent application of the rules based on gender:

- “... it was boys and girls [in our unit] just a minute ago and it was boys and girls. But they had to switch it because I felt like the girls was getting special treatment. They get into arguments, they get time to chill out, cool down outside a hour. If it was the boys, they would've sent us straight to our room but now they got their own unit and stuff.”

# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

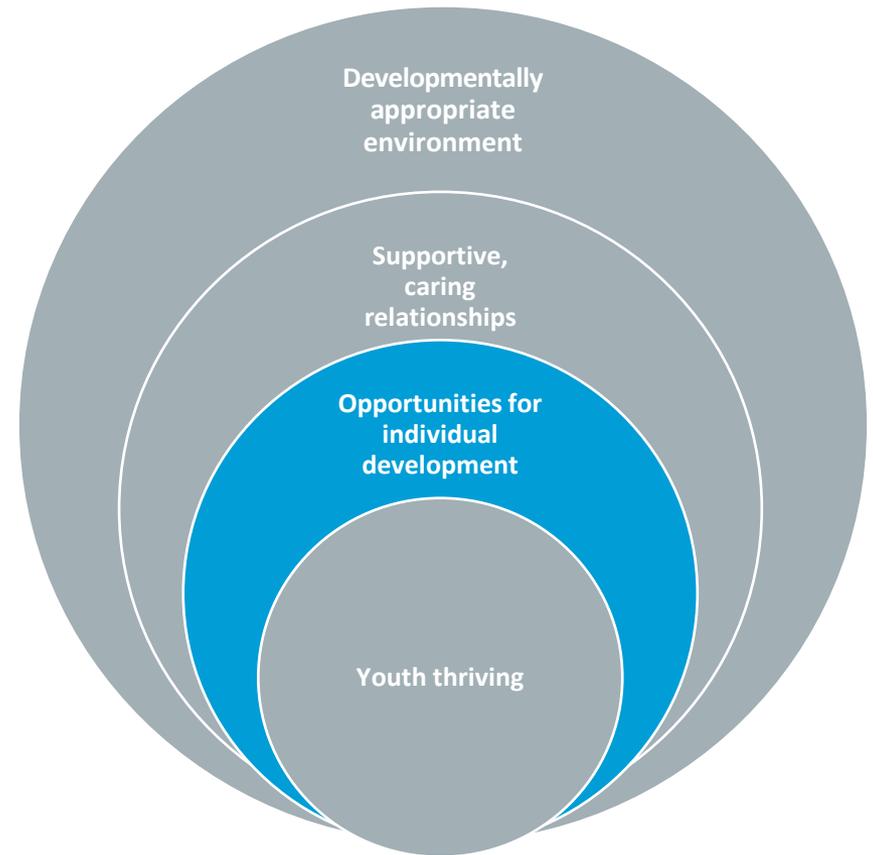
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Another youth shared an example of differential application of **the rules** by racial/ethnic group, where staff treated Latinx youth worse:

- “I feel that there’s a selection of kids that they choose who to let the rules pass by with. And for me, I’m [not] one of those kids. They won’t treat me fair. I don’t know why it’s like that. But I feel like it’s a racial thing toward us.”

# Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

Educational and programmatic activities can provide meaningful opportunities for adolescent skill and knowledge development as well as for young people to explore their interests.



Benson et al., 2007; Berk et al., 2018; Simpkins et al., 2017

# Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

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Overall, most youth identified **programs** they viewed positively.

- Sunset Youth Services was the most popular program among the youth interviewed.
- Youth appreciated the opportunity to create their own music.
- One youth described their experience in the program and how it fostered independence:
- “...when kids was rapping, the lady let me take control of it. And I was doing good. She was just telling me, "You're doing good at this" I was doing everything I like.”

# Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

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However, many youth told us that they participated in **programs** and education to stay busy or due to a lack of other options in the Hall.

- Youth shared that that the Hall rarely took youth input into account when they decided which programs to host.
- One youth explained this lack of youth input:
- “They’ll never come ask our insight on what programs we want to do, nothing. It’s just they set up a program, they say that it’s a program coming through and we got to do it, because it’s expected for us to rehabilitate ourselves and that’s what the judge want to see for people like us to go home. “

# Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

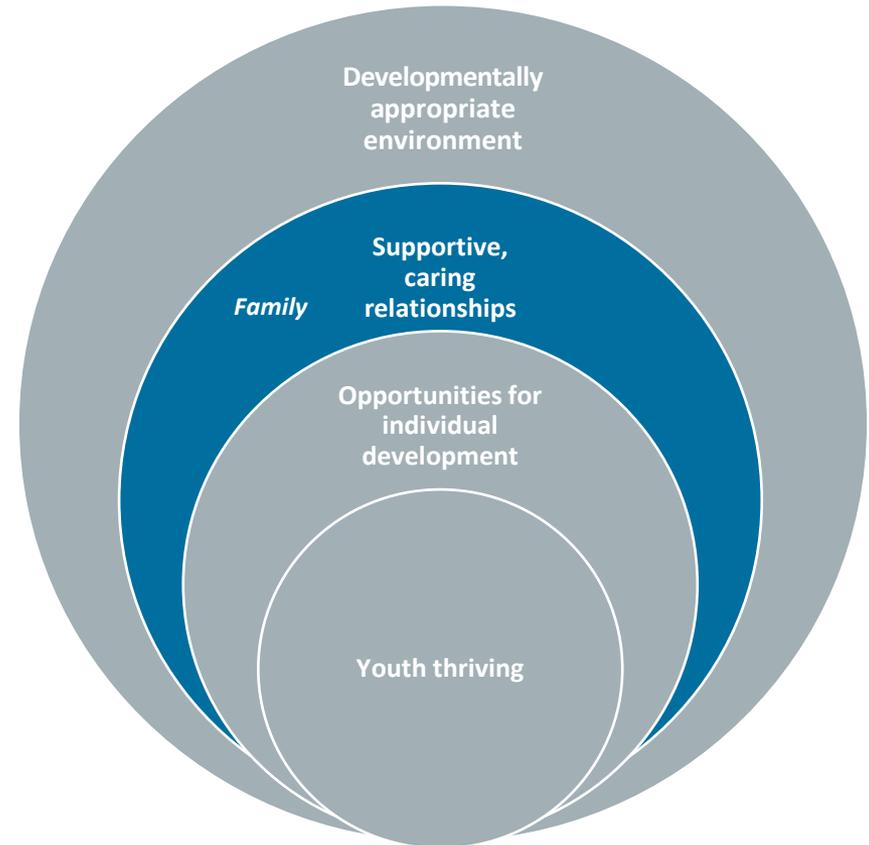
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On the quarantine unit, youth told us that there were no in person activities (programs, classes).

- Multiple youth in the quarantine unit described receiving a self-directed packet of educational materials, but no instruction.
- Youth described the lack of in-person interaction as challenging.

# Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

Warm, responsive family relationships are a fundamental resource throughout adolescence. For young people who are detained, continued access to positive family relationships is important. This is only possible through phone calls and visits.



Osher, Cantor, et al., 2020; Osher et al., 2020; Smetana & Rote, 2019

# Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

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For **phone calls**, youth shared that the number of youth on the unit limited the amount of time they received for phone calls to family.

- One youth explained:
- “It’s different the more people you have in the unit. Because if everybody ask for a phone call, they got to do certain time limits and stuff like that. But the smaller the unit, the more freedom you get.”

# Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

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Youth described a few additional challenges with **accessing phone calls**, including

- difficulty reaching family (e.g., family availability outside phone call hours),
- phones located in common areas and not private,
- needing points in merit system to access phone calls.



## Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

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Some youth shared that they had not yet had an **in-person visit**.

Reasons included

- short stays,
- waiting for permission to have a visit, and
- challenges with family members' schedules.

## Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

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Youth in the quarantine unit did not have access to **in-person visits**, but many shared that they wished they were possible.

One young person suggested that the unit use more frequent testing to allow for in person visits:

- “Yeah, I don’t get that because when we get here we get COVID tested and then still it come back negative. We still got to be here 10 days and they keep testing us, keep testing us and then the staff said they get tested only if they feel like that they have symptoms or something.”

# Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

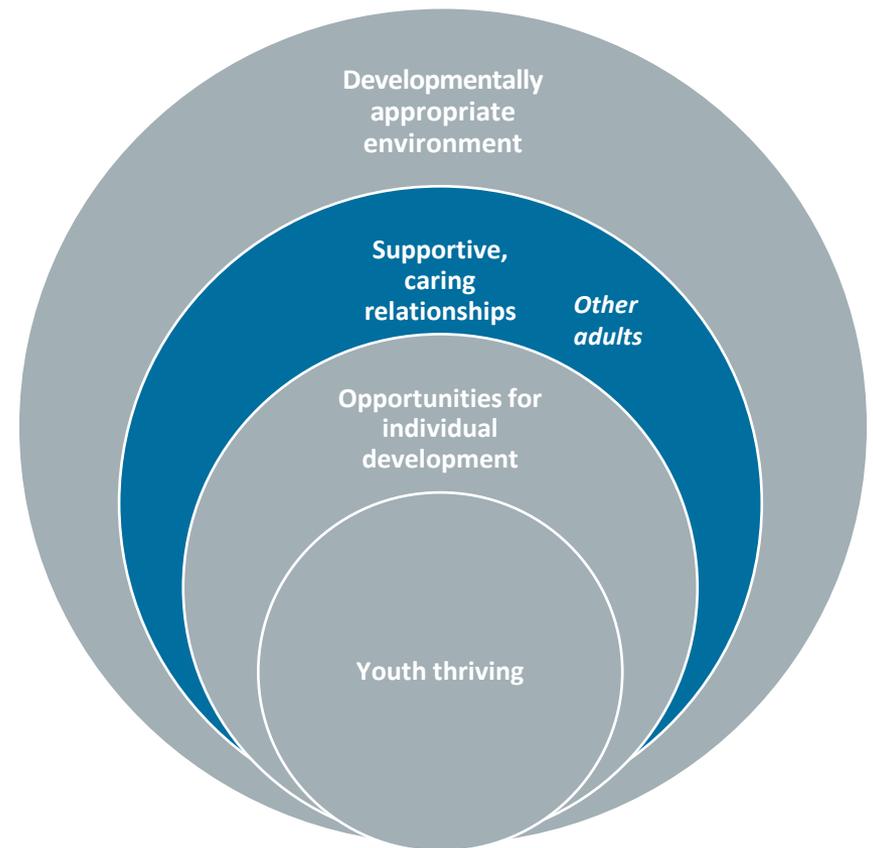
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Youth identified an array of barriers to **virtual visits**:

- Logistics of tablet access,
- Removal of tablet and virtual visit privileges,
- Challenges with family schedules.
- One youth mentioned that their unit manager took away virtual visit privileges from their entire unit:
- “No, we’re not allowed to have virtual visits. . . . One day, there was like . . . I don’t know, I forgot what happened, but the unit manager was like, . . . you guys can’t have visits virtually . . . for some reason.”

# Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

Relationships with nonparental caring adults have been demonstrated to support positive developmental outcomes. In the context of juvenile detention, staff have the potential to foster such caring relationships with young people.



Benson et al., 2007; Bowers et al., 2015; Osher et al., 2020; Raposa et al., 2019

# Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

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Overall, many youth shared that they experienced respectful and caring relationships with some staff.

- One youth shared that a staff member responded to an urgent situation quickly that made them feel cared for and supported. They said:
- “Well, one staff, yesterday, he came to check on me. .... And I felt like somebody was there for me.”

# Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

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- Another shared their perspective that most staff do care:
- “Majority of the staff, they actually care, and they want us to, I want to say, be as happy as you can be inside here. So they will try and make you comfortable and try strongly to work with you.”

# Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

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Youth opinions were split about whether staff were consistently **fair** in their relationships with youth.

Some youth agreed that everyone was treated the same, but others had witnessed differential treatment.

- In an alarming example, one youth mentioned that staff treat Latinx youth worse:
- “Yeah, some of them are racist too. They’re racist to Hispanics. A lot of them are racist to people that don’t speak English. They make fun of them, telling them to go back to their country, like, ‘I don’t know why you came here.’ They be talking crazy.”



## Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

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- Another area that youth saw **unfair treatment** was in terms of inconsistent application of rules and consequences.
- Some youth described the different ways staff favored some youth (including themselves) over others.



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# Youth Recommendations

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# Youth Recommendations: Meeting Basic Needs

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- Improve food quality, specifically giving youth larger portion sizes, dietary accommodations, and better seasoning.
- Increase young people's access to higher quality hygiene products than the commonly used Bob Barker brand.
- Provide better quality bed and bedding, especially for youth who experience pain when sleeping in the Hall, even if the current bedding meets Hall standards.
- Change Hall curfew from 8:30 p.m. to a later time.
- Organize more trips and activities outside.

# Youth Recommendations: Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

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- Identify alternative punishments to being sent to room.
- Do not apply punishments to the entire group of youth for the actions of a few youth.

# Youth Recommendations: Opportunities for Individual Development

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- Seek youth input about their interests to inform programming.
- Increase access to trade certificate and workforce programs that will provide young adults with concrete employment options upon release.
- Create more opportunities to access programming and educational services in the quarantine unit, whether virtually or by using daily testing to allow face-to-face engagement.

# Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

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- Allow more opportunities for phone calls.
- Allow more opportunities for in-person visits.
- Allow in-person visits in the quarantine unit.
- Identify additional opportunities for social support and mental health promotion, especially for youth who experience less contact with supportive family members.

# Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

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- Ensure adequate staffing to allow for greater flexibility in activities (e.g., leave the unit to go to the basketball court or go to the gym).
- Provide more support for staff.
- Staff should not exhibit racist speech or actions.



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# Limitations

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# Limitations

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- Findings may not be generalizable beyond San Francisco Juvenile Hall.
- The degree of surveillance, which is legally required by the Hall, may have limited youth willingness to disclose their experiences with researchers.
- In addition, we were not able to share the results directly with young people and get their feedback, or solicit additional recommendations from youth in that process.



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# Closing

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# Q & A

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What questions can we answer for you?

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# Supplementary Slides

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# Methods

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**Purpose:** Gather feedback from young people about their perspective of San Francisco Juvenile Hall programming, services, staff, and physical environment.

**Semi-structured interview guide** (Creswell, 2007).

- Predetermined interview questions
- Allow flexibility for order, phrasing, and number of questions

**Open-ended interview questions** (Maxwell, 2013; Nelson & Quintana, 2005)

- Youth were invited to share as much or little as they wished.
- Designed to solicit open-ended feedback on what is working well and what could be improved.

# Strategies for Interviews at San Francisco Juvenile Hall

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## **Developmentally appropriate approaches** (Arthur et al., 2017)

- The questions were at an age-appropriate reading level.
- The session length was 45 minutes.
- We built rapport and trust at the beginning of the interview (Woodgate et al., 2020).

## **Cultural competence in practice**

- Our project team has a diversity of backgrounds, lived experiences, and training.
- Our team has addressed potential for bias in the data collection tools and process.
- Our team has experience in qualitative approaches to elevate young people's voices (Woodgate et al., 2020).

# Strategies for Interviews in Juvenile Hall

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**Trauma-informed approach to the data collection** (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017).

- We designed the questions to offer choices for youth.
- We did not include sensitive or personal questions.
- We were aware of and provided options in the physical environment.

# Logistics

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## Parent consent

- For minors, AIR contacted parents approximately 24 hours before the interview.

## How we recruited young people

- Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) placed AIR flyers around the Hall.
- AIR interviewers explained the project generally to all youth present.
- AIR interviewers were situated in a classroom on the unit:
  - Individual youth could approach one on one to learn more.
  - An open door meant youth could come in if they chose.
  - AIR interviewers and individual youth were the only people in the space.
- Youth assent/consent:
  - Youth learned about the interviews and decided whether to proceed.

# Interview Process

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## Interview process (approximately 45 minutes)

- AIR interviewer recorded interview audio.
- AIR interviewer read all questions out loud.
- Youth shared their responses in as much detail as they chose.
- At the end of the interview, the interviewer turned off the audio recorder.

## Confidentiality

- AIR interviewers did not share information with JPD, including those youth who assented or declined to be interviewed.
- Audio recordings do not include identifying information (or if any was mentioned by the youth, it was stripped by AIR prior to analysis).

## Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

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- Many youth shared that they liked the Beat Within Program for:
  - Offering snacks as a reward for completion
  - Being relatively easy to complete
- A couple of youth also liked a program where an adult with prior justice involvement shared their experiences and how they changed their life for the better after incarceration.



# Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms – Grievance Process

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Most youth had not filed a grievance.

Some youth directly addressed any issues with staff themselves, instead of using the grievance process.

Most of the youth who were asked about their beliefs about the grievance process believed it was ineffective.

Examples:

Several youth believed grievances would not be resolved quickly.

Several youth felt that staff would not use their feedback to improve the Hall.

**From:** Francesca Gonzalez francesca@freedom-forward.org 

**Subject:** Urgent: Preventing Youth Sex Trafficking in SF

**Date:** June 5, 2024 at 2:39 PM

**To:** Myrna.Melgar@sfgov.org

**Cc:** Ochoa, Joshua (BOS) joshua.rudy.ochoa@sfgov.org, Zhan, Joy (BOS) joy.zhan@sfgov.org, Esquivel Garcia, Alondra (BOS) alondra.esquivel@sfgov.org, Natasha Dolby nddolby@gmail.com, MelgarStaff@sfgov.org, Jennifer.Fieber@sfgov.org, Jen.Low@sfgov.org, Michael.Farrar@sfgov.org, Emma.Heiken@sfgov.org, Leah.Lacroix@sfgov.org, Andary, Sophia (WOM) sophia.andary@sfgov.org, shokooh.miry@sfgov.org, anne.moses@sfgov.org, Raveena Rihal raveena.rihal@gmail.com, ani.galeria@gmail.com

FG

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This message is from outside the City email system. Do not open links or attachments from untrusted sources.

Dear Supervisor Melgar,

We urge you to understand the significant negative impact resulting from the recent funding decisions by the San Francisco Department for Children Youth and Families (DCYF) to not fund youth sex trafficking prevention or support in our city.

We represent Freedom Forward, a San Francisco nonprofit organization serving young people who are vulnerable to sex trafficking. Everyday, children and youth in San Francisco are sexually exploited and we are seeing a rapid influx of transitional aged youth (TAY), ages 14 -24, being trafficked and experiencing homelessness due to systemic and economic barriers. These youth deserve safety and support, however, the proposed funding landscape leaves this population underserved and ripe for repeated exploitation. Neither Freedom Forward nor the HART program, run by our partner Huckleberry Youth Programs, received any DCYF funds for our prevention work.

Freedom Forward's HYPE Center (Helping Young People Elevate) is San Francisco's only multi-service drop-in center serving young people 14-24, focused on preventing commercial sexual exploitation. Based in the Mission/Potrero Hill area of SF, HYPE Center co-locates a variety of services and resources from community organizations in one youth-focused space – services like mental health, legal services, housing access, showers and food – to ensure vulnerable youth have a coordinated web of support. Rather than reinventing the wheel, HYPE serves as a connection point to leverage the expertise of over 20 youth-serving partners to benefit our community of over 500\* unduplicated, existing HYPE members (\*and growing daily), primarily representing BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and homeless youth.

One compelling success story involves Shanté (she/they; 19) who was immediately struck by the sense of calm positivity at the Center. "Wow - this is all for us?" She shared that she'd been navigating youth shelters and homeless programs but was constantly running around the city, struggling to stay on top of her appointments and applications. She'd been homeless on and off for 2 years, resorting to sex work to earn money for food and basic essentials. Shanté told us she dreamed of a fresh start in life. Upon joining HYPE Center, Shanté first accessed our Basics, which includes access to do laundry on site, "shop" for new clothing, hygiene supplies, and beauty products, and take a private shower. "I feel like my old self!" After attending a sex trafficking education

group at HYPE, Shanté realized she'd been groomed and exploited as a minor. "I always thought what happened to me wasn't ok - but I didn't know it had a name, or that it was illegal." She accessed specialized counseling at HYPE for the first time since becoming homeless and, based on what she shared, was connected to HYPE's on-site legal and housing providers. Shanté was eligible for an SRO and moved in within two weeks, visiting HYPE to express her gratitude to our team. "HYPE has helped me turn my life around. I can bring any issues I'm dealing with and they will listen and connect me with the services I need. And it's all right here at HYPE!"

Shanté is just one of the hundreds of youth members in HYPE Center's community. Notably, 75% of our 534 unique members are either vulnerable to being, or have been sexually abused, assaulted, or exploited. Our team firmly believes that providing access to services and opportunities, addressing basic needs, and fostering a safe, inclusive space for belonging are pivotal in shielding San Francisco young people from vulnerabilities that could lead to sexual exploitation and trauma.

HYPE Center was initially launched in 2019 as part of SF SOL, a continuum of pilot models designed to target and reduce exploitation of youth in San Francisco by providing a variety of services and foster-care placement options. Spearheaded by Freedom Forward and supported by Senator Scott Wiener and Assemblymember Phil Ting, SF SOL was funded by the California Department of Social Services, bringing over \$16.3 million to San Francisco between 2019-2025. We partnered with the SF Department on the Status of Women (DOSW), along with Huckleberry Youth Programs, WestCoast Children's Clinic, and other anti-trafficking experts, to design and implement SF-SOL for two 3-year pilots spanning from 2019-2025. Mayor Breed publicly supported our efforts by stating: "Any young person who is homeless or experiencing exploitation in our streets is one too many. We must do better in San Francisco. This funding will allow us to develop programs and provide services that help our most vulnerable residents and survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, and prevent chronic homelessness in our City."

Unfortunately, the CDSS grant funds have been exhausted and the HYPE Center requires independent funding to sustain our programming to prevent youth trafficking. **We respectfully request an annual \$875,000 investment for 2025 and 2026 via add-back dollars.** This will allow the HYPE Center to continue serving our vulnerable community through 2026, and secure a permanent funding stream. **Without these funds, HYPE Center will have no choice but to close our doors,** leaving our 534 members without a dedicated space to address their basic needs, access specialized services, and be part of a community of support.

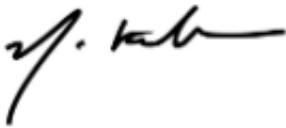
This is a valuable opportunity for the city to invest directly in sex trafficking prevention and to protect our vulnerable children and youth. We welcome an opportunity to share more about what makes Freedom Forward's HYPE Center uniquely positioned to continue filling this gap in San Francisco's direct service landscape. Our team will happily host you and your staff for an in-person tour at the HYPE Center or gladly attend

...happy meet you and your team for an in person visit at the end of summer or during summer  
a visit to your offices.

With deep gratitude for your service and leadership,



Francesca Gonzalez  
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Natasha Dolby  
Co-Founder and Board Chair  
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In Community,  
**Francesca Gonzalez** (she/her)  
Executive Director  
[Meet](#) | [Connect](#) | [Give](#)



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City and County of San Francisco  
Department on the Status of Women



# HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SAN FRANCISCO

Issued: March 15, 2023

2021 Data

## Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by:  
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## Preface

This report examines the scope of human trafficking in San Francisco during the calendar year 2021. It is the fifth report produced and the fourth report to cover an entire year's worth of data.

Eight agencies provided data about trafficked persons and alleged traffickers. Definitions of survivors/victims of human trafficking and traffickers can vary widely, and agencies contributing data to this report may have a range of experience levels in identifying human trafficking survivors. The Department asked agencies to use the federal definition of human trafficking shown below.

*A. Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age, (22 USC § 7102; 8 CFR § 214.11(a)); and"*

*B. Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery, (22 USC § 7102).*

Whether an adult has been trafficked under this federal definition, especially in cases of fraud or coercion, may be unclear, and agencies must make a judgment call in such cases.

Due to limitations in the data, it is not possible to know if multiple agencies are reporting on the same person. For example, take Person A, who was born in and recruited from Malaysia and trafficked in the healthcare industry in San Francisco. Person A might go to Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach for legal services, Asian Women's Shelter for housing, and the Newcomers Health Program for healthcare services. If all three agencies knew that Person A was a survivor of trafficking, they would all include Person A in their reports, but there is no way for the Department to know that Person A was reported three times. It would appear that there were three people from Malaysia and three people trafficked in the healthcare industry. In this example, that duplication would impact our data analysis because Malaysia is not a common country of origin in our dataset, and the healthcare industry is not common in our dataset either.

The numbers in this report must be considered in the context described above. The Department also recognizes that the fact that multiple agencies and people are making the identification is a weakness since, in a traditional research study, a small group of people trained under a specific protocol or screening tool would be making identification and plans to work towards potential solutions.

It is also important to examine bias in what groups of people and industries are thought to be involved in trafficking. According to a study by the International Labor Organization (ILO)<sup>1</sup>, using a combined methodology of drawing from a variety of data sources, trafficking in commercial sex industries is less common than trafficking in other industries. The data in

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<sup>1</sup> International Labor Organization. Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor and Forced Marriage. 2021.

this report concerning the type of trafficking must be viewed with this potential bias in mind. In our data, trafficking in commercial sex industries was reported to be more common than trafficking in other industries. There are several possible reasons why our numbers and the international estimates differ—such as media attention on exploitation in the commercial sex industries, over-policing of the commercial sex industries, and underreporting of labor violations. This report does not address this discrepancy.

Finally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several barriers created for agencies that provided data to past reports, such as increased staffing turnover and the capacity for organizations to provide services to survivors. For example, the Newcomers program, as part of the Department of Public Health, was deactivated during the emergency shelter-in-place due to COVID assignments. These barriers led to a decrease in the number of agencies which provided data for this report.

## Executive Summary

The Department proudly serves as the lead agency for the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking. Having been paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021, the Department on the Status of Women reignited the Taskforce by hosting a series of discussions according to organizational type, focus and subject matter expertise to help shape how it could make the greatest and most meaningful impact. This discussion included a need to update the data last published in the 2019 Report, continue and build those relationships in the broader anti-trafficking community and expand its reach and impact.

As part of this update, the Department found the following key findings. DOSW finds these points of particular interest and will continue to investigate them when considering policy recommendations:

**1. Those under 25 received fewer services than those over 25.**

We generally understand that younger victims are more vulnerable and require more assistance than adult victims. Because of this, it is concerning that our data shows most services are going to adults and, therefore, are not serving the most vulnerable parts of the population.

**2. One-third of trafficking cases were born outside the US.**

While most victims were born domestically, over one-third of cases were foreign-born individuals. The high proportion of foreign-born individuals in this area highlights the diversity of needs for survivors, ranging from food assistance to immigration or language access needs.

**3. Capacity building is an essential function in identifying cases.**

Our data shows the importance of building capacity for organizations as a critical function of not just servicing victims but identifying them. One organization increased the number of cases they handled by a factor of 10 since 2017, primarily due to their increased funding and ability to increase their capacity and avoid turning survivors away.

**4. While reported cases are down, this appears to be due to fewer agencies reporting.**

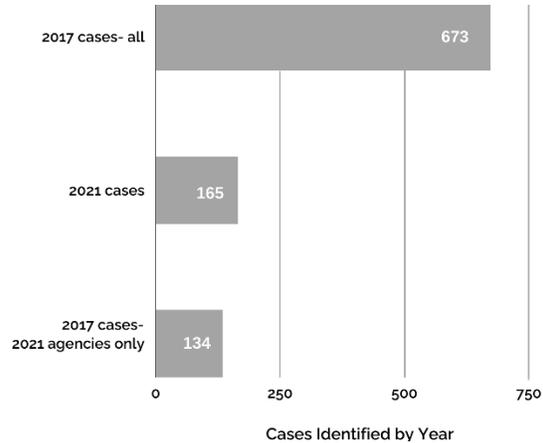
This year, we identified only 165 cases of human trafficking, a significant decrease from our previous report. However, this report had far fewer agencies contributing data, and by matching agencies to previous data collection cycles, we can see that we found an increase in cases from the same agencies.

# Human Trafficking in San Francisco: 2021 Data

## Data

In 2021, eight public and non-profit agencies reported data to DOSW on human trafficking. Human trafficking in this report refers to the definition of "severe forms of trafficking in persons" set forth in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). This definition covers both sex and labor trafficking.

The eight reporting agencies identified 165 cases of human trafficking. While this is significantly lower than the number of cases identified in previous years (673 in 2017, for example), this reporting cycle had fewer agencies participating. Comparing total identified cases across years using the same eight agencies, we saw a moderate increase in the number of identified cases, about 23%.



To protect the confidentiality of survivors, agencies provided aggregated anonymous case counts, which means the same individuals could be counted by multiple agencies and be represented in our data multiple times. Because of this, it is important to note that these data are potentially duplicated across agencies. Past iterations of this report documented the potential severity of this duplication issue; while this report could not replicate that analysis, it is safe to assume this issue is still prevalent in the data.

## Demographics

**Age:** Roughly 88% of cases were individuals under 25. Of this, 49% were minors, and 39% were youth between 18 and 24.

**Gender:** Almost all of the reported cases, 94%, were women (84% cisgender and 10% transgender). About 5% of reported cases were for cisgender men, and only one reported case of a transgender male individual (<1%).

**Race:** Overall, 72% of reported cases were individuals who were people of color. The largest group was African Americans, followed by Hispanic/Latinx and White/Caucasian.

It should be noted that many of the agencies who reported data intentionally focused on specific demographics of individuals, such as Asian Americans. This means the policies of the included agencies bias our demographic data. A more robust network of reporting agencies would alleviate these concerns.

## Capacity Building

**Capacity:** Some agencies substantially increased the number of cases they identified since 2017. For example, our grantee Safe House increased from 5 reported cases in 2017 to 51 cases in 2021. This was partially due to an increase in funding and capacity building at Safe House, which led to a new program for rapid rehousing of those experiencing homelessness and sexual exploitation.

## Location and Type of Trafficking Cases

**Birthplace:** Two-thirds of reported cases (66%) were individuals born in the United States, with one-third of reported victims born outside the US. 21% of reported cases were for individuals born in the Bay Area.

**Type:** The vast majority of reported cases (91%) were sex trafficking cases, compared to 9% of reported cases being labor trafficking cases.



## Services

**Services provided:** Case management and food assistance were the two most common services offered to victims. On average, adults received more services than those under 25.

## System Response

**System Response:** SFPD opened 51 investigations into cases of human trafficking. Of these cases, 11 resulted in arrests, and 9 resulted in charges being brought against the alleged trafficker (all 9 cases are still pending).

## Recommendations

DOSW and the Mayor's Taskforce will focus on three recommendations:

### **1. Reigniting the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking**

This data update highlights the need to rebuild our network of anti-trafficking organizations and for the centralizing presence and organization of the Mayor's Taskforce on Anti-Human Trafficking. Without these coordinating efforts around data collection, our report only has one-third of the cases than were previously captured.

However, when accounting for the loss of reporting agencies, DOSW found an uptick in cases, suggesting an undercounting of the trafficking in San Francisco by a substantial margin.

The Mayor's Taskforce was also valuable in tracking what data was collected and tabulated. The lack of coordination from DOSW's previous leadership was a concern raised by multiple agencies during this data collection effort. Reinvigorating the Taskforce and its focus on working with outside agencies to collect the correct data will improve how much data is received as well as the quality of that data.

### **2. Building Out Capacity in Community-Based Organizations**

This report highlights the importance of capacity building in providing services to victims and identifying cases of human trafficking. By increasing funding to critical organizations, we not only provide more services to victims but lower our undercounting of cases leading to a better understanding of the size, scope and context of human trafficking occurring in San Francisco.

### **3. Looking into Service Gaps**

Our data collection efforts focus on what services are presently being provided to victims of human trafficking. While this information is essential, we cannot understand the gaps between what services are being provided and what services are needed. Accordingly, DOSW suggests shifting our data collection efforts towards what services victims need. Such an approach would allow us to understand what needs are going unaddressed and allow for policy suggestions to match these underlying issues and service gaps.