

JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTER SITE VISIT

PREPARED FOR ALAMEDA COUNTY PROBATION

The Research & Action Team at Impact Justice conducted a site visit at the Juvenile Justice Center to observe programming and youth committed to the Secure Track. The RAC was also able to conduct focus groups and administer a survey to gather feedback from the youth.

About Us

IMPACT JUSTICE

Impact Justice is a national innovation and resource center committed to reducing the number of people involved in US criminal justice systems, improving conditions for those who remain incarcerated, providing meaningful opportunities for successful re-entry, and attending to crime victims' needs. Home to some of the foremost leaders in juvenile justice, violence prevention, research and evaluation, restorative justice, and youth development, Impact Justice provides an array of technical assistance to criminal justice and community stakeholders. For more information, please visit www.ImpactJustice.org

THE RESEARCH AND ACTION CENTER

This report falls under the purview of the Research and Action Center. As a Center of Impact Justice, our research catalyzes community efforts to eliminate disparities and propel system change. We focus especially on the populations most impacted by disparities, including youth and adults of color, as well as members of the LGBTQ/GNCT communities. That's why we partner with community service providers, government agencies, and key stakeholders across the country to research, evaluate, and support implementation of the most effective and innovative practices.

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Special thanks to Brandon Miller, Senior Researcher, for his role in collecting and analyzing data

Summary of Site Visit

BACKGROUND

The Research & Action Center (RAC) at Impact Justice has assisted Alameda County, through the SB 823 Subcommittee of the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, in the development of the Plan that was required by the State of California following the passage of SB 823, which closed the Department of Juvenile Justice and its state-level facilities for young people. Currently, Impact Justice has been contracted by Alameda County Probation Department (ACPD) to help evaluate the implementation of that Plan, specifically to track the implementation of the 277 recommendations made by the Subcommittee in the Plan.

As part of this evaluation, the RAC conducted a site visit at the Juvenile Justice Center in San Leandro in March 2023. We were given a tour of the grounds (although the rainy weather at the time kept us mostly indoors) and the facility, including intake, medical, and visitation areas. We also observed classrooms and programs in both Units 1 and 3, where youth committed to the Secure Track are held, and conducted a focus group on each Unit as well. We developed a survey to solicit youth feedback and administered those during our site visit as well. We were able to administer and collect the surveys independently from Probation staff, who were not in the room during focus groups or survey administration.

Youth in Unit 1 were mostly youth who had not spent any time at DJJ, but were committed directly into the Secure Track. Youth in Unit 3 were all youth who had returned from DJJ following the closure of that facility. Some of the youth in Unit 3 were previously interviewed by the RAC during the Plan development phase, while they were still incarcerated at DJJ.

The young people had a lot to share, and they readily opened up to our team member who facilitated, an African-American man with lived experience himself. They shared their experiences and gave input about the program and their units. They shared their doubts that “anything would change,” and also expressed disappointment that they felt that what they read in the Youth Handbook was not reflected in their day-to-day experiences.

Findings & Recommendations

Fifteen young people responded to the survey we distributed out and collected. Of those who responded, the average age was 18.58 years old. Seven identified as African-American, three as Latino, one as white, and one as mixed-race (the rest did not respond to the question). All of those who responded identified as Male (none identified as transgender, non-binary, or something else). Of those who responded, all but one identified as heterosexual/straight, and one indicated that he preferred not to say. All youth currently in Units 1 and 3 participated in the focus groups.

Alameda County Probation has also requested to add a few statements in response to the findings and recommendations presented here. It is their hope that their statements can provide more recent updates and perspectives. Their statements are clearly labeled, and were prepared by ACPD, not Impact Justice.

PROGRAMMING

Staffing shortages do appear to be negatively impacting programming on the units. Youth shared that they had not been on the blacktop in months. They shared that they want more structured time and programming. In survey responses, a common response to “what do you like least” was the large amounts of down time they had, as well as the amount of time spent in their rooms due to staffing shortages. They also shared their worries that offered programming will not adequately prepare them to return to their lives in their communities. They expressed the desire to give more input on what programs they want and gave several suggestions for programming. They requested more computer software programs, gardening programs, and courses in business and barbering. They also expressed feeling segregated from the other units and want more opportunities to interact with the non-823 units.

I like that I’m doing an electrician program because that will follow me when I come home.

Youth Respondent

Survey results are mixed as well, although there are some programs that are clearly popular among the young people. When asked about their top three favorite programs/activities, several programs were mentioned repeatedly: ROP, school/college courses, Raising Leaders, and PE/working out/basketball. When asked about “what do you like best” there were only five positive responses, but several mentioned educational opportunities.

Recommendations

Seeking to minimize the time spent alone in rooms should be a top priority. Look for ways to leverage non-probation staff (such as credible messengers and other trusted programmatic staff) on the unit to create staffing models that will better support a wide variety of programming and activities for the young people. Look for opportunities for youth to spend time outside of their unit, especially outside on the blacktop for physical activity. Look for more opportunities to provide life skills programming, and programming that aligns with youth interest and input. Also include youth in decision-making in meaningful ways, especially in areas that impact their day-to-day lives.

Perspectives from ACPD

Programming in the SB 823 has and will continue to evolve as we (Probation) onboard new programs and services that align with the youth's needs and interest. Attachment A outlines the current programs and services, as well as those planned, with respective timelines for implementation. Furthermore, since April 2023 a schedule has been implemented for youth to be taken onto the "blacktop" for outdoor recreation more frequently. While we recognize the benefits of getting youth onto the "blacktop," we do so while balancing staffing and safety as a priority.

FACILITIES

Both the quality and quantity of food provided at the Juvenile Justice Center remains a top concern for the young people. These same concerns were shared in 2021 during interviews with youth at JJC as well. The young men shared that the food they were served was often cold, and the small serving sizes left them feeling hungry after meals. Other facility-related concerns were that showers often only had cold water, and that they wanted warmer clothing or the ability to wear their own clothing. They also shared that there are often long waiting lines to use the phone for family calls and requested that more phones be installed. They also requested the addition of small kitchen-type appliances so they could make more of their own food; specifically, they requested an air fryer, microwave, and smoothie machine be made available to them in the unit(s).

Recommendations

Efforts to improve the quality and quantity of food should be a top priority. Food is more than just a vehicle for adequate nutrition – it can also bring comfort, enjoyment, and help to build community. Providing the small appliances that were requested (air fryer,

microwave, and a smoothie machine) could also help in this area, as well as providing an opportunity to soften and normalize their environment and ability to learn and practice life skills. Steps should also be taken to ensure that youth are able to take warm showers and that the temperature in the unit does not result in discomfort. Warmer clothing options should be provided to all residents.

Perspectives from ACPD

The contract with the existing food vendor is set to expire July 1, 2023. Over the past several months, Probation has been in the process of selecting and moving forward with a new vendor to provide better quality food. This particular vendor participated in two-week pilot providing meals to the SB 823 youth, which received positive feedback. Furthermore, at program inception, youth in the SB 823 program were given access to a small kitchen to cook their own food, a microwave on the unit, and other small appliances to help normalize the environment. Several safety concerns were raised as the youth demonstrated anti-social behavior relative to the utilization of these appliances. We have plans to open an Honors Dorm where these items will again be available and accessible to youth who earn the right to be housed in the Honors Dorm.

PRIVILEGES

Young people shared that they feel that privileges are not given or taken away according to the policies outlined in the Youth Handbook. They also feel that giving the entire unit consequences for individual behavior(s) is unfair. Aligning with concerns discussed above, youth also expressed the desire to be able to shop for groceries and prepare food in the unit. They also would like to be able to receive packages from their families. While security issues may be of concern here, the goals of least restrictive environment, normalization, and connection with families should also be weighed. The young men also shared that they wished they had a commissary where they can use their own money to purchase things. They also requested a more frequent rotation of movies that includes more recent films. Similarly, they also requested more channels to watch on television, and more age-appropriate reading materials.

Recommendations

Entertainment options should be regularly updated, with a variety of options, and with input and feedback from the young men on what interests them. ACPD should consider the addition of a small commissary available to each unit. Policies around receiving packages from families should also be reviewed. Receiving packages and gifts

from family members can help to normalize the experience, help maintain close connections, and be sources of motivation and encouragement for young people. Security concerns around such packages should be fully explored and mitigations put into place that can still allow for packages to be received.

Perspectives from ACPD

The Youth Handbook was drafted in 2021 at program inception and in alignment with the goals and objectives of the SB 823 Realignment Plan. Since that time, modifications to various aspects of the program have been made and the Youth Handbook is currently being revised. Before being finalized, we plan to develop an SB 823 Youth Council to review and vet the updated draft Handbook.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF & EACH OTHER

Young people were asked about their relationships with probation staff, program staff, and each other in both the focus group and on the survey. In focus groups, youth shared that they felt that some staff were overly harsh and reactionary. They did express, however, that they felt it was easier to get along with older probation staff. As mentioned above, youth expressed concerns about staff shortages that interrupt programming and also result in excessive time spent alone in their rooms.

The 15 young people who responded to our survey shared their feelings and opinions on their relationships with probation and non-probation program staff, as well as with each other. The survey results, illustrated below, demonstrate that only about half of the young people feel that probation staff care about them, but about 86% reported that they were treated with respect. About a third of the youth felt that probation staff did not treat them fairly, and only about 60% felt that they could go to probation staff if they needed assistance. Results regarding non-probation program staff followed similar trends, although scores for non-probation staff were generally higher.

Figure 1: Youth Responses to Survey regarding Relationships with Probation Staff

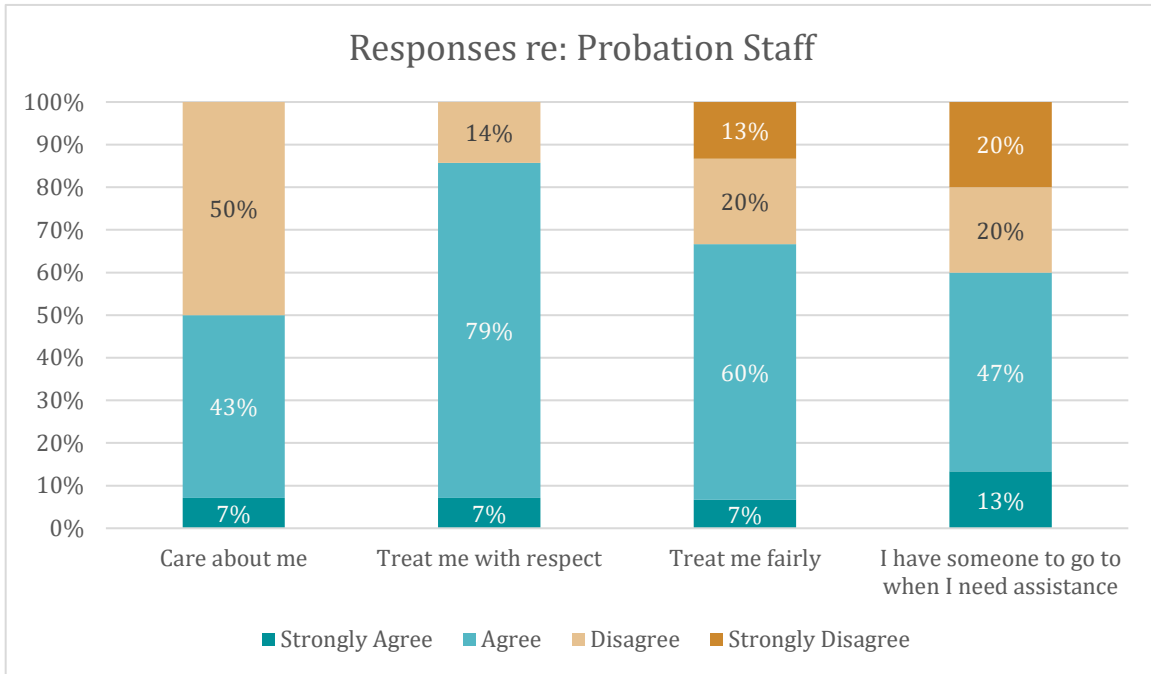
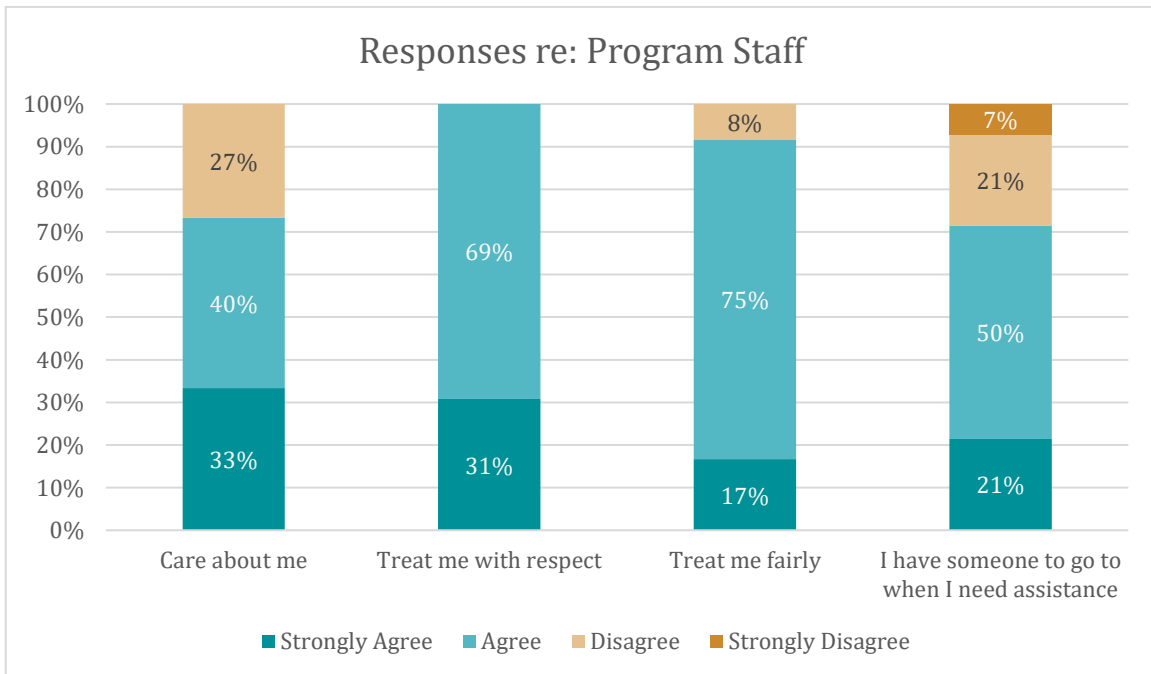
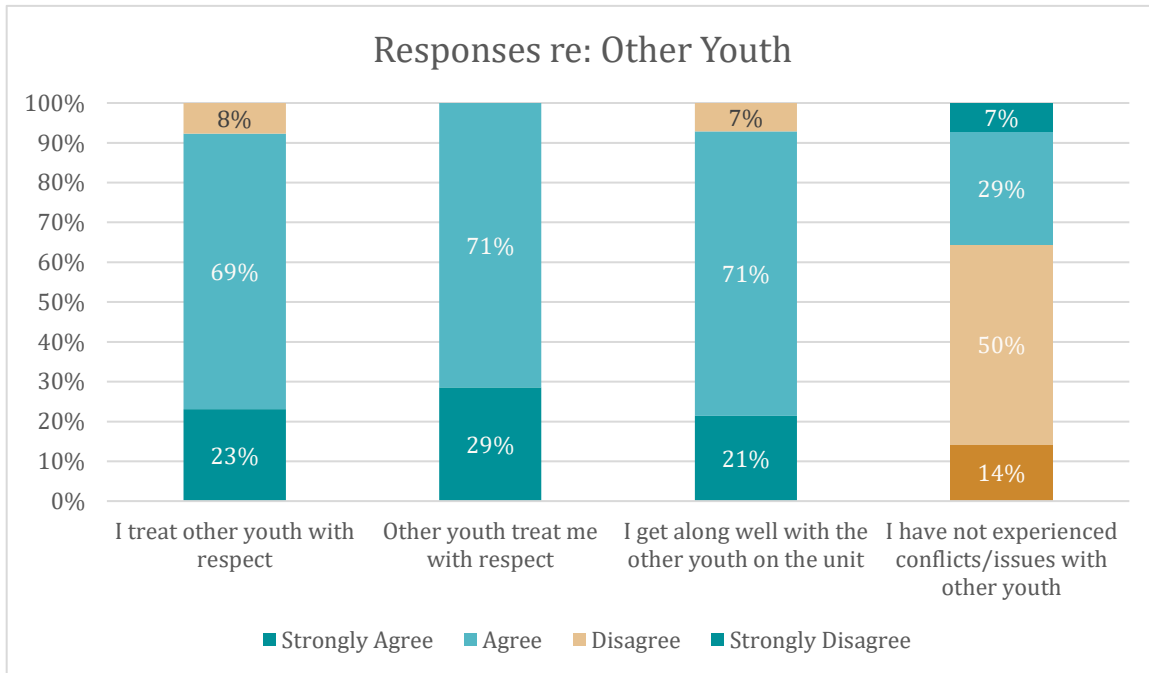


Figure 2: Youth Responses to Survey regarding Relationships with Program Staff



We also asked the young people to reflect on their relationships with each other. Results show that while some conflict has been reported, youth generally feel positively about their relationships with each other, and 86% said there is another young person on the unit who they feel connected to.

Figure 3: Youth Responses to Survey regarding Relationships with Other youth



Recommendations

Addressing staff shortages to allow for more regular programming and the establishing of routines could also help youth and staff develop better relationships. Incorporating Credible Messengers into the unit milieu in a meaningful way could help alleviate some of the shortages and could help to bridge the disconnect youth currently feel with probation staff. Opportunities for relationship building between probation staff and the young people should be prioritized, in both formal and informal ways.

Opportunities for probation and non-probation staff to spend time together could also help to strengthen relationships between them as well, positively contributing to the sense of trust and safety in the milieu. This can also be done in both formal and informal ways: attending trainings together, problem solving together, discussing youth progress (both inside and outside the context of MDT meetings), etc.

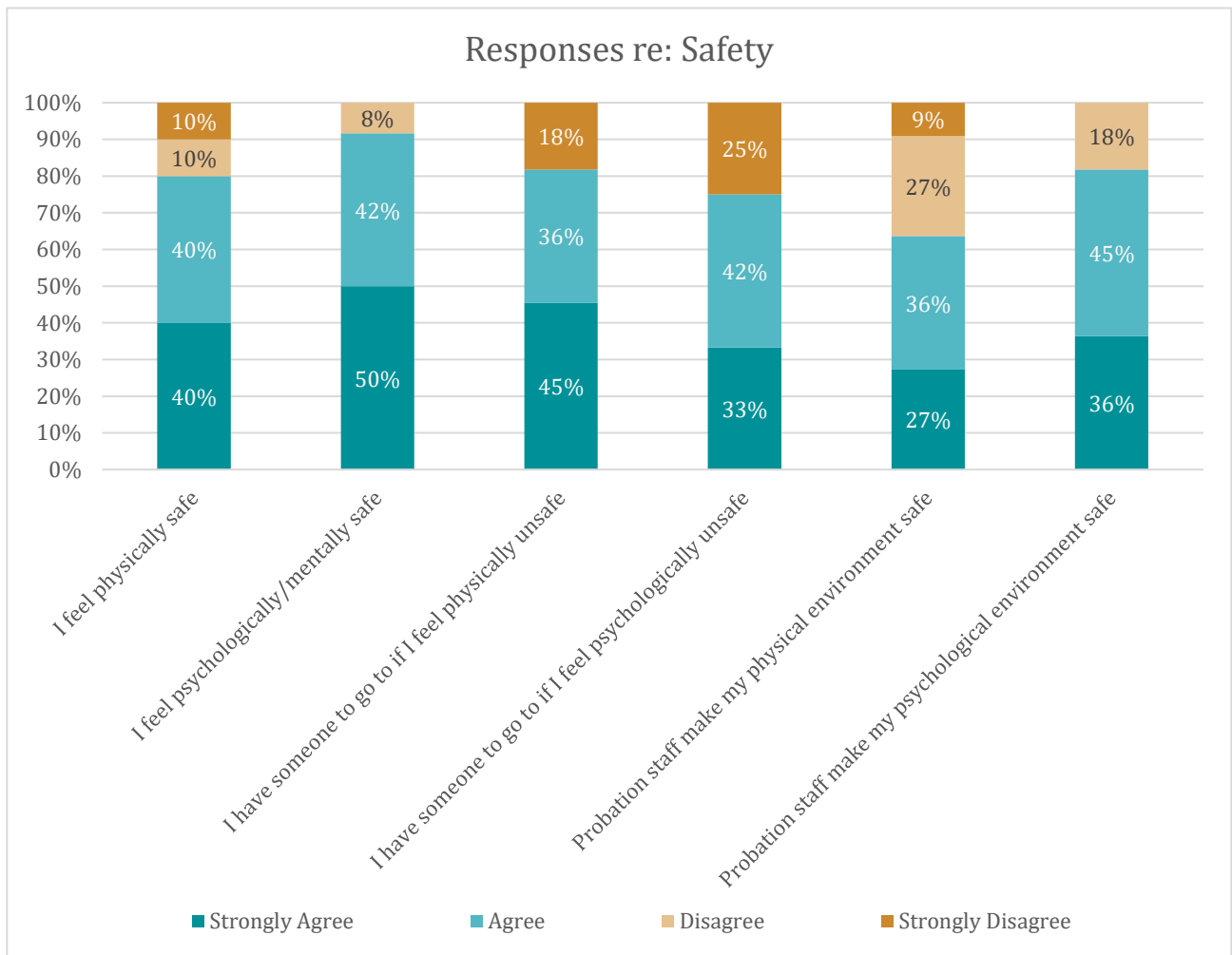
Perspective from ACPD

Credible Messengers are being introduced into the facility, which will include co-trainings and co-facilitation of groups and programming. Credible Messengers will be involved in MDTs, Success Plan meetings, etc. All of these efforts will help with continuing to build positive relationships and a therapeutic environment.

FEELINGS OF SAFETY

In survey responses, the young men in the secure track generally reported feeling safe both physically and psychologically/mentally.

Figure 4: Youth Responses to Survey regarding Feelings of Safety





Recommendations

Increasing the number of probation and non-probation staff and improving the quality of these relationships will help to improve feelings of physical and psychological safety among the young people in the units. While it does take time to build trusted relationships, staffing shortages will continue to hamper these efforts until they are able to be addressed.

Findings & Recommendations

Overall, the site visit was successful in that we were able to establish rapport with the young people and were able to hear their opinions, feelings, and suggestions for improvement. They shared points of frustration and concern, but most also shared that they felt safe on the unit, that they felt connected with at least one other young person on the unit, and that they felt respected by both Probation and non-Probation program staff.

The implementation of the SB 823 Plan remains a work in progress, with staffing shortages and a current lack of “softer” placement options (that are still secure) hindering progress. While other options (such as Camp Sweeney, etc.) are being explored, ACPD should prioritize things like the quality of food, warm clothing, warm showers, ability to spend substantial amounts of free time outside of rooms – all things that have a very large impact on the day-to-day wellbeing of the young people committed to the secure track. We also encourage ACPD to look for ways to meaningfully involve young people in decision making around these and other issues. Their inclusion in the Youth Advisory Council should be considered, but a smaller unit-specific or secure-track specific Council could also be important ways for these young men to be included in decision making. Looking for ways to expand their choice and voice can be powerful ways to motivate and engage the young people in these units.

The evaluation team would like to thank probation and non-probation staff for their hospitality during our visit. We would also like to express our thanks to the residents of Units 1 and 3 of the Juvenile Justice Center for their willingness to share their experiences with us.

Attachment A: Secure Track Programs, May 2023

1. **Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) Credible Messenger Services** – Contract executed April 1, 2023, with in-unit activation anticipated for July 1, 2023.

After receiving 35 hours of training in June 2023, rotating Credible Messengers employed by RJOY are assigned 13 hours per day, seven (7) days per week, between the Secure Track units. Duties include facilitating weekly groups in a singular curriculum with the below modules and providing a weekly session on each topic (13.5 group hours per week, per unit).

- Youth Restorative Justice
- Civic and Social Engagement
- Cognitive Behavioral Intervention
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Family Intervention/Restoration
- Gang Intervention
- Health and Well Being
- Parenting/Fathering

2. **Deputy Sherriff Activities League (DSAL)** – Anticipated Activation July 1

Recreation Programming – 10 Hours per week, per unit, in addition to existing recreational programming currently offered by ACPD, Laney College and ACOE.

- Basketball
- Futsal/Soccer
- Badminton
- Circuit/Core/Cardio Training
- Dance/Zumba/Yoga
- Volleyball
- Flag Football

Farming as part of “Dig Deep Farms” – 10 Hours per week per unit

- 72 – Hour Permaculture Design Certification Program
- Field instruction in raised bed gardening development and maintenance.
- Field Instruction in greenhouse gardening, construction, and maintenance.
- Instruction in landscape and playing field design and maintenance training

- Instruction in landscape and hand tool and power tool Instruction
- Meets GSA MQ for employment

The goal is to target Alameda County GSA Job Skills Employment Targets with the intention to provide a career path:

- GSA Building: Building Maintenance Laborer
- GSA Maintenance and Construction Worker
- GSA Gardener I, General Services Agency
- GSA Maintenance Aide I

Additional programming included in the DSAL contract for development:

- Facilities Maintenance
- Animal Husbandry and Therapeutic Animal Training
- Canine Grooming
- Culinary Training
- Aquaculture/Hydroponics or Pisciculture

3. Substance Use Disorder Treatment - Family Spring Inc. – Activated 2022

- Group Sessions 1 x per week per unit for 12 weeks
- Individual 1 x per 2 weeks per unit participant.
- Current substance use disorder in custody and post-release
- New 3-year contract for substance use disorder in-custody and post-release (will be executed June 2023)

4. Anger Management – Family Spring Inc. (Activated May 1, 2023)

- Group sessions 1 x per week per unit for 12 weeks
- New provider for Anger Management

5. Raising Leaders Program – Hayward Unified School District – Activated 2022

- Youth Leadership Workshops Program
- Group meetings 1 x per week for 8 weeks.

- Internships available upon 8 weeks conclusion for the duration of a youth's custody time – up to 30 hours per week
- With Paid Internship (\$20 per hour) – with jobs that include:
 - Library Assistant
 - Screen Printing
 - DSAL Dig Deep Farms
 - Facility Support Positions
 - The Last Mile Technology Training (pending contract execution)

6. **Laney Community College: Restoring Our Communities** – Activated 2022

- In-person and virtual community college classes
- 5 days per week, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. availability
- Education and vocational counseling
- Reentry services, including continuing education
- Supplemented by volunteer tutoring

7. **Positive Communication Practices** – Culturally Responsive CBT – Activated 2022

- Group sessions 1 x per week for 12 weeks
- Individual sessions every other week.
- Culturally Responsive Cognitive Behavioral Therapy – Rites of Passage Program
- Introduction to Construction Trades (32 hours over 16 weeks) – Activated March 2023

8. **GROW – George Smith** (Returned Citizen) – Activated 2022

- 1 x per week for 12 weeks (on-going cohorts)
- Gang Intervention
- Life Skills/Social-Emotion Development

9. **Financial literacy Program – Jon “Yayha” Johnson** (Returned Citizen) – Activated April 2023

- 1 x per week for 18 weeks
- Money Smart for Young Adults – FDIC Accredited (30 hours)

10. **Multi – Craft Core Curriculum (MC3 Construction)** – CBO Rising Sun Activates July 2023

- 128 Hours of construction curriculum
- Accredited by the National Association of Building Trade Unions

- Meets GSA MQ for employment

The goal is to target Alameda County GSA Job Skills Employment Targets with the intention to provide a career path:

- GSA Building: Building Maintenance Laborer
- GSA Maintenance and Construction Worker
- GSA Maintenance Aide I

11. Online Training Available to Youth – Activated 2021

- Vocational Electric (Current User) – 3x per week
- Tablets (Workforce Dev., GED) – Daily Availability
- Udemy Catalogue (8,000 titles) – Daily Availability
- Coursera Catalogue (5,400 titles) – Daily Availability

Programs In Development

Technology – Classroom # B 3061 – Shared Dedicated Classroom to support the following programs:

1. Hidden Genius (18 Hours) – Anticipated activation August 15, 2023

- Basic Technology/Basic Entrepreneurship
- In Person

2. Laney College – Media 155 - (55 Hours) – Anticipated activation August 15, 2023

- Basic Sound Video and Music Recording (33 classrooms, 22 lab hours)
- Analog and digital multi-track techniques in professional sound recording and music videos. Professional studio environment workflows; basic tracking; overdubbing; mixing
- In person
- Community College Credit

3. The Last Mile – Technology, Coding, and Audio-Visual Career Development (520 Hours) – Anticipated activation October 15, 2023

- Technology, Coding, and Audio-Visual Engineering Career Development (20 hours per week)
 - i. Custom-built Hybrid of DJJ Program Curriculum
 - ii. Remote instruction with an onsite Facilitator from Hidden Genius, ACPD Staff, or other CBO
 - iii. Qualifies for Raising Leaders paid internship hours