AB 12 in San Francisco: Supporting Former Probation Youth in Extended Foster Care

Report prepared for the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Commission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present research conducted through an internship with the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) during the summer of 2023. The objective was to understand JPD's AB 12 program, including how it works, who it serves, and any noteworthy challenges and gaps. In addition to background research and data analysis, the author conducted interviews with City and County staff, staff at various service providers, a Superior Court judge, and current and former AB 12 youth.

The Department's AB 12 program[1] is a voluntary, non-probation program that provides extended foster care for youth ages 18-21. JPD provides extended foster care to former probation youth in San Francisco. This report presents four findings:

1) **Relationships are key to help foster youth transition into adulthood.** Establishing trusted connections with youth is essential to their success in AB 12. JPD's AB 12 program leverages existing relationships to support youth in a collaborative effort between social workers, attorneys, the judge, and service providers. Youth retain the same judge and attorney from probation, and social workers work with eligible youth's probation officers to help streamline their transition into extended foster care. While keeping the AB 12 program under JPD allows for relational continuity and specialized support for former probation youth, remaining with the Department can still be traumatic for youth. Inviting community-based organizations (CBOs) to take on greater or more formalized roles in supporting youth could help address these ongoing harms. In addition, the AB 12 program could offer more resources to cultivate permanent connections between youth, family members, and other supportive adults.

2) **AB 12 youth face limited housing options.** Most youth live outside of San Francisco due to a combination of high costs, limited transitional housing locations, and safety considerations. Living outside the county not only means being further from family, friends, and a young person's home community, but may also affect a youth's access to programs. While transitional housing programs – where half of AB 12 youth live—offer on-site services, youth living in self-arranged housing (SILPs) outside of San Francisco may have a harder time accessing resources. Safe, stable, and well-located housing is a critical component to youth success. JPD should ensure that youth—in both SILPs and transitional housing—have adequate financial resources to afford housing wherever a young person chooses to live.

3) **Existing gaps include individualized support and financial literacy.** Staff and service providers report that AB 12 youth often lack basic life skills. Addressing this need requires more individualized guidance and support, such as those offered through organizations like SFCASA that assigns Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to youth. Connecting youth to resources that are relational-based and responsive to their identities can help them take full advantage of services. Financial literacy was also identified as a major gap. JPD should expand its financial coaching program to all AB 12 youth and also identify how to meet other needs in mental health, transportation, housing move-in costs, and college readiness. Finally, due to staffing turnover at service providers, youth referrals do not always go through. The City and County is currently pursuing a Justice Services Care Coordinator strategy, which could better ensure that youth referrals are connected to outside programs.

4) **More resources are needed to support youth beyond AB 12.** Youth aging out of AB 12 face a loss of financial and social support. Moreover, there is a lack of needs-appropriate housing and services

[1] "AB 12 program" and "extended foster care" are used interchangeably in this report.

after age 21, increasing the risk of homelessness, financial insecurity, and recidivism. The City and County currently does not have enough transitional housing and housing vouchers for youth emancipating from AB 12. However, recent initiatives have aimed to ease this transition, including San Francisco's Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and the State's Guaranteed Income (GI) Pilot. JPD should build upon these initiatives by formalizing post-AB 12 support in a community aftercare program, continuing to fund guaranteed income, securing contracts for THP+ out of the county, and advocating for SB 9. JPD should also collect and report on data related to youth outcomes.

This report presents eight recommendations, which include emphasizing permanency, supplementing monthly financial support, addressing needs in individualized support and financial literacy, formalizing a community aftercare program, securing out-of-county THP+ beds, and supporting state-level advocacy efforts. Report findings were presented to the San Francsico Juvenile Probation Commission on October 11, 2023.

VALUES AND POSITIONALITY STATEMENTS

Values Statement

The findings and recommendations in this report strive to combine an ethic of care with systems-wide analysis towards creating alternative spaces of safety, nurture, and affirmation for youth impacted by the juvenile justice and foster care systems. This report recognizes that these systems have historically inflicted significant bodily and societal harms upon Black families and other communities of color and acknowledges the complicity of carceral and child welfare institutions in reinforcing the surveillance of these communities. In an effort to repair and reduce this harm, this report seeks to provide recommendations on how the AB 12 program of extended foster care, situated at the porous border between juvenile and adult criminal legal systems, can better intervene and remove youth from the cradle-to-prison pipeline. The analysis employs a holistic approach that values lived experiences as a means to bring greater depth to quantitative data.

Author's Positionality Statement

Marisa Lin (she/they) is a Chinese American daughter of educated immigrants who settled in Rochester, Minnesota, land of the Wahpeton people. She is a writer, public servant, and graduate student pursuing a Master of Public Policy degree at the University of California, Berkeley. Their interests are centered upon the transformation of the criminal legal system into just, community-based solutions. Her work in this area includes auditing the San Jose Police Department, volunteering at San Quentin State Prison, and this report. As an East Asian woman who has had minimal direct contact with the criminal legal system, Marisa recognizes the limitations of her own knowledge and seeks to continually learn from the experiences of directly impacted individuals and communities.

BACKGROUND

The AB 12 program offers voluntary, extended foster care for youth aged 18 through 21 in California.[2] Previously, foster care in the United States ended when a youth turned 18. However, studies indicated that youth aging out of care at age 18 experienced poorer outcomes compared to their peers, including in education, employment, and mental health.[3]

In 2008, the federal government passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which among other provisions permitted states to use federal Title IV-E funds[4] to fund foster care services up to the age of 21. Two years later in 2010, California adopted this measure and passed AB 12, which made extended foster care available within the State.

The goals of the AB 12 program are to provide:

- A safety net for youth as they transition into more independent living environments
- More time to address trauma and pursue education and employment goals
- Opportunities to cultivate connections with supportive adults
- Skills for self-sufficiency and adulthood.[5]

The program's premise is that providing stable housing can enable transitional aged youth to better focus on their education, employment, and health, along with forming lifelong, supportive connections with other adults. Youth receive monthly financial payments in the form of a direct payment from the County or transitional housing agency and the support of a case worker.[6] Studies showed that youth who remained in foster care after 18 were more likely to pursue postsecondary education, have higher earnings, and delay pregnancy.[7]

To be eligible for AB 12, youth must have an out-of-home placement order before the age of 18. An out-of-home placement means that a minor has been removed from their home by the Juvenile Court. Once in the program, youth must meet at least one of five participation criteria. Exhibit 1 summarizes these requirements. While in the program, young people must meet with their social worker monthly and have court status hearings every six months to review their progress.[8]

[2] In legal terms, these youth are referred to as Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs).
[3] Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Ruth, G., Keller, T., Havlicek, J., Bost, N. (2005). Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
[4] Title IV-E of the Social Security Act refers to the federal foster care entitlement program.
[5] From the Extended Foster Care Factsheet created by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).
[6] More information on these financial payments can be found in Appendix C.
[7] Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A. & Pollack, H., (2007). When Should the State Cease Parenting? Evidence from the Midwest Study. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
[8] AB 12 youth are not required to attend court hearings.

Exhibit 1: AB 12 Eligibility and Participation Criteria

Initial Eligibility Requirements	Ongoing Participation Requirements
• Must have an out-of-home placement order by age 18 • Must be off juvenile probation* • Must be able to meet one of the ongoing participation requirements (right)	• Must live in an approved placement • Must meet monthly with social worker • Must meet one of the following: 1) Secondary education 2) Post-secondary education 3) Employment of at least 80 hours per month 4) Program designed to "promote or remove barriers" to gaining employment 5) A documented medical condition that prevents the youth from doing any of the above

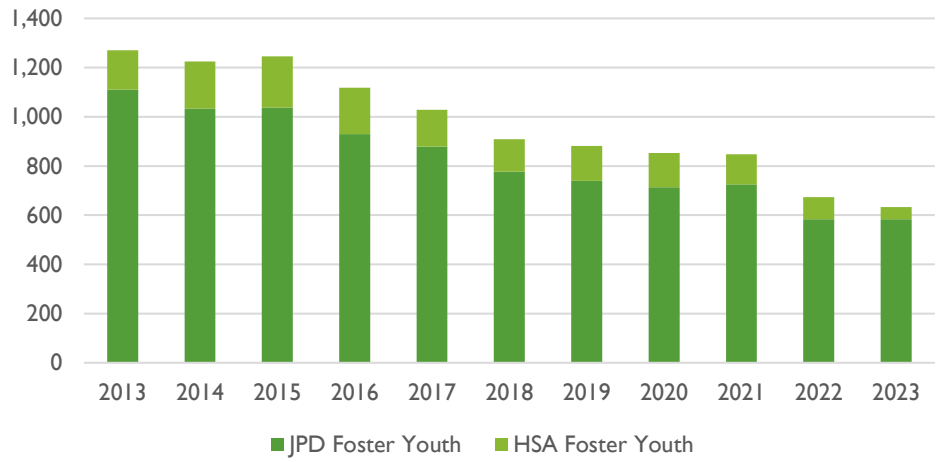
Source: All County Letters 11-61 and interviews with JPD staff.
*San Francisco requirement. Youth who do not successfully complete their probation are still eligible for AB 12. However, they may need to meet certain expectations before entering the program.

San Francisco has separate AB 12 programs for former probation youth and all other foster youth.

In San Francisco, AB 12 youth are served through two agencies: the City and County's Human Services Agency (HSA) and Juvenile Probation Department (JPD). JPD serves youth involved with the juvenile justice ("delinquency") system and HSA serves youth involved with the child welfare ("dependency") system. In the dependency system, the government removes due to abuse or neglect, while in the delinquency system, the government removes them due to delinquency conduct.

Overall, San Francisco's foster youth population has declined over the last decade. JPD's foster youth population has historically been smaller than HSA's. As of January 1, 2023, there were 583 foster youth in San Francisco's dependency system and 50 foster youth in the county's delinquency system.

Exhibit 2: Total Foster Youth in San Francisco Has Declined



Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (UC Berkeley) with data from the California Department of Social Services. Data includes all foster youth up to age 21.

JPD's AB 12 program involves social workers and other stakeholders.

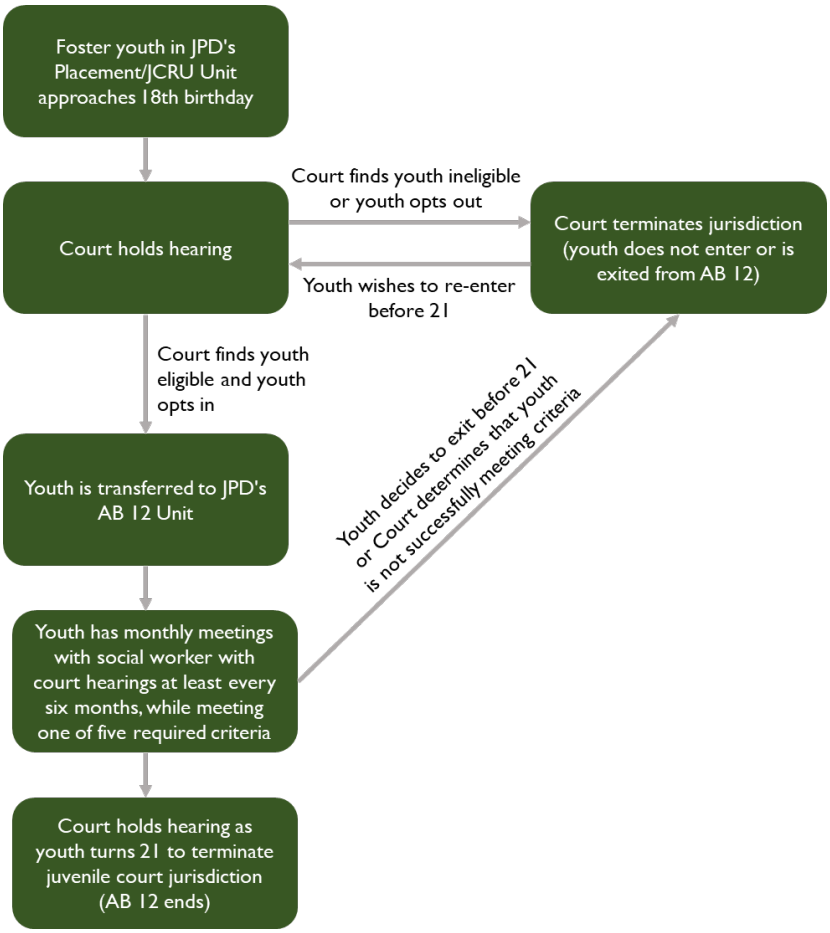
JPD's AB 12 Unit runs the Department's AB 12 program. This unit primarily consists of three social workers and a supervisor.[9] For youth eligible for extended foster care, AB 12 staff work directly with the probation officer to understand a young person's needs and how to support them in AB 12. Finding 1 describes the advantages of this arrangement, which includes facilitating warm handoffs between units and allowing social workers to consult probation officers if any issues arise in the program. Youth are typically transferred into AB 12 from the Placement/JCRU Unit. [10]

It should be noted that AB 12 is a voluntary program. As a young person approaches 18, their probation officer is supposed to inform them of AB 12, including the program's benefits, requirements, and expectations. The young person can then choose whether to opt into the program. This process is displayed in Exhibit 3.

[9] Other support staff include unit secretaries and a Senior Supervising Probation Officer. As of this writing, one social worker was out on maternity leave.

[10] Unless the youth is over 18, in which case they would be entering on their own from outside JPD. JCRU stands for Juvenile Court and Re-Entry Unit.

Exhibit 3: AB 12 Program Flowchart



Source: Analysis based on staff interviews.

Social workers are typically a young person's primary contact in JPD's AB 12 program. They support youth in meeting their goals for AB 12, ranging from education, and employment to health, parenting, and independent living skills. In their monthly in-person meetings with youth, social workers check in with the youth on how they are making progress towards these goals. Social workers document this progress in court reports filed at least every six months.[11]

Social workers help youth in a variety of areas, depending on their needs. Social workers may assist youth with tasks such as opening a bank account, applying to jobs, applying to college, securing housing, and making appointments. In addition, social workers also connect youth to outside resources, such as for mental health, education, job training, and independent living skills.

Young people also receive support from an attorney and judge. Their attorney, typically from the Public Defender's Office, is usually the same one who has represented the youth in their juvenile delinquency case and continues to represent them at AB 12 court hearings. They also address any legal issues that may arise for the youth, such as gender and name changes, restraining orders, and adult criminal cases. The judge determines a youth's eligibility for the AB 12 program and holds regular court hearings every six

[11] May be more frequent depending on if an interim report is requested by the court.

months—sometimes more frequently, depending on need—to discuss a youth's progress. Unlike criminal courts, AB 12 Court is structured as a collaborative, non-punitive court. More information on AB 12 Court can be found in Finding 1.

Exhibit 4: AB 12 Roles

Social Worker (JPD)	Judge (Superior Court)	Attorney (Public Defender)
• **Meets monthly** with youth • **Provides support and guidance** • **Initiates referrals** to service providers • Collaborates with **young person's support team** • **Writes court reports** every six months	• Determines youth **eligibility** for the program • Receives **court reports** • Hosts **court visits** for each youth at least every six months • Identifies **areas for additional support** and connects youth to resources	• Addresses and represents youth on any **legal issues** that may arise (i.e., adult cases, restraining orders, gender/name changes)

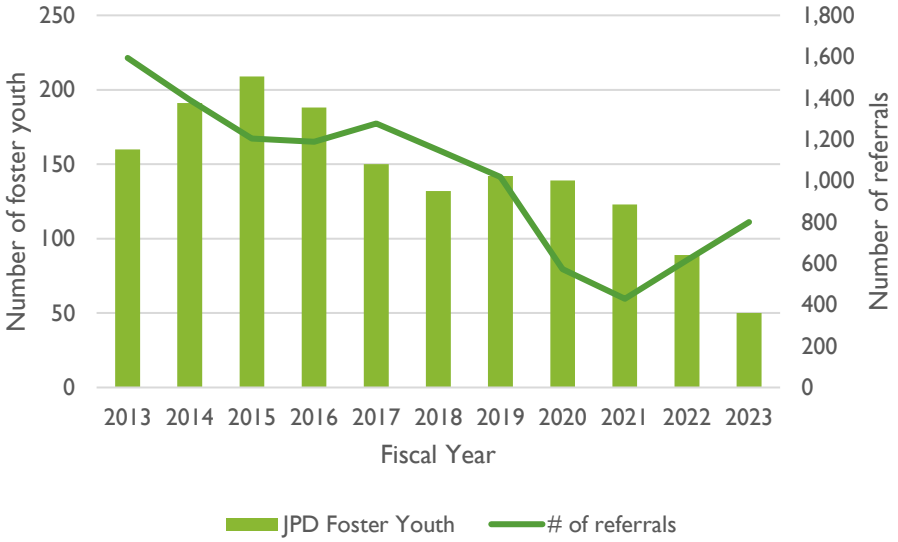
Source: Interviews with various County staff.

The number of AB 12 cases has decreased since January 2022.

The AB 12 program is a "downstream" program in that it receives youth after they have been involved in both the delinquency and child welfare systems. To be eligible for JPD's AB 12 program, youth must have completed probation and have an out-of-home-placement (OOHP) order prior to turning 18. This means that youth in the AB 12 program are a subset of the youth already on JPD's caseload.

Not all youth who enter the juvenile justice system will end up in the AB 12 program. However, there is a rough parallel between the number of referrals and the total number of foster youth (which includes both youth in and not in the AB 12 program) with JPD. Exhibit 4 shows how JPD's overall foster care population (including AB 12 youth) has declined with the number of referrals, except in recent years.

Exhibit 5: Referrals and JPD Foster Youth



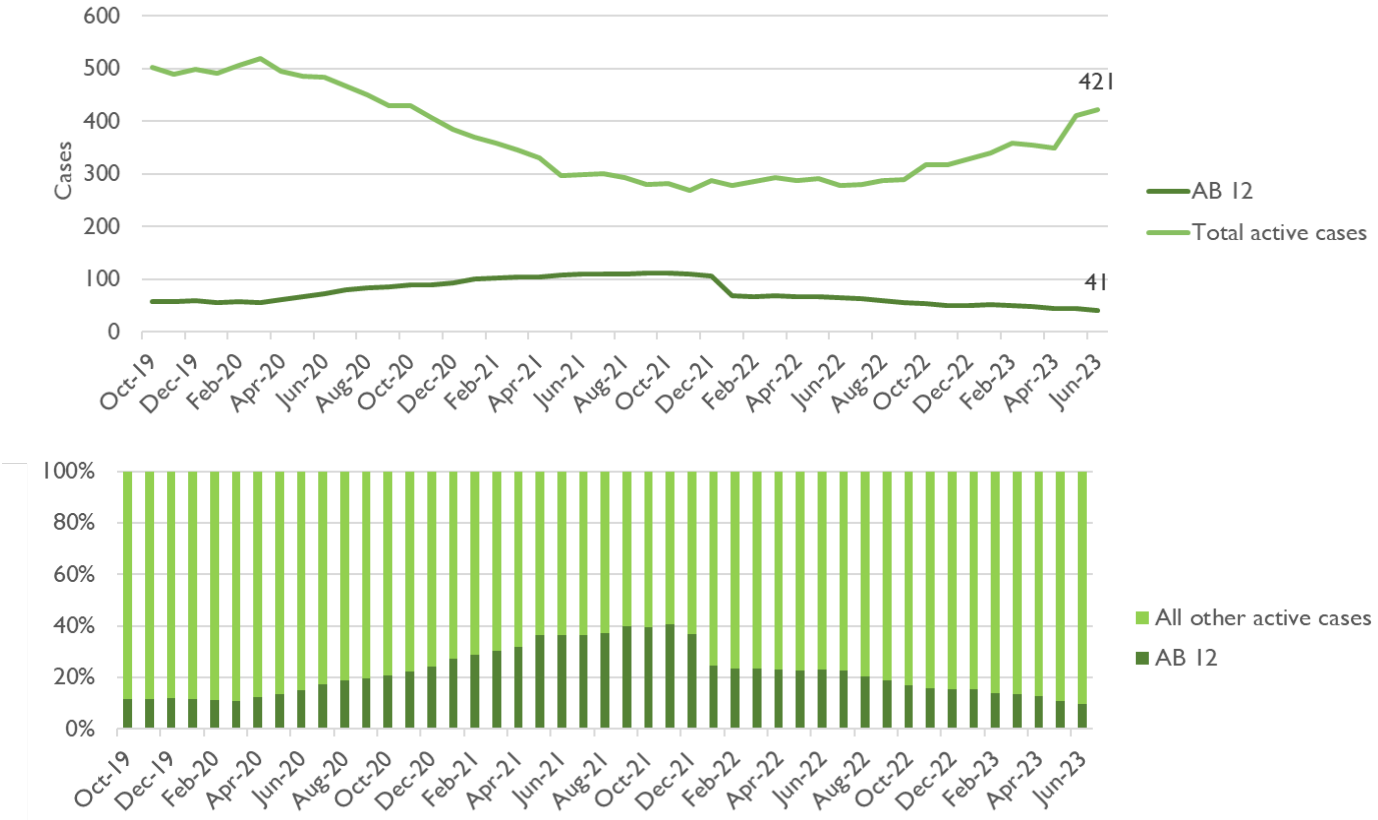
Source: JPD Annual Reports and California Child Welfare Indicators Project (UC Berkeley) with data from the California Department of Social Services. Note that while the foster youth population is a point-in-time count (as of January 1), the number of referrals is cumulative over the fiscal year. The number of referrals for 2023 was combined based on monthly reports for July 2022 through June 2023.

Other factors that affect the number of youth in the AB 12 program are the rate at which foster youth choose to opt in to AB 12 benefits and their length of stay in the program. The COVID-19 pandemic affected both these factors. In August 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom extended foster care benefits through December 2021. As a result, youth who would have aged out on or after January 27, 2020 were able to remain in AB 12 longer. In addition, staff reported that the pandemic caused some youth whom had originally opted out of extended foster care to enter the program to alleviate financial strain.

From February 2020 to December 2021, the number of AB 12 cases increased by 86 percent.[12] By the end of that period, many youth exited the program, resulting in a caseload drop from December 2021 to January 2022 of 36 percent (38 youth). Afterwards, the Department continued to experience a gradual decline in the AB 12 caseload through June 2023, when AB 12 cases were only 10 percent of JPD's active caseload. Exhibit 5 shows the number and proportion of cases that were AB 12 cases out of JPD's total caseload.

[12] The COVID-19 emergency affected the AB 12 program in other ways. For example, some services became virtual, such as court visits and programs offered through service providers. (Social workers were generally required to continue meeting youth in-person.)

Exhibit 6: Percent of AB 12 cases out of total JPD caseload has varied over time



Source: JPD monthly reports.

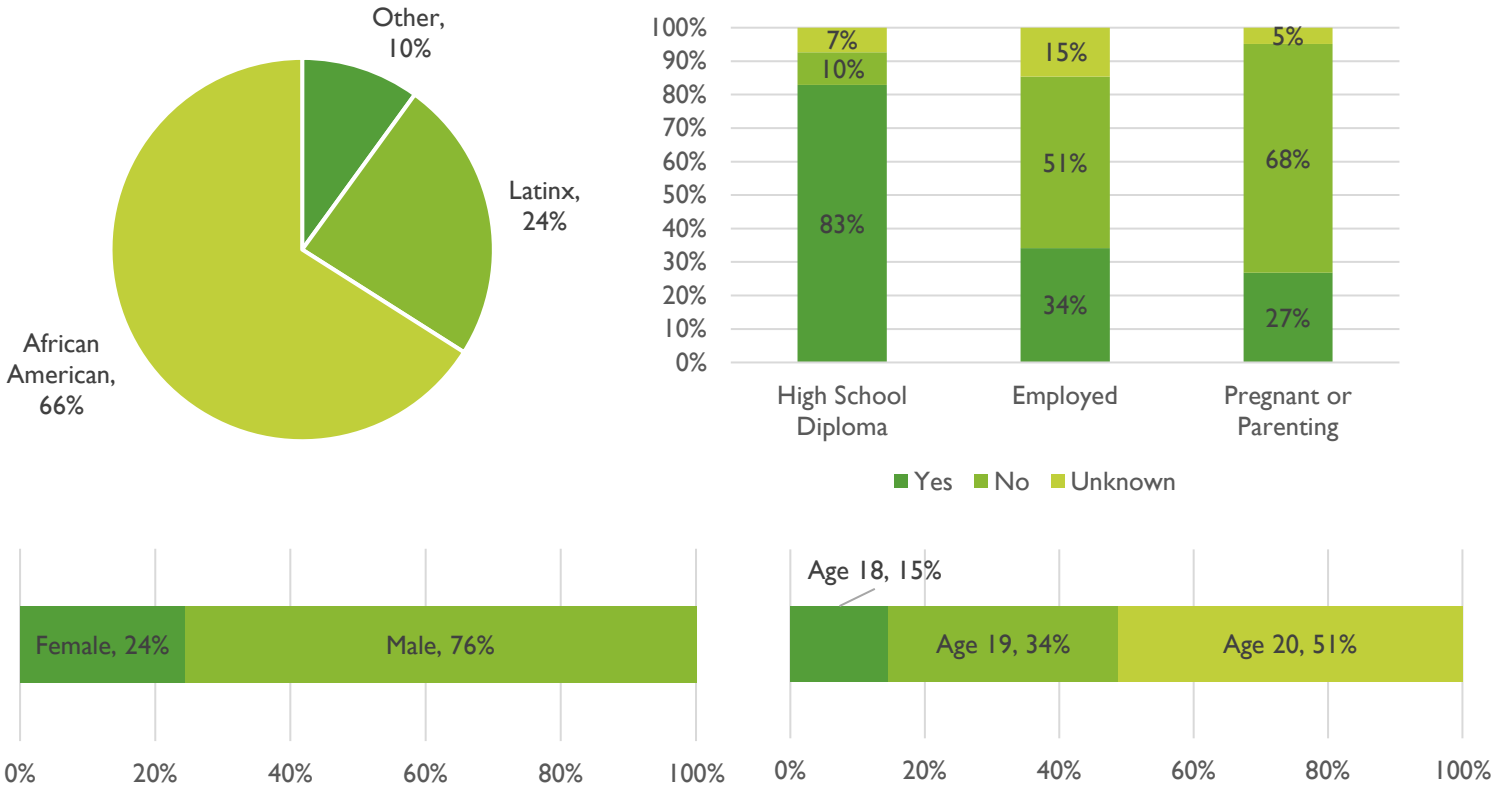
Young people in JPD's AB 12 program are primarily youth of color.

In June 2023, there were 41 youth in JPD's AB 12 program. Almost 95 percent of AB 12 youth were youth of color (Hispanic and African American) and three in four were male. While 83 percent had a high school diploma, only a third were employed in June.[13] In addition, about a quarter were pregnant or parenting. About half of AB 12 youth were 20 years old, indicating that they will age out of the program by the end of 2023.

Most youth also live outside of San Francisco. AB 12 does not require youth to live in their original county, the county in which their out-of-home placement order was originally issued, and a combination of costs, transitional housing locations, and safety considerations lead youth to relocate outside of the city. Finding 2 provides more discussion on housing.

[13] As of September 2023, staff reported that four youth were enrolled in college, and one had recently graduated with an Associate's Degree.

Exhibit 7: Characteristics of JPD's AB 12 Youth (N=41)



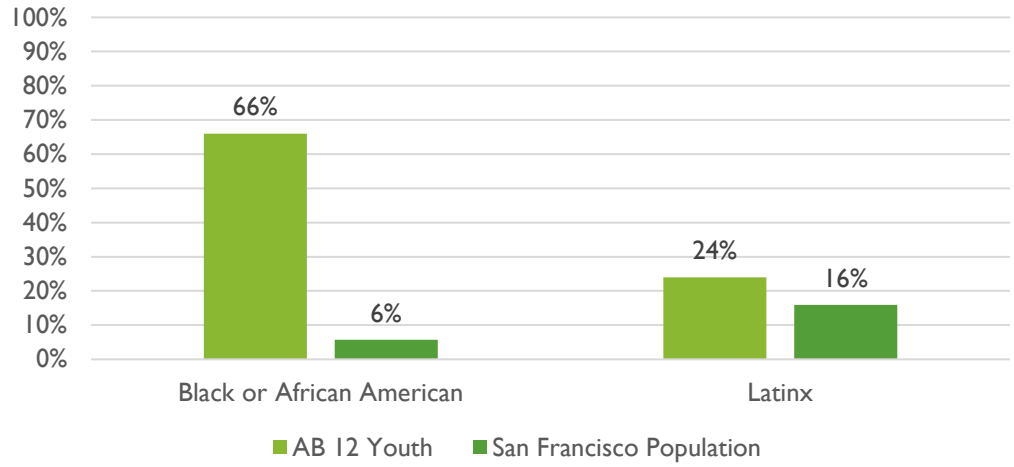
Source: Internal JPD data as of June 30, 2023.

Comparing the demographics of JPD's AB 12 program to the overall San Francisco population reveal significant racial and gender disparities. For instance, although San Francisco's overall population is 6 percent African American.[14] Black youth were 66 percent of youth in JPD's AB 12 program. Latinx youth are also overrepresented in the AB 12 program, though the disparity with the San Francisco population is smaller.

Although most youth are male, almost a quarter of youth in the program are female. This percentage is about 10 percentage points higher than the proportion of female youth in Juvenile Hall during 2022.[15] In comparison, rates of Black and Latinx youth are only two to three percentage points different from their 2022 Juvenile Hall populations.[16]

[14] According to most recent US Census estimates for 2022.
[15] Females were 14 percent of the 2022 Juvenile Hall population, according to JPD's 2022 Annual Report.
[16] In 2022, the Juvenile Hall population was 64 percent African American and 21 percent Latinx.

Exhibit 8: AB 12 Youth are Disproportionately Black and Latinx Compared to San Francisco's Population



Source: AB 12 youth figures from JPD internal data as of June 30, 2023. San Francisco figures are 2022 estimates from US Census (2023 was not yet available).

Although female youth are a minority in the program, as former foster and probation youth, they have distinct experiences, challenges, and needs. Past research has shown that young women involved in the justice system are more likely to experience multiple mental health issues than males and face particular challenges in pregnancy, parenting, and violence (including sexual violence). [17]

Though youth are different, there are common areas to measure success.

AB 12 seeks to provide foster youth with support to successfully transition to adulthood. While success looks different for each youth, there are goals that are common across the population:

- **Permanent Connections:** Relationships with caring and supportive adults and peers
- **Housing:** Safe and stable housing
- **Education and Employment:** Enrollment in education, employed, or in a program that reduces barriers to employment
- **Healthcare:** Access to services and resources to maintain positive physical and mental health
- **Independent Living Skills:** Skills to navigate daily independent living and achieve education/career goals

[17] Jerry Flores, Janelle Hawes, Angela Westbrooks, Chanae Henderson. "Crossover youth and gender: What are the challenges of girls involved in both the foster care and juvenile justice systems?", *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 91, 2018, Pages 149-155.

- **Long-Term Plan:** A sustainable long-term plan with a demonstrated commitment to follow through[18]

Each AB 12 youth formulates goals to work towards while in the program. These goals are outlined in a youth's case plan, which is updated every six months and describes how the youth seeks to transition to independent living. In addition to describing the responsibilities of the youth, the case plan also describes what support they will need from the social worker and other services.[19]

[18] This framework was informed by interviews with staff and SFCASA's five advocacy areas, which can be found here: https://www.sfcasa.org/s/SFCASAAdvocacyAreas02-2020.pdf. SFCASA is an organization that trains and supports Court Appointed Special Advocates to San Francisco-based foster youth.
[19] All County Letters 11-61 and 11-69.

Finding I: Relationships are key to transitioning foster youth to adulthood.

Summary

Establishing trusted connections with youth is essential to their success in the AB 12 program. JPD's AB 12 program leverages existing relationships to support youth in a collaborative effort between social workers, attorneys, the judge, and service providers. Youth retain the same judge and attorney from their time on probation, and social workers work with a youth's probation officer to help streamline a youth's transition into extended foster care. While keeping the AB 12 program under JPD allows for relational continuity and specialized support for former probation youth, remaining with the Department can still be traumatic for youth. Inviting community-based organizations (CBOs) to take on greater or more formalized roles in supporting youth could help address these ongoing harms. In addition, the AB 12 program could offer more resources to cultivate permanent connections between youth, family members, and other supportive adults.

JPD's AB 12 program emphasizes continuity of relationships.

JPD's AB 12 program seeks to create a network of support for youth that includes legal, financial, emotional, housing, and skills-based assistance. The Department does this by facilitating a warm handoff from a youth's probation officer to a social worker that can connect the youth to various resources. At the same time, AB 12 Court is a collaborative court that invites the youth, social workers, lawyers, and service providers to participate in a youth's life journey.

JPD's AB 12 youth face many challenges.

Interviews with AB 12 youth and those who work with AB 12 youth reveal an ongoing array of challenges. Many come from backgrounds of family turbulence, exposure to violence, substance abuse, mental health issues, sexual assault, and other adverse childhood experiences. These are compounded by the significant trauma youth can experience while on probation, including incarceration and placement in the foster care system.

Beyond probation, youth must navigate complicated community dynamics, including delinquent ties and other negative influences that may increase the likelihood of recidivism.[20] This can make it extraordinarily difficult for youth to break out of cycles of involvement with the justice system and remain safe. As one youth put it, "Just because you change doesn't mean [that] other people change."

For some, past criminal records can pose an obstacle to obtaining housing, employment, and other essential services.[21] Youth may have low credit scores and owe legal restitution—as much as thousands of dollars—which can pose a financial burden on the individual and their family. Both credit scores and legal restitution can be barriers for youth to secure housing. One youth reported experiencing stigma associated with being systems-involved.

[20] These dynamics may have implications on housing, as high costs may mean doubling up with roommates—sometimes also from similar backgrounds. More on this in Finding 2.

[21] Many youth are eligible to have their records sealed, meaning that they are not viewable by non-governmental entities. Even so, interviews indicate that some youth believe that their past system involvement hinders them from obtaining employment, housing, and other resources.

Relationships are crucial to supporting AB 12 youth.

Relationships are important in engaging foster youth. They are especially significant for those in the AB 12 program since participation is voluntary. Having trusted connections with an AB 12 youth can enable the social worker and other adults to encourage the young person to strive for their goals, participate in programs, and share about their lives.

JPD's AB 12 program facilitates continuous relationships with young people. Youth who have been placed in the foster care system as a result of delinquency proceedings remain with the Juvenile Probation Department for extended foster care. Staff note that this arrangement preserves a youth's history with the Department and their longstanding relationships with their circle of support.[22] Except in instances of turnover, attorneys from the Public Defender's Office remain with the youth from their initial case through their time in the AB 12 program. Similarly, the judge remains constant during a youth's time in JPD.

This arrangement also allows the probation officer to streamline the youth's transition to the AB 12 social worker. Probation officers inform youth of their AB 12 eligibility and as soon as a youth is identified as a candidate for the program, staff from JPD's AB 12 Unit are typically invited to Child Family Team meetings to understand the youth's needs and potential services they could benefit from. One youth described how his probation officer found him a transitional housing placement so that he had somewhere to go when he was released from Juvenile Hall. While he was there, his social worker helped him with "anything and everything"—gift cards, rental applications, etc. The overall experience had "a big impact on [his] life."

In interviews, youth described having close relationships with their social workers. One youth described how his social worker helped him with "everything." Another credited his social worker for helping him transform his "f*** up background" to "a normal life." He described how his longtime relationship with his social worker, as well as his social worker's familiarity with his background and family helped build rapport between the young person and social worker. For youth, success was not simply about being connected to resources, but about how trust and engagement with another transformed their mindsets. For one youth, his social worker "expanded his horizons." When asked about what, he responded, "Everything. [Social worker] motivated me."

The arrangement setup allows youth to form multi-year relationships with their attorneys and the judge, as well as with their social worker from JPD. For youth without adequate family support, these relationships provide some consistency in the absence of parental guidance and resources they would not otherwise receive to the same degree. These connections are especially important for out-of-county youth, who may live away from family, friends, and home community.

JPD's AB 12 program promotes collaboration.

While social workers are a young person's primary contact with the AB 12 program, youth may receive guidance and resources from multiple people, including their attorney and judge, and sometimes family and friends, service providers, and transitional housing program staff. These stakeholders form a youth's circle of support.

These individuals collaborate with one another. Social workers make referrals to and may regularly communicate with service providers regarding the youth. At times, social workers may work with service providers to help youth obtain resources. In one example, Bay Area Legal Aid was assisting youth whose

[22] Note that although the AB 12 program is housed within JPD's Probation Services Division, the program is not a probation function.

CalFresh applications were being denied. According to staff, social workers provided documentation of the youths' participation in the AB 12 program to prove their eligibility.

Having multiple people in a youth's circle of support increases the likelihood that youth will participate in the program. One service provider described how he used his rapport with one youth to loop the social worker into their conversations and better engage the young person. This collaborative culture is integral to JPD's AB 12 program.

Exhibit 9: AB 12 Youth's Circle of Support

Source: Analysis based on staff interviews.

AB 12 Court is a collaborative court.

AB 12 requires youth to have court hearings at least every six months.[23] (Youth are encouraged to but not required to attend.[24]) The AB 12 Court in San Francisco is structured as a collaborative court, in which a youth's team comes together to identify issues, problem-solve, and share progress. Through the hearings, the judge assesses a youth's progress towards their goals.[25] These hearings provide a space for a youth's support network to give and receive feedback as they help them transition to adulthood.[26] The AB 12 Court Judge has also invited representatives from service providers to sit in on sessions, allowing youth to be easily connected to services.[27] City and County staff and service providers have noted that this setup allows the youth's support team to recognize a youth's accomplishments and bring up any areas needing attention, while promoting dialogue, problem-solving, and community.

[23] The AB 12 Judge may schedule hearings more frequently depending on need.
[24] Staff estimated that youth attend about half the time. AB 12 Court sessions occur in a hybrid format so youth can attend virtually.
[25] Those included in a youth's Transitional Independent Living Case Plan (TILCP), which is updated every six months.
[26] Contrary to what youth experienced in probation, AB 12 Court is designed to be non-punitive. In an interview, the current AB 12 Court judge (Roger Chan) described how he strives for a youth-centered approach in hearings by inviting youth to articulate issues, needs, and goals. In cases where a youth is struggling—for instance, because of mental health, substance use, housing instability, or childcare—the Court may leave a case open to allow the youth additional time to meet the program's participation requirements.
[27] These service providers include Bay Area Legal Aid, SFCASA, and ILSP.

County staff and service providers note that this approach of having service providers present is effective because it can ensure that referrals are not otherwise lost. In this way, AB 12 Court is not simply about reporting to a judge, but about offering youth a space where—in one staff member's words—a "circle of elders" has resources to help a youth thrive.

The AB 12 program is a non-probation program in a probation department.

Although the AB 12 program is not a probation program, it is located under JPD. San Francisco also runs another AB 12 program out of its Human Services Agency (HSA), which serves youth who were placed in foster care due to abuse or neglect in the home, as opposed to delinquent conduct. When asked about the possibility of combining the AB 12 programs, service providers and one youth responded that this arrangement would not be effective because of the different needs and experiences among JPD's and HSA's AB 12 youth.

According to them, young people who are systems-involved have particular needs related to safety, records expungement, avoiding recidivism, mental health, and other areas. In interviews, youth described how coming from communities with gangs instills a survival mindset in people, as choosing to not join a gang can put one's safety at risk. In addition, incarceration is a traumatic experience. A previous JPD study found that 11 percent of foster youth in the San Francisco juvenile justice system during January 1, 2019 to March 8, 2021 were incarcerated.[28] One youth stressed how his time at Juvenile Hall deeply shaped him as a person; he believed that to truly understand youth who have been incarcerated one had to understand the institution in which they were incarcerated (Juvenile Hall).

Moreover, transferring youth to another government agency can be disruptive, as the young person would work with a new attorney, judge, and other staff who may not have as much familiarity with the youth or their background. Like probation officers, JPD social workers—along with the judge, attorneys, and service providers—have years of experience working with justice system involved youth. Keeping young people in JPD's AB 12 program allows them to benefit from having a dedicated support team built over multiple years. This team can help provide valuable relational stability that may be absent from other areas of a youth's life.

Lastly, though reducing the reach of a law enforcement agency like JPD into youths' lives can distance young people from the criminal legal system, decision makers should also not ignore the harmful history of the country's child welfare system in imposing surveillance and separation on families of color.[29]

There is potential to explore a more community-based approach to the AB 12 program.

At the same time, it is equally important to acknowledge the trauma that young people have with the juvenile justice system and how keeping them with JPD in the AB 12 program may exacerbate it. Staff noted that some youth are hesitant to continue into extended foster care because they no longer wish to be involved with the same agency that oversaw their probation. One youth expressed that he was initially concerned that AB 12 would be—or feel like—an extension of probation. He stated that he had friends who quit the program because it felt too much like probation. While he personally benefited from the program, he chose not to attend his AB 12 court hearings because it reminded him of being incarcerated.

[28] Reyna McKinnon. "Out-of-Home Placement in the San Francisco Juvenile Justice System," Advanced Policy Analysis for the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department and Goldman School of Public Policy, Spring 2021.
[29] Roberts, Dorothy E. Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World First edition., Basic Books, 2022.

While remaining with JPD may not always be the main reason some youth choose not to opt into the AB 12 program—for instance, some youth may be more independent or have the support of family—observations from social workers and service providers raise some questions about the impact of the current arrangement of JPD overseeing the program. Staff noted that youth may be hesitant to visit JPD since that is where they attended court while on probation. And one service provider pointed out how youth in the AB 12 program, despite being off probation, are still having a law enforcement agency approve their housing placements.

However, JPD could invite community-based organizations (CBOs) to take on a more prominent role. Unlike JPD staff, CBOs are distinct from law enforcement and may already have existing relationships in community members, youth, and other CBOs. Youth engaged with CBOs can also participate in a larger community of peers and adults through the service provider.

In addition, one service provider said that CBO support could also ease the transition for youth when they age out, as the abrupt transition that often occurs in a government setting (i.e., taking youth off a caseload once they reach certain milestones) can take on a more flexible format in community work, where relationships are ongoing and less defined by legal stipulations. One service provider said that they have helped AB 12 youth with informal transition plans and aftercare that doesn't stop at a certain age. "We still have thirty to forty year-olds coming around," they said. "We're family."

Greater community-based supports could help minimize and address the direct and lasting traumas young people face in the juvenile justice system. Having CBOs take on a more active role in supporting AB 12 youth can be a way to expand the relationships available to youth and pilot a more community-oriented approach. Recommendations in other findings highlight opportunities for JPD to do so.

Biological and chosen families are crucial sources of support.

In addition to the support of social workers and other stakeholders, youth may receive support from their parents or other family members. Studies have shown the importance of permanency in improving outcomes for foster youth.[30] Parents and extended family can offer important ongoing support that is difficult to replace with programs and outside individuals.

This support is crucial for youth who are transitioning into adulthood. One youth stated how while in extended foster care, he received financial support from his family to cover moving costs for his first apartment. He noted that these costs were high and would have been a challenge to cover on his own. Another described how his mother helped him get a job and showed him how to do taxes. He recounted how moving out of San Francisco and away from his mother, as well as his community, was challenging.

Family members can also help youth as they age out of care. JPD staff provided records showing that multiple youth who were aging out of the program were living with their parents while they waited for a transitional housing placement or voucher to become available. This was the case for one youth who had aged out; he reported that he had recently moved back to the Bay Area and was staying with his parents while he looked for housing.

[30] Roberts, Dorothy E. Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World First edition., Basic Books, 2022.

Relational permanency is essential to a foster youth's success.

Studies have shown how permanency has long-term beneficial impacts on the social, psychological, and financial outcomes of youth.[31] One study found that youth who reunified with their families experienced the lowest occurrence of homelessness.[32] The State of California has previously recognized the value of prioritizing permanency for foster children. AB 403, a 2017 bill that prioritized keeping children with their families stated that "Efforts to achieve legal permanency and emotional permanency are necessary for every child and youth" with the bill's goal being to "[create] faster paths to permanency."

Although youth in extended foster care are legal adults, this does not eliminate the need for meaningful parental and other family connections. Researchers have defined relational permanency as "a sense of belonging through enduring, lifelong connections to parents, extended family or other caring adults, including at least one adult who will provide a permanent, parent-like connection for that youth." Achieving relational permanency is especially critical for AB 12 youth, since they may have faced previous barriers to developing permanent connections (such as incarceration), they only have—at most—three years before they age out of care, and many live away from their home communities in San Francisco, as Finding 2 describes.

Relational permanency looks different for each youth. While some may have relationships with parental and other biological connections, others may prefer alternative structures of support. Those in the LGBTQ+ community, for instance, often rely on "chosen families"—individuals who are biologically unrelated but provide mutual love and support that is lacking from their biological families.[33] Recognizing the value of these nontraditional communities for LGBTQ+ youth and helping them engage with chosen family networks can assist them in achieving permanency.

As youth exit the program, JPD staff track whether they report having "at least one connection to a caring, committed adult who can provide a safe, stable relationship, guidance, and emotional support to the youth."[34] Department survey data indicated that practically all youth (37 out of 38) who aged out of JPD's AB 12 program in 2022 had at least one such connection. While this is a positive finding, the wording of the question does not distinguish between permanent connections and more casual ones. One service provider described a "permanent connection" as someone who would be available to support a youth in times of crisis.

One of the objectives of the AB 12 program is to equip youth for independence, but achieving independence requires long-lasting, nurturing connections with supportive adults. As part of a youth's transitional independent living case plans (TILCPs), social workers encourage youth to cultivate "lifelong" connections; if a youth doesn't have permanent connections, social workers may connect youth with

[31] Annette Semanchin Jones, Traci LaLiberte, "Measuring youth connections: A component of relational permanence for foster youth." *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 35, Issue 3, 2013, Pages 509-517.
[32] Fowler PJ, Marcal KE, Zhang J, Day O, Landsverk J. Homelessness and Aging Out of Foster Care: A National Comparison of Child Welfare-Involved Adolescents. Child Youth Serv Rev. 2017 June.
[33] Blum, Dani. "The Joy in Finding Your Chosen Family." The New York Times, The New York Times Company, 25 June 2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/well/lgbtq-chosen-families.html#:~:text=The%20term%20refers%20to%20%E2%80%9Cnonbiological,who%20has%20researched%20chosen%20families.
[34] Quote from the State's instructions for completing the quarterly statistical report on Outcomes for Non-minor Dependents Exiting Foster Care, or form SOC 405XP."

SFCASA[35] or other service providers. Because youth are legal adults, social workers do not contact the youth's family members.

JPD could incorporate permanency more systematically with efforts like covering transportation costs for youth to see family members and other important connections, referring youth and their families to family counseling. Prioritizing permanency should be a priority given that youth will be soon emancipating from care.

RECOMMENDATION 1

To foster relational permanency among AB 12 youth, JPD should develop formal efforts to help youth cultivate close connections with family members and other supportive individuals. These efforts may include:

- Covering transportation costs of visits
- Identifying and connecting youth and their families to counseling services

[35] SFCASA is an organization that trains and supports Court Appointed Special Advocates to San Francisco-based foster youth.

Finding 2: AB 12 youth face limited housing options.

Summary

Most youth live outside of San Francisco due to a combination of high costs, limited transitional housing locations, and safety considerations. Living outside the county not only means being further from a youth's family, friends, and home community, but may also affect a youth's access to programs. While transitional housing programs –where half of AB 12 youth live—offer on-site services, youth living in self-arranged housing (SILPs) outside of San Francisco may have a harder time accessing resources. Safe, stable, and well-located housing is a critical component to youth success. JPD should ensure that youth—in both SILPs and transitional housing—have adequate financial resources to afford housing wherever a youth chooses to live.

Stable housing is critical for health and success of foster youth.

The purpose of housing in extended foster care is safety, preparation for independence, and stability. According to the State's Welfare and Institutions Code (§300.2), the purpose of foster care is to:

> *provide maximum safety and protection for children who are currently being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, being neglected, or being exploited, and to ensure the safety, protection, and physical and emotional well-being of children who are at risk of that harm.*

In general, AB 12 youth should live in "placements that are least restrictive and encourage as much independence as possible, based on the youth's development needs and readiness for independence."[36] Staff described how housing stability allows youth to better focus on their education, employment, and independent living goals:

> *Without the basic stability of housing, people can't survive in any other aspect of their life. Giving either a transitional housing program or a stipend to pay for housing provides stability [for youth] to work on mental health issues, safety issues, education issues, employment issues—all those things.*

AB 12 youth live in two placement types.

AB 12 youth live in two placement types: Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILPs) and transitional housing programs (THPs). A SILP is a placement that the youth is responsible for arranging, such as an apartment, single room occupancy, dorm, or an arrangement with a family member. Youth in SILPs receive AB 12 payments directly and social workers must inspect and approve SILP placements (note that payments are intended to cover housing and other living expenses).

On the other hand, THP beds are managed through an agency that provides case management and other services onsite. AB 12 payments go to the agency funding THP programs and youth receive a monthly stipend from the agency to cover other living costs. These differences are summarized in Exhibit 9.

[36] All County Letter 11-77.

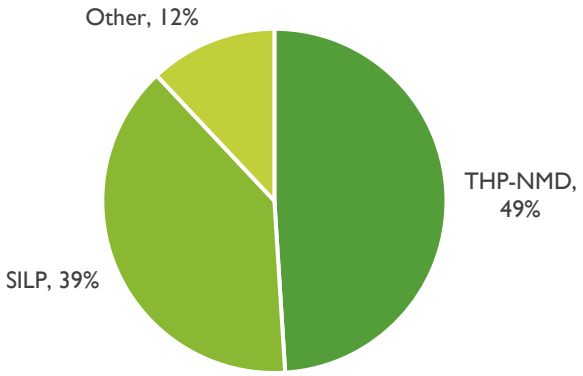
Exhibit 10: AB 12 Housing Placements

	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PLACEMENT (THP-NMD)	SUPERVISED INDEPENDENT LIVING PLACEMENT (SILP)
Initial payment to:	THP agency*	Youth
Payment amount (as of FY 23-24):	$4,192 + county supplement	$1,206
Case management support:	Yes (provided by THP agency)	No
Housing arranged by:	THP Agency (signs lease)	Youth
Can look like:	House with other youth, apartment with roommates, studio	Apartment, dorm, living with family

Source: Staff interviews and All County Letter 23-65. NMD refers to Non-Minor Dependents (ages 18-21).

Youth must reside in approved housing placements to be eligible for monthly payments.[37] However, whether youth live in THPs or SILPs depends on different factors, including housing type, affordability, location, and youth needs and preferences. Youth may be deterred from living in transitional housing programs since they may have to live with roommates they don't get along with. One service provider stated that these dynamics can undermine a youth's ability to maintain housing stability, and that some young people have reported to staff that they would rather experience homelessness than live in a group setting. Youth may not prefer to meet with a case manager in transitional housing or live in the available THP locations. These factors mean that youth may live in SILPs not because they are necessarily ready to be independent. As of July 2023, half of JPD's AB 12 youth resided in transitional housing placements and 40 percent in SILPs.[38]

Exhibit 11: Half of AB 12 Youth Live in Transitional Housing Placements (N=41)



Source: Internal JPD data as of July 21, 2023. THP-NMD stands for Transitional Housing for Non-Minor Dependents. SILP stands for Supervised Independent Living Placement. Other category includes incarcerated youth and unapproved SILPs.

[37] Social workers can offer transitional (temporary) approvals for youth in between apartments.
[38] The most common THP providers were Unity Care, Holly's Place, and Pacific Clinics.

AB 12 young people encounter challenges in transitional housing placements.

AB 12 youth may face difficulties in THP placements. As young adults living on their own for the first time, youth may not adhere to certain rules, incurring violations such as by bringing in pets, smoking, drinking, having parties, or engaging in fights. As a result, the THP agency may issue a 30-day eviction notice, a period which may shorten if a youth doesn't come into compliance. Staff report that youth have received notices as short as 7 or 14 days, which offers only a short period of time to identify and apply to other THP programs—a process which can take a few weeks.[39]

Another challenge is finding units for parenting youth or youth living with their partners. While THP beds are generally available to AB 12 youth, housing for couples or youth with children can be difficult to secure, as THP programs generally do not allow youth to select roommates.[40] As of June 2023, there were 11 youth who were pregnant or parenting.

Transitional housing placement programs are licensed by the State. To obtain and maintain a license, the THP providers must comply with the State's Health and Safety Code and Title 22. According to staff, this means that making additional THP housing available within San Francisco will involve the State's approval.

Four in five AB 12 youth live outside of San Francisco.

AB 12 does not require youth to live in the same county as the court whose jurisdiction they're under (i.e., San Francisco). As of June 2023, about 80 percent of JPD's AB 12 youth live outside of San Francisco. This rate is higher than that of the overall foster youth population that emancipated in 2022 from HSA and JPD, of which 66 percent lived outside of San Francisco (N=104).[41] The most common counties that JPD's foster youth live in are Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Mateo counties.[42]

For former probation youth, safety is a common reason why youth live outside of San Francisco. Former probation youth may have been involved with or have encountered gangs in their communities, which can pose threats to safety and increase rates of recidivism. Youth report how gang culture pressures individuals to become involved, putting themselves at risk of harm.

In interviews, young people described leaving the city to escape the violence. One youth estimated he lost as many as twenty individuals he knew to violence. Although he had lived in the city for most of AB 12, losing a friend became the catalyst for him to move out. Another youth still commutes into the city for work but decided that "living [in San Francisco] was too dangerous."

Another reason youth live outside of San Francisco is the limitation of transitional housing program (THP) placements. According to staff, there are few THP options within San Francisco. Those within the city are similar to group homes, with youth living in a shared house, which youth have expressed is an undesirable arrangement. Staff reported that youth tend to prefer apartments in areas such as San Jose, Alameda County, and Contra Costa County.

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[39] Youth may also be removed immediately from a THP program in the case of emergency (i.e., endangering a roommate). Also, youth typically cannot return to THP programs that they have been removed from.

[40] Staff mentioned a couple possible exceptions: one program in the Bay Area and another in the Stockton-Sacramento area. The Bay Area program is a Tier 2 program, meaning that youth must start in the regular program first before being allowed to choose their roommate.

[41] "Young Adults Exiting Foster Care: Housing Support Options," San Francisco Human Services Agency.

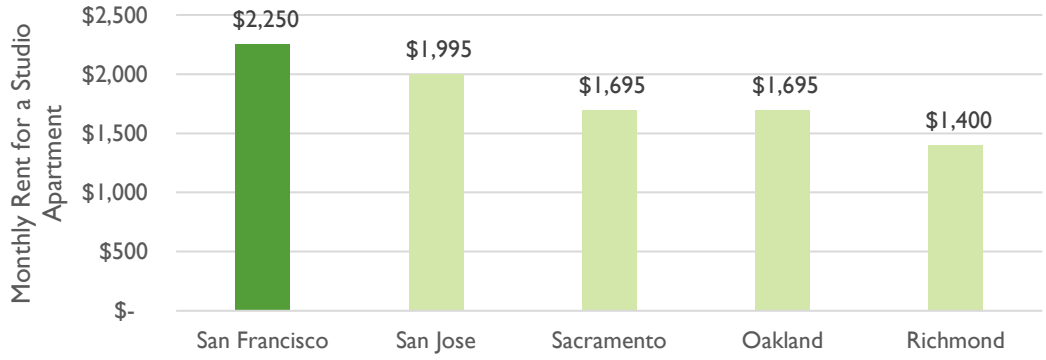
[42] Though no AB 12 youth were living out-of-state as of September 2023, staff report that youth in the past have lived in North Carolina, Louisiana, Nevada, and Pennsylvania.

Housing costs in San Francisco are among the highest in the Bay Area.

Housing costs are a significant factor in leading youth to relocate outside of the city, especially those who wish to make their own housing arrangements (i.e., in SILPs). Rents in the city exceed the monthly AB 12 payments youth receive, which are meant to cover both housing and other living costs. For FY 2022-23, those living in SILPs received $1,129 a month to cover housing and other living costs, an amount that translates to $13,548 annually, or below 15 percent of San Francisco's Area Median Income (AMI) [43]—a category that the California Department of Housing and Community Development identifies as "acutely low-income." The US Department of Housing and Urban Development defines housing affordability as not spending more than 30 percent of a household's gross income on housing. For an AB 12 youth without any other income, this means not spending more than $339 on monthly rent.

Youth move outside of San Francisco to cities with lower rent. As shown in Exhibit 11, the monthly studio rent in San Francisco was higher than other Bay Area cities. In January 2023, the rent for a single studio was $2,250 a month, compared to $1,695 in Oakland and Sacramento, and $1,400 in Richmond. The market rent was also higher than in San Jose, the largest city in the Bay Area.

Exhibit 12: San Francisco Exceeds Market Rate Studio Rents in Other Cities



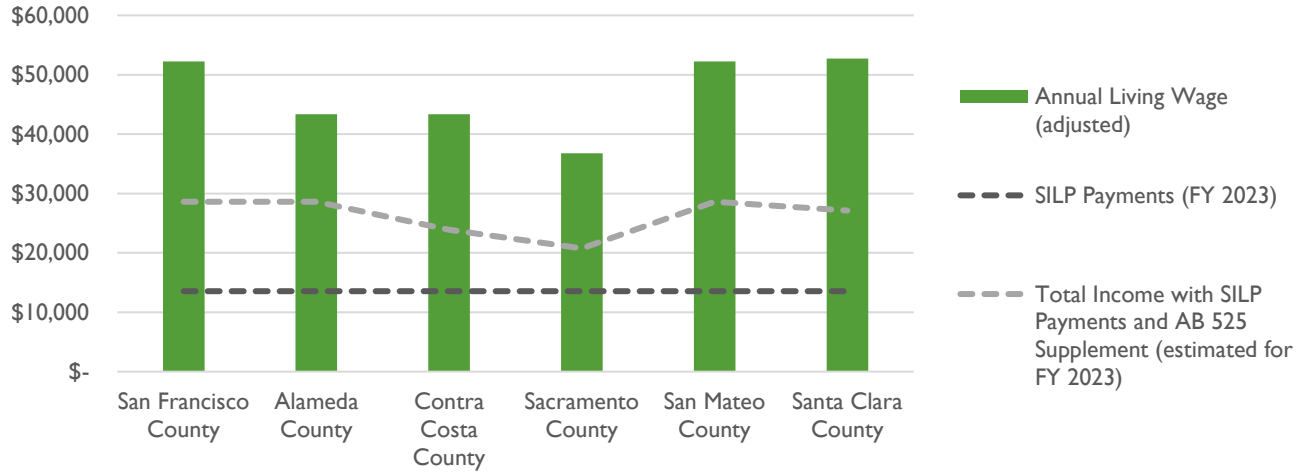
Source: Values as of January 2023 according to Zillow.com. Comparison cities selected based on areas youth reside (not comprehensive).

SILP payments are lower than the living wage in San Francisco and other California counties, as estimated by MIT's Living Wage Calculator. In two of the most common counties youth reside in, Alameda and Contra Costa, the annual living wage for a single adult is $43,352—about $30,000 more than the annual SILP amount.[44]

Youth may also seek employment to supplement their monthly AB 12 payments. As of June 2023, only a third of AB 12 youth were employed. However, one youth estimated that even while working, he was spending as much as 70 percent of his income on housing.

[43] AMI threshold based on numbers calculated by the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development based on data released by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.
[44] Medical costs are subtracted from living wage estimates, since AB 12 youth can receive free health care through the County.

Exhibit 13: SILP Payments are Lower than Living Wages in California Counties



Source: Annual living wage based on 2022-23 estimates from MIT Living Wage Calculator. These include food, housing, transportation, and other costs. Medical costs were subtracted from MIT's original estimates since youth are eligible to receive medical services free of cost through the County. Note that the counties shown include the most common counties where AB 12 youth live but are not comprehensive. AB 525 supplements are estimated based on the methodology the bill proposed: the difference between half of the fair market rent of a 2-bedroom apartment in the county of residence and 30 percent of the rate currently paid out to youth in SILPs, adjusted annually with HUD fair market rent data.

AB 525 proposes additional supplements for youth living in SILPs.

There have been efforts to increase the amounts that AB 12 youth receive for SILPs. In February 2023, State Assemblymember Phil Ting of San Francisco proposed a bill to provide a housing supplement for youth living in SILPs based on their county of residence. Under AB 525, youth in SILPs would receive additional monthly financial support on top of the base amount they receive, effective July 2025. (California passed a similar law for THP placements in 2020.) This supplement would be calculated as the difference between half of the fair market rent of a 2-bedroom apartment in the county of residence and 30 percent of the rate currently paid out to youth in SILPs, adjusted annually with HUD fair market rent data. Based on this method, AB 12 young people living in Bay Area counties and Sacramento would have each received at least $20,000 as a supplement for FY 2023.

Despite support from the County Welfare Directors Association of California and the Chief Probation Office of California, AB 525 did not pass during the 2023 legislative session. However, JPD should continue to support similar initiatives.

Young people living in transitional housing likely also need additional financial support.

The State provides funding to transitional housing programs for each young person in their program.[45] For FY 2024, transitional housing agencies receive a base amount of $4,192 per youth per month. Some counties receive an additional supplement per youth. For FY 2024, the base amount is $4,192 per youth.

[45] Transitional housing agencies in each county receive a base amount of funding per youth, and agencies in some counties receive an additional supplement per youth.

Programs in San Francisco receive an additional $695 per youth and those in Alameda receive an additional $304 per youth.[46]

Transitional housing programs dedicate some of this funding to housing and other costs while providing monthly stipends for youth. However, these stipends are sometimes not enough for youth to cover all other living costs. One youth expressed that the small stipend made it financially difficult. Like youth in SILPs, youth in THPs should also have enough resources to cover costs and save for the future (particularly for youth afford more permanent housing after they move out of transitional housing). Using the MIT Living Wage Estimates as a reference, JPD should identify how much youth in THPs are receiving each month and supplement this income for youth so that they can afford other living expenses.

Out-of-county youth may live further away from families, friends, communities, and resources.

While there are several factors that contribute to youth living outside of San Francisco, moving out of the city presents its own challenges. Youth are further away from their community, family, and friends, as well as certain employment opportunities. For instance, staff note that some youth still prefer to work in San Francisco due to the city's higher minimum wage. Moreover, living outside of San Francisco changes the types of resources that are accessible. According to staff, social workers are less familiar with services and programs in other counties and do not always know who to contact for referrals. All youth who were interviewed lived outside of San Francisco and reported not being involved with resources in their county of residence, except one who had participated in a program offered through their transitional housing program. This suggests that the potential gap in resources may be more acute for out-of-county youth living on their own rather than in transitional housing. Finding 3 discusses how upcoming efforts through the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families may help address this gap.

Providing adequate financial resources can help foster youth afford ideal housing placements.

For housing to be supportive to a youth's development, it should be affordable, close to community support and resources, and where youth wish to be. However, the current unaffordability and scarcity of housing options in the Bay Area make it difficult for AB 12 to achieve these aims. These limitations mean that youth have less influence over where they live, who they live with, and the resources and opportunities they have access to.[47]

Moreover, youth in foster care should receive enough to not only afford housing but cover other essential living costs and accumulate savings. Financial strain can hinder a youth's ability to pursue education, obtain employment, and maintain positive mental health. It also places the youth at higher risk of homelessness and recidivism. In this way, housing is not just about ensuring a youth's present wellbeing but also about helping them build an economic and social foundation for the future.

JPD should ensure that AB 12 youth have adequate financial resources for housing. The Department should support the passage of AB 525, which would help ensure that youth in SILPs have enough resources to afford housing in their county of residence. Until this bill is passed, JPD should consider supplementing monthly payments to current AB 12 youth using the formula proposed by AB 525.[48]

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[46] All County Letter 23-65

[47] In some cases, youth may resort to living with a family member—sometimes the same family member they were removed from in the first place—or live in other arrangements that may risk their personal safety. They may struggle financially, and this instability can negatively impact their mental health, lead to homelessness, and contribute to recidivism.

[48] The difference between half of the fair market rent of a 2-bedroom apartment in the county of residence and 30 percent of the rate currently paid out to youth in SILPs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To help youth afford housing that is supportive of their development and well-being, JPD should:

- Support advocacy efforts for similar legislation to AB 525.
- Until AB 525 or similar legislation is passed, provide financial supplements to youth living in SILPs according to their county of residence, no less than the amounts based on the approach proposed by AB 525 and using the MIT Living Wage Estimates as a reference.
- Identify how much youth in transitional housing programs (THPs) are receiving each month and supplement this income using the MIT Living Wage Estimates as a reference.

Finding 3: Existing gaps include individualized support and financial literacy.

Summary

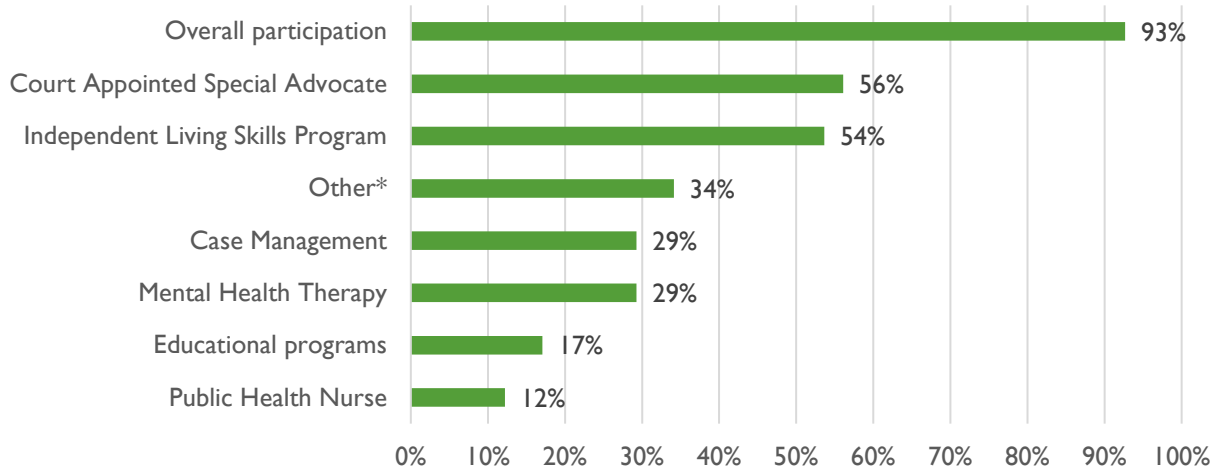
Staff and service providers report that AB 12 youth often lack basic life skills. Addressing this need requires more individualized guidance and support, such as those offered through organizations like SFCASA that assigns Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) to youth. Connecting youth to resources that are relational-based and responsive to their identities can help them take full advantage of services. Another major gap was financial literacy. JPD should expand its financial coaching program to all AB 12 youth and also identify how it can meet other needs in mental health, transportation, housing move-in costs, and college readiness. Finally, due to staffing turnover at service providers, youth referrals do not always go through. The County is currently pursuing a Justice Services Care Coordinator strategy which could better ensure that youth referrals are connected to outside programs.

Most AB 12 youth are involved in outside support programs.

According to JPD data, the majority (93 percent) of youth are involved in community-based programs, which include programs related to mental health, life skills, and education. The programs with the highest participation rates were Court Appointed Special Advocate, which is offered through SFCASA, and the Independent Living Skills Program, which is offered through First Place for Youth.[49]

Note that youth often participate in more than one program. Young people active in programs participated in an average of 2.5 programs.

Exhibit 14: AB 12 Youth Participation in Programs (N=41)



Source: JPD data as of June 30, 2023. The Other category includes employment, diversion, financial literacy, and legal aid, as well as out-of-county programs.

[49] SFCASA is a non-profit that trains and supports volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates to foster youth in San Francisco's dependency and delinquency systems. First Place for Youth's Independent Living Skills Program provides programming to foster youth related to education, career development, health, housing, and life skills, among others.

There is a need for more relational, individualized support.

Interviews with staff and service providers indicate that AB 12 youth are underprepared for adulthood. One provider described how unstable family backgrounds and system-involvement can mean a deficit of "love and discipline, support and encouragement, [and] access to resources." As a result, youth often lack the skills needed to live self-sufficiently and may struggle with tasks, such as making appointments, applying for jobs, obtaining IDs, and opening bank accounts.

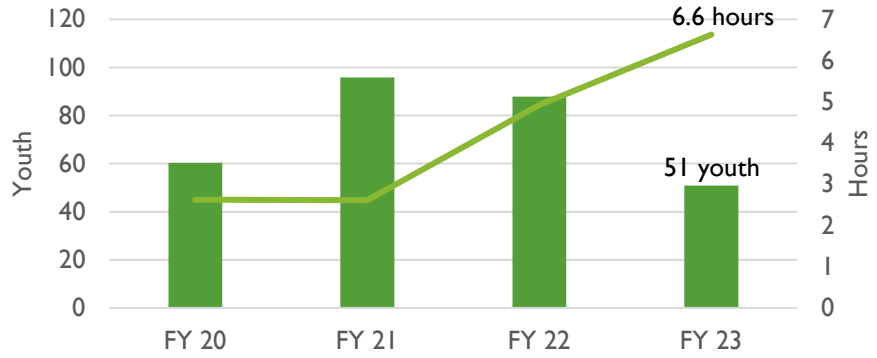
Social workers play a critical role in helping youth complete essential tasks. Youth described relying heavily on their social worker in interviews. However, both youth and staff observed gaps. In one youth's words:

> *We went from being structured in Juvenile to being super free. It's hard to transition, especially when you don't have a family or support system. The monthly check-ups were good but not enough. I needed some more structure…[such as] having somebody to check in.*

Moreover, it can be difficult for social workers to accurately understand a youth's barriers and needs solely based on monthly meetings. Though social workers may sometimes meet with youth more frequently depending on need, their caseloads consist of multiple youth, meaning that their capacity to provide consistent, one-on-one attention to each youth is limited.[50] As of June 2023, there were only two social workers for 41 AB 12 youth (the third social worker was on maternity leave until October 2023).

Department time study data estimated that in 2022, social workers devoted an average of 6.6 hours per youth per month. This number can vary depending on a youth's needs, engagement, and other demands on a social worker's time.[51] One social worker estimated that the figure could be as a high as nine hours per youth per month.

Exhibit 15: JPD AB 12 Staff Hours per Youth per Month



Source: JPD monthly reports and Title IV-E time study data. AB 12 youth per fiscal year were calculated as the average of average monthly cases. Due to limited data, FY 2020 cases was calculated from October 2019 to June 2020.

[50] Moreover, according to the department's time study data, social workers spend more of their time on case management than home visits with youth. Social workers spent 60 percent of their time on case management, which includes making referrals, consulting with service providers, and writing, monitoring, and updating case plans. The remaining 40 percent was spent on home visits, which includes travel time and work related to monthly visits.

[51] According to social workers, travel can take up a significant amount of time, particularly for youth who live out-of-county. Social workers also attend court sessions and complete substantial paperwork, including court reports, Transitional Independent Living Case Plans (TILCPs), travel reimbursements, and re-entry forms. And finally, social workers may spend time on former AB 12 youth who still contact them for support and resources.

Even with the efforts of social workers, staff and service providers consistently identified youth's lack of life skills as a gap. One provider described youth as "extremely underdeveloped" in terms of preparation for adulthood. To illustrate the need for more individualized support, another provider gave an example of how youth struggled to complete their financial grant application. This application only required a receipt and two paragraphs describing need and reason for the need. However, youth still encountered issues—for example, not providing enough information, failing to attach a receipt, or expecting an immediate response to address an urgent need when the review process was monthly. Some youth had to apply repeatedly because they did not correctly complete their applications.

Despite resources available through service providers, such as transitional housing programs, SFCASA, and ILSP (Independent Living Skills Program), staff and service providers observed that there is still need for greater support. SFCASA, for instance, is limited by the number of volunteers and can only support a limited caseload of youth.[52] ILSP has experienced staffing turnover, which they report has prevented them from sitting in on AB 12 Court, and which other staff report has led to some referrals getting lost. Youth living in SILPs may not have the same access to case management services as those in THPs. One youth who was living on his own expressed that he could have benefited from "more structure," such as more frequent meetings with his social worker.

An intersectional approach can help the program be responsive to young people's identities.

Individualized support should also be responsive to the various identities of foster youth that affect their lived experiences, needs, assets, and challenges. This is important because, as one provider described, when youth sense that adults are not sensitive towards their cultural or life backgrounds, youth may emotionally "shut down" or disengage. Identities include, but not are not limited to Black youth and other youth of color, female youth, LGBTQ+ youth, parenting youth, youth with disabilities, and youth with incarcerated parents.

As an example, studies have shown that LGBTQ+ youth experience particular stress from biological family rejection, abuse, bullying, racism, homophobia, and transphobia, among others. These factors contribute to higher rates of mental health issues in this population.[53] Recognizing the unique needs of this population, the California Department of Social Services in 2021 partnered with Oakland-based organization Family Builders to offer LGBTQ+ navigators throughout California to provide services to families through the Youth Acceptance Project (YAP) model, which seeks to help families become more "affirming, supportive and nurturing" for LGBTQ+ youth.

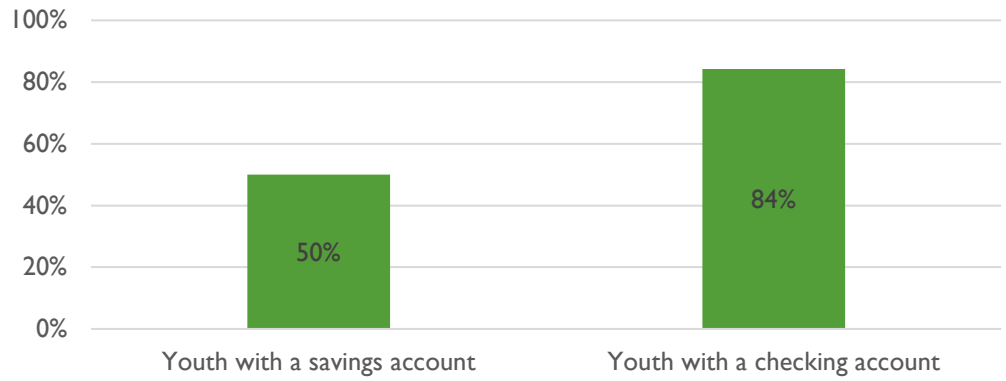
Youth lack financial literacy skills.

Another gap identified by staff, service providers, and youth alike was financial literacy. Staff identified budgeting, saving, managing credit, doing taxes, and opening bank accounts as skills youth needed to learn. Exit data for the 2022 cohort indicated that out of the 38 youth that left the program, 16 percent (six youth) did not have checking accounts and 50 percent (19 youth) did not have savings accounts.

[52] At the time of the interview, SFCASA staff estimated they were supporting about 30 youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

[53] Prince, D. M., Ray-Novak, M., Gillani, B., & Peterson, E. (2022). Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care: An Evidence-Based Theoretical Conceptual Model of Disproportionality and Psychological Comorbidities. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 23(5), 1643-1657.

Exhibit 16: AB 12 Youth Who Exited in 2022 with Bank Accounts (N=38)



Source: Exit survey data collected by JPD staff and reported to HSA.

Youth similarly identified financial literacy as a need. Youth responses indicated a lack of familiarity with financial principles or comfort with making financial decisions. One youth reported that he doesn't like to borrow money, even though he knows that it can help him. Another youth said that he learned how to manage his finances through trial and error. Looking back, he would have done things differently by being more mindful of large purchases (such as a car) and building up his savings.

Credit poses a major challenge. Staff note that it's not unusual for youth to have low credit scores, sometimes as the result of identity theft or lack of understanding in how to manage credit. Low credit scores, along with possible legal restitution, can hinder a youth's ability to secure housing and borrow loans. Staff at Bay Area Legal Aid, which offers civil aid advice to AB 12 youth, cite credit scores as one of the most common issues they encounter.

Another challenge is filing taxes. Youth described not knowing how to file taxes, which can be particularly difficult for youth who work as independent contractors and must file Form 1099's. Staff noted that youth in these situations may not realize that they owe taxes. Because Form 1099s are less common, it may be harder for youth to find help on filing 1099's compared to filing Form W-2s.

There are ongoing efforts to improve financial literacy among youth.

To address this need, SFCASA partnered with HSA and other organizations to launch its second annual Foster Youth Tax Clinic in 2023. In this program, trained volunteers help foster youth complete their taxes. In 2023, this effort returned $80,000 in refunds to youth, with an average of $1,904 per filer. San Francisco's Independent Living Skills program also provides financial literacy programming. Social workers also mentioned working with youth on budgeting.

San Francisco's Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) also includes financial literacy in some of its services to youth ages 18 through 24. In its 2024-29 funding cycle, DCYF described financial literacy as a component of its Youth Workforce Development strategy, describing financial literacy as covering "the importance of and access to bank accounts, direct deposits, education around savings and money management, support with filing taxes," which are areas that were highlighted in interviews.

JPD is also developing a program targeted towards AB 12 youth who owe legal restitution. The AFTER (Aims to Foster Transformation & Ensure Restitution) Program, developed in partnership with the San Francisco Treasurer's Office, seeks to provide "an alternative to the traditional restitution process and

set both the young person who did the harm and the person harmed on a stronger and more economically secure path.[54]" Youth will be connected to a financial coach to help them build financial literacy skills. Once the youth has satisfactorily participated in the program, JPD will make a restitution payment to the crime survivor. Staff note that although this program is directed towards a subset of youth in the AB 12 program (i.e., those who owe restitution), it could be potentially expanded to all youth.

The efforts of SFCASA, DCYF, and JPD show there are multiple resources related to financial literacy available to AB 12 youth in San Francisco. However, there remains a gap for out-of-county youth, who may have a harder time participating in programs based in the city. Although youth who owe legal restitution may have a particular need for financial coaching, this does not mean that youth who don't owe restitution do not need this service. Interviews with youth indicated that they struggled to manage finances because they didn't have role models to guide them. JPD should explore offering financial coaching to all youth in its AB 12 program, prioritizing those who may not otherwise have easy access to financial literacy programming.

Other identified gaps were mental health, transportation, housing move-in costs, and college readiness.

Although individualized support and financial literacy were the most commonly identified needs, staff and service providers identified other gaps:

- **Mental Health:** According to staff, there is a shortage of mental health resources available to youth, particularly those that practice alternatives to talk therapy. The scarcity can result in long wait times (as long as 6 to 8 months, according to staff) before youth can access services. At the same time, youth may not be willing to engage with mental health resources. Youth did not identify mental health as a need in interviews.

- **Transportation:** Limited public transportation options pose challenges to out-of-county youth who commute. Additionally, some youth may encounter safety issues on public transit (e.g., encountering certain individuals they may get in trouble with).

  There are some transportation resources available for youth. The Clipper START program can provide eligible youth a 20 to 50 percent discount on Bay Area public transit options. JPD staff can also secure taxi rides for youth through a Countywide contract. However, this service is meant for one-time uses (e.g., getting to appointments, moving, attending court) rather than ongoing transportation (such as commuting to work).

- **Move-In Costs**: One youth described initial move-in costs, such as a security deposit and moving costs, as a barrier to securing housing. Although his family was able to assist him, he said the expense was significant. Youth can receive assistance from the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing's (HSH) Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which provides one-time funds for move-in costs.[55] Staff also report that they utilize funds through an HSA foster youth fund (for which they bill JPD). These funds can cover a one-time fee for housing up to $800.

[54] AFTER Program Project Agreement.
[55] According to staff, youth can participate in this program through HSH's Coordinated Entry system. However, entering the system requires forms and intake interviews, so many youth do not follow through.

- **College Readiness:** Out of the 38 youth who had exited from AB 12 in 2022, about a quarter (10 youth) had attended some college but only 5 percent (2 youth) were enrolled at time of exit. One research study indicated that foster youth are more likely to drop out of college than their low-income peers, with the researchers concluding that increased access to college does not necessarily translate into higher college attainment.[56] There may be existing programs at colleges that can serve as a resource for foster youth and formerly incarcerated students, such as New Directions at San Francisco City College and Hope Scholars at UC Berkeley, that can help youth navigate the college environment.[57] Another barrier is that young people may simply be more interested in working than pursuing higher education.[58]

These gaps show the diversity of areas that youth can benefit from additional resources.

RECOMMENDATION 3
To address gaps, JPD should: • Provide greater individualized support to youth that is responsive to different identities • Make financial literacy coaching available to all AB 12 youth • Address other identified needs

Social workers rely on existing relationships with service providers to identify and refer youth to resources.

Currently, social workers rely on existing relationships—such as contacts in other departments, counties, or service providers—to connect youth to resources. Some contacts are readily known, such as the public health nurse who can make medical referrals and the service providers present at AB 12 Court. However, finding resources is less straightforward for youth who are outside of San Francisco.

Social workers tend to be less familiar with services in other counties. In these cases, they rely on research to identify resources and who to contact. Staff gave an example of tracking down the appropriate contact in Tulare County to answer a question about housing eligibility. According to staff, this process took more effort than it would have taken in San Francisco since they didn't have existing relationships in Tulare.

To help track resources, JPD staff compile programs on an internal spreadsheet, which staff describe as including both programs in county and out-of-county. Although turnover at service providers sometimes render contact information outdated, JPD staff update this spreadsheet as they reach out to community organizations. To increase awareness of available programs, staff could consider integrating regular opportunities for information sharing with and among providers. JPD's Research and Planning Unit, for instance, convenes the Department's grantees to promote communication and collaboration. Although the AB 12 program doesn't issue grants, bringing common service providers together—such as during AB

[56] Stopping Out and its Impact on College Graduation Among a Sample of Foster Care Alumni: A Joint Scale-Change Accelerated Failure Time Analysis. Angelique G. Day, Richard J. Smith, and Emiko A. Tajima. Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research 2021 12:1, 11-39.
[57] See https://www.ccsf.edu/student-services/new-directions and https://hope.berkeley.edu/.
[58] In staff's view, getting youth college-minded begins earlier than 18. Because of this, there is only so much AB 12 can do to prepare youth for higher education.

12 Court sessions, which some providers already attend, or other ways—could make it easier to stay informed of available services.

The lack of a *formalized system may hinder youth referrals.*

Even when a social worker refers a youth to a service provider, referrals do not always go through. Staff turnover, for instance, at the community organization can hinder youth from connecting with services, as staff shortages may impact an organization's capacity to follow up on referrals. One provider reported that they were "severely understaffed" and were unable to attend AB 12 court hearing to receive youth referrals. Also, social workers may have limited capacity to follow up on every referral they make.

JPD does not have a formal system for referrals to ensure that youth are connected to resources but the 2024-29 Request for Proposals by the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families includes a Justices Services Care Coordinator strategy. The Care Coordinator role will be "responsible for…leading the connection and referrals based on assessments that link young people to additional supports, education, enrichment, and work-related opportunities that are available throughout the city." Justice Services Care Coordinators will serve San Francisco youth ages 14 to 25 in the juvenile justice system, including youth under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court in the AB 12 program.

The Justice Services Care Coordinator strategy is an example of a community partnership that could help ensure AB 12 youth are connected to resources. Since most AB 12 youth live outside of San Francisco, JPD should ensure that Care Coordinators can connect youth to services in their counties of residence.

Finding 4: More resources are needed to support youth beyond 21.

Summary

Youth aging out of AB 12 face a loss of financial and social support. Moreover, there is a lack of needs-appropriate housing and services after this age, increasing the risk of homelessness, financial insecurity, and recidivism. The City and County currently does not have enough transitional housing and housing vouchers for youth emancipating from AB 12. However, recent initiatives have aimed to ease this transition, including the County's Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and the State's Guaranteed Income (GI) Pilot. JPD should build upon these initiatives by formalizing post-AB 12 support in a community aftercare program, continuing to fund guaranteed income, securing contracts for THP+ out of the county, and advocating for SB 9. JPD should also collect and report on data related to youth outcomes.

AB 12 support ends at age 21.

Youth age out of AB 12 on their 21st birthday. This means that they are no longer eligible to receive AB 12 monthly payments and lose the formal support of their social worker, judge, and attorney. Staff and service providers expressed concern that the loss of support and lack of transitional services put youth at risk of adverse outcomes.

One service provider described the experience from their perspective:

> *…it's like leaving home for the first time; you don't know what's really going to happen. You have all the tools you think you need, but now you're literally on your own. And that reality of being on your own is still a little traumatic for some, even the ones that have been doing well….that transition to be on their own is difficult.*

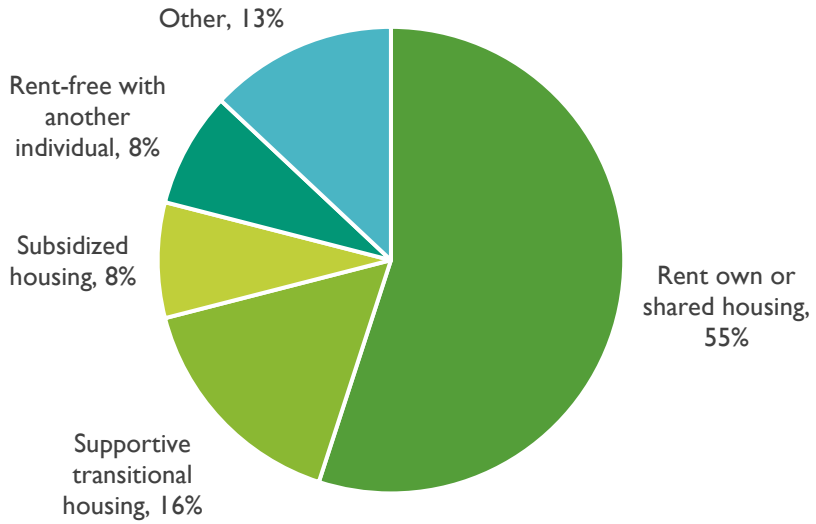
Interviewees consistently identified housing as the main challenge for youth aging out. To avoid homelessness, youth must secure a transitional housing placement-plus (THP+) or find an apartment or other living arrangement. However, as described below, THP+ beds for youth over 21 are scarce. This means that youth are often left with needing to find a unit they can afford.

Youth emancipating from care, however, may not have the financial ability to live on their own. Data on youth who exited JPD's AB 12 program in 2022 showed that 28 out of 38 youth were employed (74 percent). Of these, 8 youth were reported to be employed only part-time. In addition, nearly 40 percent of this population were receiving temporary financial assistance, and 24 percent were receiving CalFresh benefits.[59]

Data for youth who exited in 2022 suggested that not all were able to rent on their own. While just over half of the 38 youth were renting their own or shared housing, the remaining population lived in supportive transitional housing (16 percent), subsidized housing (8 percent), living with rent-free with another individual (8 percent), or in another arrangement (13 percent). For the additional 14 youth who exited during the first half of 2023 (January 1, 2023 to June 30, 2023), staff reported that 11 needed either emergency housing (36 percent) or would likely need it in the future (43 percent).

[59] According to the State's instructions for completing the exit survey (Form SOC 405XP), temporary financial assistance could include Independent Living Program support, Emancipated Youth Stipend, or other.

Exhibit 17: Housing Status of JPD's AB 12 Youth Exiting in 2022 (N = 38)



Source: Exit survey data collected by JPD staff and reported to HSA. Other category includes youth with other types of arrangements, unknown arrangements, or no arrangements.

Exiting foster care can be an emotionally challenging experience.

Youth emancipating from foster care experience a sudden transition from having a consistent team of adults to being on their own. This can be a stressful experience, especially since some youth may not be fully equipped to live on their own. One service provider described the experience of aging out:

> *Once young folks emancipate at 21, they're not ready for the world…They go from having a care team to check in on them and remind them of the things that they need to do to not having those folks anymore. That must feel confusing…like where do I go, who do I go to now?*

Although youth develop transition plans about six months before they emancipate, this period can still be a stressful time. One service provider said that youth tend to be concerned that they may not have the appropriate tools or resources to succeed on their own. The loss of community can be emotionally challenging.

One youth described his thoughts on aging out:

> *I was bummed when AB 12 ended. If it wasn't for AB 12, I would be in a tricky position most of the time. I never really had somebody I could follow as an example. I had to pave my own way. If it wasn't for AB 12, it would be completely rough.*

Former foster youth may still maintain ties with their social worker and/or attorney.

While the AB 12 program ends at age 21, youth aging out may need additional support in their transition. According to staff, some former AB 12 youth remain in contact with their social worker. In fact, in their exit court hearings, youth are encouraged to let their social worker know if they need future support. Youth may also remain in contact with their attorney as well. Staff commented that cutting off ties with youth who have aged out is not humane; at the same time, however, these relationships impose additional demands on staff.

Staff time spent on former AB 12 youth takes time away from current AB 12 youth. The COVID-19 emergency exacerbated this dynamic by initiating various efforts that continue financial support to former foster youth. Former AB 12 youth who have received support through these programs remain tied to JPD and may continue reaching out to AB 12 staff for assistance on funds, housing, and other resources. While time spent on former AB 12 youth is not currently tracked, anecdotes indicate that supporting former AB 12 youth involves a nontrivial amount of time and effort.

To understand the extent of these efforts, staff should track how much time they spend supporting former AB 12 youth. JPD can use this data to better understand youths' need for additional support after the AB 12 program and how it can support youth who have emancipated from care. This can also be an opportunity to clarify the Department's role and expectations regarding its support of youth after age 21.

RECOMMENDATION 4
JPD should track staff time spent on supporting individuals who have aged out of AB 12 and clarify the Department's role and expectations in supporting former AB 12 youth.

Some service providers continue to serve youth over 21.

Interviews with staff and service providers conveyed the consistent acknowledgement that AB 12 youth are usually not ready for self-sufficiency by the end of the program. Foster youth—some lacking basic life skills—have only three years once they enter the AB 12 program to prepare for adulthood. In recognition of this, some organizations and services serve youth beyond this age. Although Independent Living Programs in other counties typically serve youth up to 21 years old, San Francisco's Independent Living Skills Program serves youth up to 22 years old. ILSP staff said this was because HSA staff felt strongly that youth needed an additional year of supportive services.

Seeing that many Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) continue to informally support their youth after they age out of foster care, SFCASA has decided to establish an aftercare program, which is still in development. This program will focus on three areas: Community Connections, Health and Wellbeing, and Economic Inclusion and Stability. This program will formalize and build upon existing support that CASAs are already providing to youth.

Exhibit 18: Service Providers and Programs Serving Youth Beyond 21

Organization, Service, or Program	Service Type	Maximum Age
Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP+)	Housing for youth who left foster care on or after 18th birthday	25
Department for Children, Youth, and Their Families (DCYF)	Various programs	25
First Place for Youth	Independent Living Skills Program	22
Bay Area Legal Aid	Civil legal aid	24
HYPE Center	Multi-service drop-in center	24
SF CASA	Aftercare program (in development)	TBD

Source: Service provider websites and interviews. This is not a comprehensive list.

Since many former AB 12 youth continue to receive financial support from the City and that youth may still maintain ties with their social worker, JPD should formalize this support by creating a community-based aftercare program or hub. This could take a similar approach as the DCYF-funded Justice Care Coordinator strategy by connecting AB 12 youth (from JPD and potentially from HSA as well) to resources, programs, and supportive adults as they transition out of care.[60] Moreover, this program would also be an opportunity to invite community-based organizations to take on greater roles in supporting youth. Given the importance of relationships as described in Finding 1, instead of handing youth off right as they emancipate, social workers should introduce youth during the AB 12 program through site visits, programming, and events. While social workers may continue to still be involved in the lives of youth they have worked with, this hub can alleviate some of the demands on their time.

RECOMMENDATION 5

To streamline young people's transition out of the AB 12 program, JPD should create and fund a community-based aftercare program for youth to facilitate connections to resources, programs, and caring adults as youth transition into adulthood.

THP+ and voucher programs provide housing to youth after AB 12.

After aging out of care, former foster youth can live in THP+ housing, which provides transitional housing for youth 18 years and older. THP+ programs are funded by counties and youth can stay for 3 years or until they turn 25, whichever comes first. Like other transitional housing programs, THP+ programs also offer case management services to youth, though they are less intensive.

There are not enough THP+ beds for all foster youth leaving care.

Although San Francisco has THP+ placements, there are not enough beds for the number of youth aging out of AB 12. As of November 2022, San Francisco had a capacity of 67 beds through four THP+ providers.[61] At that time, HSA predicted that 16 of these would become available in 2023. However, the agency also anticipated that 65 youth would age out of AB 12 that same year—39 youth from HSA's AB 12 program and 26 youth from JPD's. In addition, at that time there were also about 20 youth who were on the waitlist from a previous cohort. That meant that if San Francisco were to make one bed available per youth, it would need about 69 more beds than its current capacity.[62]

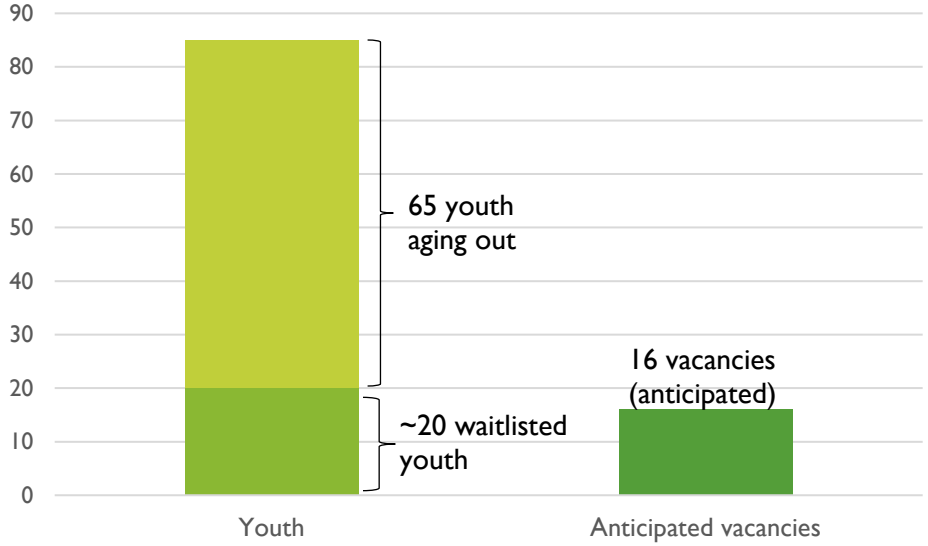
(Note that this number can change based on the number of young people who choose to participate at any given point. As of August 2023, HSA staff estimated that there could be as many as 20 vacancies available through the end of the year with 26 youth anticipated to emancipate over this period.)

[60] Currently, the Justice Care Coordinator strategy is only funded to serve young people under San Francisco jurisdiction (i.e., not those who have aged out).

[61] First Place for Youth, Larkin Street Youth Services, Salvation Army (Railton Place), and Edgewood Center for Children and Families.

[62] Calculated by combining the 65 youth aging out in 2023 with the 20 waitlisted youth, which adds up to 85 youth. Subtract 16 available beds from this value to get 69 additional beds needed.

Exhibit 19: Projections of THP+ Vacancies and AB 12 Youth (as of November 2022)



Source: HSA internal projections for 2023 as of November 2022. Of the 65 youth anticipated to age out of AB 12 in 2023, 39 are from HSA and 26 from JPD. Waitlisted youth are former AB 12 youth who are still waiting for a THP+ bed. Note that this graph reflects a snapshot in time and numbers are subject to change.

San Francisco utilizes housing vouchers for former foster youth.

To expand housing options, San Francisco created the SF Foster Youth Housing Program (SF-FYHP), which utilizes Family Unification Program (FUP), Foster Youth Independence (FYI), and Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) for former AB 12 youth.[63] This program is a collaboration between HSA, San Francisco's Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, the San Francisco Housing Authority, and Unity Care, which provides voluntary case management services and other services, such as assisting youth in applying for vouchers, identifying affordable housing, and furnishing the unit. By November 2022, the program enrolled 32 young adults—23 in FYI/FUP vouchers and 9 in EHV vouchers.[64]

Unlike THP+ housing, vouchers allow youth to select and sign a lease to their own apartment, meaning that there is more geographic flexibility (including outside of San Francisco). At the same time, there is also an expectation that youth will be able to live more independently.

However, the size of the voucher program is limited by the number of vouchers available. As of August 2023, San Francisco had 25 vouchers available for youth and 14 EHV vouchers were being used by youth (out of a larger pool of EHV vouchers). According to HSA staff, usually agencies must apply for large numbers of vouchers at a time, but now they can apply to HUD for on-demand FYI vouchers in smaller increments—as small as one voucher—making the process potentially more responsive to need.[65] Other limiting factors are the capacity of partner agencies to provide supportive services and the geographical range of these services, since youth must be able to access case management services for the three years that they're in the program.

[63] FUP vouchers can be used for families, former foster youth, and youth aging out of foster care. FYI vouchers are only for current and former foster youth. EHV vouchers are available to various populations, including households at risk of homelessness and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.
[64] Use of FUP vouchers is limited to three years. Individuals can use EHV vouchers indefinitely.
[65] According to staff, in reviewing applications HUD examines an agency's voucher utilization rate, which may vary significantly since the number of vouchers tends to be limited.

There is a scarcity of transitional housing for San Francisco youth emancipating from care in other counties.

Former AB 12 youth living outside of San Francisco face challenges in securing housing. Youth who wish to continue to live in their county of residence may qualify for a voucher or THP+ housing in that county.[66] However, securing either option is difficult, given the limited number of vouchers and the general scarcity of THP+ housing across counties.

According to staff, HSA only has THP+ placements available within San Francisco. This means that youth living in other counties are dependent on the other county's agency for placement, leading to potentially long wait times. There are a couple ways JPD could make THP+ beds available for JPD youth in other counties. These are to secure its own contracts, leverage other counties' THP+ contracts, or leverage existing contracts through the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH). Out of these, staff report that the third option is the most feasible.[67] Currently, HSH has various contracts with service providers who also work in other counties (for example, Unity Care). HSH could expand these contracts to provide beds for San Francisco's out-of-county youth. Staff note that this could also benefit foster youth in HSA's AB 12 program as well.

To increase housing options for youth aging out of JPD's AB 12 program, the Department should work with HSH to make additional THP+ beds available to youth living in other counties. As mentioned in Finding 2, these include Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Mateo counties.

RECOMMENDATION 6
To ensure youth can live in transitional housing after they age out of the AB 12 program, JPD should work with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to make THP+ beds available in counties where many of the Department's AB 12 young people live.

New initiatives have provided financial support to youth aging out.

In addition to housing, there have been initiatives to continue financial support to youth after they age out of extended foster care. As mentioned earlier, youth stop receiving extended foster care payments after turning 21. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, California Governor Gavin Newsom extended AB 12 benefits through December 31, 2021 for youth who turned 21 on or after January 27, 2020.

Emergency Housing Assistance Payments (EHAP)

After the expiration of Governor Newsom's extension, the City and County began issuing payments to youth who emancipated from extended foster care at the end of 2021. Youth in the first cohort received $1,060 per month from January 2022 to Fall 2023 (18 months). Subsequent cohorts of youth also received

[66] Youth are also eligible for housing resources offered by San Francisco's Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), which has a Youth Coordinated Entry System for youth ages 18-24. This system allows youth to access permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing beds in San Francisco's Homelessness Response System. However, HSH resources are only located within the city (A 2018 consultant report noted that HSH youth resources tend to be in the Tenderloin and central city areas.)

[67] Staff note that the first option would require significant amounts of money and a competitive solicitation for service providers. The second option would involve providing money to agencies in other counties, which could then place San Francisco youth in housing made available through those agencies' contracts. While this process is administratively less complicated, staff note that an overall scarcity of beds may make other agencies more reluctant to make their beds available to other youth.

EHAP payments through June 2023, after which the County discontinued EHAP and enrolled youth in the County's Guaranteed Income pilot. From January 2022 to January 2023, the County issued approximately $1.2 million in EHAP payments.

Guaranteed Income (GI) Pilot

In November 2022, San Francisco's Human Services Agency was one of seven applicants across California selected to participate in the first State-funded guaranteed income pilot program. The State awarded $3.3 million to HSA to distribute to 150 former foster youth for 18 months, both those served by HSA and JPD. The San Francisco GI pilot launched in October 2023 and is issuing $1,200 per month to AB 12 youth who emancipated from care anytime in 2022 or 2023. The pilot will undergo local and statewide evaluations.

Senate Bill 9

In December 2022, Senator Dave Cortese introduced Senate Bill 9 (SB 9) to extend the age threshold of foster care from 21 to 22 years old. SB 9 allows youth to remain in the program through age 22 if they are "experiencing homelessness or [are] at reasonable risk of homelessness if they are not under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court." In addition, SB 9 requires the Department of Social Services to facilitate a 3-year pilot program in at least three counties to extend foster care up to age 22.

SB 9 did not pass the 2023 legislative session. However, the bill passed the California Senate, indicating that there is existing support for the policy. JPD should explore how it can support similar efforts in the future.

Financial support beyond AB 12 has helped youth transition out of care.

Efforts like SB 9, EHAP, and the GI pilot are important, as interviewees recognized that three years is not long enough for youth to be adequately prepared for adulthood. "Age 21 is just very young for that major transition [out] of AB 12 to happen," one service provider remarked, recommending that youth should have "more time and more support."

In interviews, youth described the importance of receiving financial payments during the pandemic. "The payments were necessary," one said. "Especially with the whole COVID situation." Although living expenses are high in the Bay Area, the financial support has allowed him to "experience things no one in the family has been able to."

The continued financial support also enabled another former AB 12 youth to explore living in another city before returning to the Bay Area. Financial support is crucial for foster youth—a reality that doesn't change once they emancipate from care. Youth were appreciative of the support but honest about the financial difficulties of living in the Bay Area. "The only thing is," said one youth, "I wish AB 12 gave us more money."

With the GI pilot ending after 18 months and being limited to young people who aged out before January 1, 2024, JPD should identify ways to continue financial support for AB 12 youth aging out of care. It should also support advocacy efforts to pass SB 9. These efforts will help extend the runway for AB 12 youth transitioning into adulthood and increase their chances of success.

RECOMMENDATION 7

To help AB 12 young people transition out of foster care, JPD should:

- Support advocacy efforts for efforts that are similar to SB 9
- Continue funding the Guaranteed Income program beyond the initial pilot until SB 9 or similar bill is passed.

Reporting on youth outcomes can help JPD understand their needs and challenges.

Analyzing and reporting on data is important in evaluating the impact of a program and determining how well the program is in achieving its goals. Currently, JPD tracks demographic data, as well as data related to education and employment of AB 12 youth. The State also requires agencies to complete an exit survey on each youth when they emancipate from the program and includes items like whether a youth has a bank account, their educational attainment, and sources of income.[68] JPD can analyze and report on this data to understand the status and needs of AB 12 youth while they are in the program and as they emancipate.

Although JPD collects demographic data on race, age, and gender, it does not collect data on how many youth identify as LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in both the foster care and juvenile justice systems, and because of their identities experience unique stressors such as discrimination, violence, and rejection of biological families.[69] [70] Many of these youth are also youth of color.[71] Collecting information on the proportion of LGBTQ+ youth can inform JPD's approach and services.

In assessing the program, the Department should complement its quantitative data with qualitative data, which can provide insight into the feelings and experiences of youth. While these perceptions are subjective, they can influence a youth's aspirations, motivation, and behavior. JPD could collect this information surveys or interviews, which could include questions about youths' assessments of their:

- Mental and emotional wellbeing
- Physical safety
- Housing stability
- Permanent connections
- Availability of educational or job opportunities
- Agency in shaping life outcomes
- Attitudes about the future

To guide reporting, JPD could use the areas of success of permanent connections, housing stability, education and employment, healthcare, independent living skills, and long-term plans (as described in the Background).

[68] Outcomes for Non-minor Dependents Exiting Foster Care, or form SOC 405XP.
[69] Prince, D. M., Ray-Novak, M., Gillani, B., & Peterson, E. (2022). Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care: An Evidence-Based Theoretical Conceptual Model of Disproportionality and Psychological Comorbidities. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 23(5), 1643–1657.
[70] Roberts, Dorothy E. Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World First edition., Basic Books, 2022.
[71] Irvine, Angela. and Aisha Canfield M.P.P. "The Overrepresentation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning, Gender Nonconforming and Transgender Youth Within the Child Welfare to Juvenile Justice Crossover Population." The American University journal of gender, social policy & the law 24 (2016): 2.

JPD does not collect data on recidivism in the adult/criminal justice system.

Another relevant area to measure is recidivism. The AB 12 Court Judge expressed that one of the goals of extended foster care is to "disrupt the cradle-to-prison pipeline"—to prevent former probation youth from entering the adult criminal legal system. This is particularly important for youth in JPD's AB 12 program, as one research study showed that juvenile incarceration significantly increases the chance of adult incarceration.[72]

JPD does not collect data on recidivism. However, according to staff, youth in the AB 12 program have sometimes entered the program with pending adult criminal cases or have been arrested while in the program. Their comments suggest that recidivism is not an uncommon occurrence. Being incarcerated can impact a youth's ability to meet extended foster care requirements, which can cause them to lose their payments. (Though if the incarceration is short-term, a young person may still be able to remain in the program.) Although JPD's AB 12 program is separate from probation, the program exclusively serves youth who have had experience with the juvenile justice system. By providing financial, social, and emotional support to young adults, extended foster care can help former probation youth build lives that lead them away, rather than towards, prison.

Recidivism is a standard way to measure the effectiveness of interventions in the criminal justice system. Collecting data on recidivism could help JPD measure a key metric of success for the AB 12 program. Tracking how many young people in the program are arrested, incarcerated, or convicted by the criminal justice system can help JPD better understand how being in extended foster care may be impacting these youth.

RECOMMENDATION 8

To better understand the youth in JPD's AB 12 program and their outcomes, JPD should compile data and regularly report on:

- Relevant outcomes of youth, such as permanent connections, housing stability, education and employment, health and access to care, independent living skills, long-term plans, etc.
- Youth perceptions of relevant areas, such as mental and emotional wellbeing, safety, housing stability, permanent connections, educational or job opportunities, agency, and attitudes about the future.
- LGBTQ+ youth
- Recidivism rates of youth in and after the AB 12 program

[72] The researcher's estimates range from 23 to 41 percentage points more likely.
Aizer, A., and J. J. Doyle. "Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges." The Quarterly Journal of Economics 130, no. 2 (February 2, 2015): 759–803.

CONCLUSION

The San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department's (JPD) AB 12 program fills a crucial gap in supporting probation youth who have been placed in foster care as they transition to adulthood. The program's model leverages existing relationships to provide consistent relational support as young people in out-of-home placements complete probation and re-enter their communities as legal adults. JPD's expertise and existing connections, along with its collaborative approach, allows it to offer support for the unique needs and challenges of former probation youth. However, there are still gaps in the program, including the financial resources needed to live in the Bay Area, more intense individualized support, and financial literacy services. When a youth emancipates from the AB 12 program, these needs do not go away; rather, they may actually be magnified due to the loss of monthly payments and formalized support of the social worker and other staff. JPD should ensure that AB 12 youth can cultivate permanent connections and afford housing where they wish to live and address existing gaps, create aftercare support, and arrange adequate housing options and financial resources for newly emancipated youth. The Department should also track outcomes by collecting and reporting on data.

In addition, JPD should accompany these strategies with investments earlier on. As this report describes, by the time youth enter the AB 12 program they have experienced significant trauma and disruptions in their lives, and many are not ready to live on their own. Dorothy Roberts, a sociologist who studies the child welfare system, provides a sobering view of extended foster care:

> *By the time makeshift resources kick in, foster care has already set children back so far it is nearly impossible for them to catch up. The government gives teens a few more years of paltry services to recover from what might have been a childhood of traumatizing placements.*[73]

As a "downstream" program, extended foster care is limited as a prevention service. At best it is a responsive intervention that provides youth with one of their final opportunities to build a life free from the child welfare and justice systems. However, this report shows that accomplishing this outcome requires more than the effort of any single individual; rather, it involves a community of supportive adults who can offer permanency, wisdom, and resources. It also requires adequate financial support that covers more basic living costs, but enough to enable youth to live healthy, vibrant lives while building an educational and economic foundation for their futures. Not all youth will be successful. Studies have shown that many former foster youth enter the adult criminal legal system, experience homelessness, and suffer from other adverse outcomes. But for now, the AB 12 program offers a window that can help those who are in the right place and time to benefit. As one youth said, "[AB 12] didn't make me an adult. But it prepared me."

[73] Roberts, Dorothy E. Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World First edition., Basic Books, 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a list of recommendations in this report:

1) To foster relational permanency among AB 12 youth, JPD should develop formal efforts to help youth cultivate close connections with family members and other supportive individuals. These efforts may include:

    - Covering transportation costs of visits
    - Identifying and connecting youth and their families to counseling services

2) To help youth afford housing that is supportive of their development and well-being, JPD should:

    - Support advocacy efforts for similar legislation to AB 525.
    - Until AB 525 or similar legislation is passed, provide financial supplements to youth living in SILPs according to their county of residence, no less than the amounts based on the approach proposed by AB 525 and using the MIT Living Wage Estimates as a reference.
    - Identify how much youth in transitional housing programs (THPs) are receiving each month and supplement this income using the MIT Living Wage Estimates as a reference.

3) To address gaps, JPD should:

    - Provide greater individualized support to youth that is responsive to different identities
    - Make financial literacy coaching available to all AB 12 youth
    - Address other identified needs

4) JPD should track staff time spent on supporting individuals who have aged out of AB 12 and clarify the Department's role and expectations in supporting former AB 12 youth.

5) To streamline young people's transition out of the AB 12 program, JPD should create and fund a community-based aftercare program for youth to facilitate connections to resources, programs, and caring adults as youth transition into adulthood.

6) To ensure youth can live in transitional housing after they age out of the AB 12 program, JPD should work with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to make THP+ beds available in counties where many of the Department's AB 12 young people live.

7) To help AB 12 young people transition out of foster care, JPD should:

    - Support advocacy efforts for efforts that are similar to SB 9
    - Continue funding the Guaranteed Income program beyond the initial pilot until SB 9 or similar bill is passed.

8) To better understand the youth in JPD's AB 12 program and their outcomes, JPD should compile data and regularly report on:

- Relevant outcomes of youth, such as permanent connections, housing stability, education and employment, health and access to care, independent living skills, long-term plans, etc.

- Youth perceptions of relevant areas, such as mental and emotional wellbeing, safety, housing stability, permanent connections, educational or job opportunities, agency, and attitudes about the future.

- LGBTQ+ youth

- Recidivism rates of youth in and after the AB 12 program

Appendix A: Scope and Methodology

This report presents research conducted through an internship with the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) during Summer 2023. The objective this project to understand JPD's AB 12 program, including how it works, who it serves, and any noteworthy challenges and gaps. Research primarily centered around pre- and post-COVID periods (i.e., 2019 through 2023).

To achieve this, I did the following:

- Interviewed service providers who work with AB 12 youth:
  - Bay Area Legal Aid
  - Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice
  - First Place for Youth
  - SFCASA
  - Sunset Youth Services
  - Unity Care
- Interviewed JPD social workers, supervisor, and Director of Probation Services
- Interviewed County staff in the following departments:
  - Human Services Agency
  - Public Defender's Office
  - San Francisco Superior Court
- Interviewed three current and former AB 12 youth
- Reviewed AB 12 legislation, All County Letters, and other State resources
- Analyzed internal Department data on AB 12 youth demographics, caseloads, staffing, housing status, and program participation
- Analyzed exit survey data for youth who exited AB 12 in 2022
- Observed AB 12 Court hearings

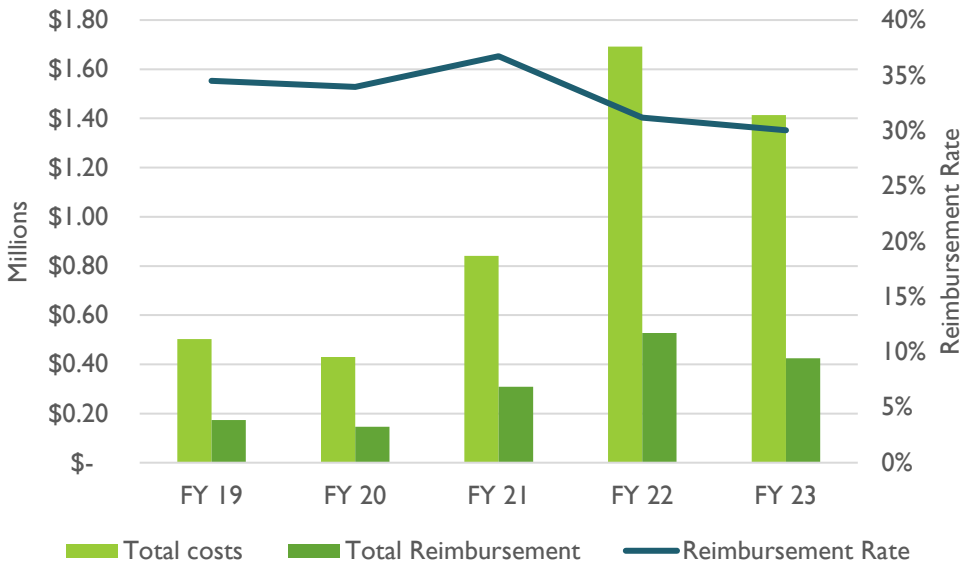
Appendix B: AB 12 Payments

Housing Type	Monthly Amount	Supplements (FY 2023-24)	Description
Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP)	$1,206	$2,700 if six months pregnant $900 per child if parenting	SILPs are youth-selected placements, such as a rental unit or college dorm. **Payment goes directly to youth.**
Transitional Housing Program – Non-minor Dependent (THP-NMD)	$4,192	Additional county supplements:* San Francisco: $695 Alameda: $304 Contra Costa: $304 San Mateo: $695	THP-NMDs are agency-run housing programs overseen by each county. **Payment goes directly to county.** Youth receive a stipend.
Emergency Housing Assistance Payment (EHAP)	$1,060	N/A	Youth who emancipated on December 31, 2021 are eligible and received their last payment on June 2023.
Guaranteed Income (GI) Pilot	$1,200	N/A	Youth who emancipated on or before October 31, 2023 are enrolled.

Source: Staff interviews, internal County documents, and All County Letters 21-123 and 23-65.

Appendix C: Program Costs and Reimbursement

JPD receives reimbursement for a portion of its AB 12 program costs from federal and state funds.[74] In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, JPD spent $1.41 million on its AB 12 program and received $0.42 million in reimbursements. The reimbursement rate has remained around 30 to 35 percent, indicating that most program costs are covered by local funds.



Source: JPD Title IV-E claim cost and payment data.

[74] Types of costs eligible for reimbursement include salaries and direct costs (such as travel and trainings). These reimbursements come from federal Title IV-E and State Continuum of Care funds.