

WHAT WE NEED TO THRIVE

A YOUTH-LED VISION FOR
A JUST ALAMEDA COUNTY

AUGUST 2023



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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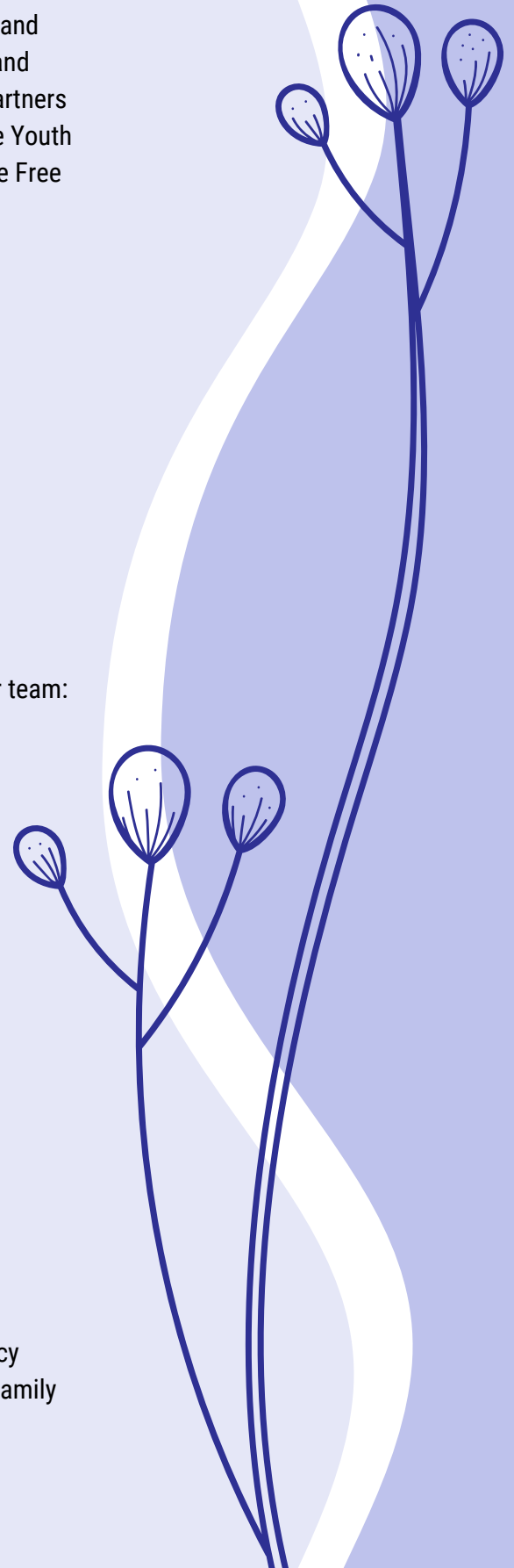


TABLE OF CONTENTS



1. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW	4
2. THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE	6
3. OUR COMMITMENT TO YOUTH JUSTICE	9
4. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH	13
5. SURVEY PARTICIPANTS	19
6. RESEARCH FINDINGS	22
7. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS	31
8. CONCLUSION	34
9. APPENDIX	36

1.

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

In July of 2021—after decades of organizing by young people and their families—California made a bold decision to close the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). As a result, California counties are now responsible for treating, caring for, and even locking-up young people who would have otherwise been reprimanded to DJJ.

To facilitate this realignment, California is distributing over \$500 million in grants to local counties, including Alameda. It has been nearly 3 years since these funds began flowing in, but according to young people themselves, they still do not have access to improved services. **So we asked ourselves, where is the money going? And perhaps more importantly, we asked the youth: where should these funds be going?** What is the county doing since realignment funds first began flowing to Alameda in 2020? Are they receiving the support they need? What services do they prioritize for youth justice in their county? What aspirations do they hold?

To find out, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) and Ceres Policy Research conducted a youth-led, community-driven research project in Alameda County. This project aimed to assess the impacts of the current youth justice system, gathering input from impacted families, youth, and community leaders to build a shared strategic vision for youth justice in Alameda County, and beyond. The results are outlined in this report.

This report provides context and grounding in California’s current political context for youth justice advocacy efforts, namely the shift from state to local. It shares information about EBC and our partner organizations’ demonstrated commitment to zero youth incarceration in Alameda county throughout the years. Next, the report outlines our steps to conducting community-based participatory research. We then outline our research findings, followed by concrete recommendations for Alameda County.

This report aims to inform recommendations for a way forward. **Overwhelmingly, our survey results indicate that youth support community services and alternatives to the criminal legal system – this is their vision of real youth justice.** Through the work of EBC, Ceres Policy Research, and our partners, impacted youth and families are increasing their power to guide decision-making and shift Alameda County into a community-led model of youth justice. One that prioritizes restorative justice, healing, and opportunities for our youth.



2.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE SHIFTING YOUTH JUSTICE



THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

SHIFTING YOUTH JUSTICE

From State Prisons to Local Response:

A Historic Opportunity to Reimagine Youth Justice in Alameda County

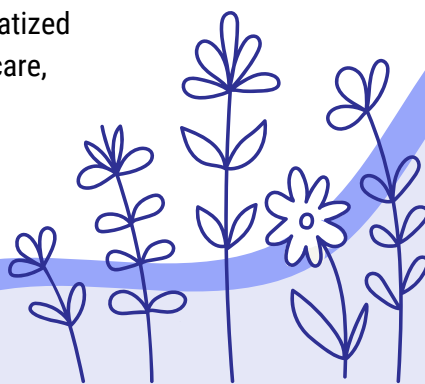
In June 2023, California took the historic step forward of closing its Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). At the height of its power, the DJJ, or the California Youth Authority, as it was then called, was a sprawling system of youth prisons that incarcerated more than 10,000 youth and young adults. The majority (84%) were youth of color.

Abuse was rampant – every month, an average of one-third of the DJJ’s youth population was exposed to violence – including beatings, sexual abuse, and intimidation. Extended isolation and other extreme punishments, restrictions on contact with their families and loved ones, poor access to development opportunities, neglected mental health needs, and pervasive abuse from custody staff created lasting harms on youth in the DJJ’s care.

It is no surprise then that more than half of these youth indicated suicide risk, or that over three-quarters of youth returning home from the DJJ were re-arrested within three years of their release. Promising support to youth and their families, California’s youth prisons re-traumatized youth and systematically refused them the care, healing, and opportunity they needed in this critical time in their lives.

The closure of the DJJ this year was hard won through nearly twenty years of organizing by families who fought to get their kids safe and free. From 2020-2023, the responsibility for youth who have committed harms was transitioned to local counties, where most will be closer to home. Aiming to support effective local response, the state is providing \$559 million in grants to counties to serve youth who are transitioning to county facilities; and an additional \$208,800,000 annually to counties after 2025.

There is overwhelming evidence showing that incarceration is an ineffective strategy for steering young people away from criminal behavior and that high rates of youth incarceration do not improve public safety outcomes for anyone. Time and again, research shows us that incarceration harms the physical and mental health of young people, impedes their education and exposes them to abuse. Community-based alternative programs and other services designed for the unique needs of young people have been proven to achieve equal or better outcomes at far lower costs.



Today, all of us who call Alameda County home face a rare opportunity to reimagine what justice looks like for the young people in our care.

And the questions remain - do we want to trap youth in cycles of violence and trauma, perpetuated by a historically racist, expensive, and failing juvenile justice system? Or do we want to support youth to return to their loved ones, giving them opportunities to repair past harms and providing adequate care to heal? Even more boldly – what would our community look like if our youth were thriving? If they were never put behind bars in the first place, but had everything they needed to succeed?

How we spend reflects our principles. Unfortunately, current expenditures signal that Alameda County is at risk of replicating the punitive harms of the state. Programs run by Probation Departments are often confused or disguised as an “alternative to incarceration,” but they are in fact another harmful arm of law enforcement, relying on surveillance and punishment. Probation Departments are run by sworn-in peace officers, with the powers to arrest, search, detain and remove youth from their homes. Their practices are punitive and ineffective as an intervention for promoting healthy youth development.

In contrast, successful intervention models seek to promote “psychosocial maturation” through supportive interventions like youth development opportunities and counseling, utilizing incentives rather than punishment.

This report is led by youth, revealing how effectively Alameda County is prepared to serve the teens and young adults who are most vulnerable to the harms of the criminal legal system. Most alarmingly, as this report demonstrates, the vast majority of surveyed youth struggle to access development programs or other support infrastructure, which evidence overwhelmingly shows is critical to preventing youth incarceration.

Youth voices are critical to shaping an effective and holistic youth justice system. We asked youth. Their responses fill a gap in the conversation and their vision leads the way.

The closure of the DJJ and the transition of juvenile justice to our county creates an important window of opportunity. Local bodies like the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council have been set up to lead and advise on Alameda’s youth justice response, creating more avenues for the community to advocate directly for our priorities.



3.

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOUTH JUSTICE

EBC & PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



EBC & YOUTH JUSTICE

Since its inception in 1996, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) has been working with impacted youth and families to address the harms caused by policing and incarceration in California. Throughout the years, EBC has made concrete advances towards breaking the cycle of disinvestment and incarceration of youth in communities of color. We have done this through a number of advocacy efforts, community organizing campaigns, and policy efforts aimed at uplifting and supporting youth.

In recent years, EBC's youth justice work has focused on shifting Alameda County towards a community-led model of youth justice that prioritizes restorative justice, healing, and opportunity for our youth locally. EBC played a key role in the closure of California's youth prisons, organizing with over 1,400 families through our 2002-2016 Books Not Bars campaign. In 2020, we released "Reimagining Youth Justice: A Blueprint for Alameda County", a report that assessed Alameda County's failing juvenile justice system, and proposed more effective alternatives that provide for the safety of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth. With our partners in the Free Our Kids coalition, EBC now advocates for a county response that is grounded in principles of racial equity, healing, and community safety.

A timeline of some of our efforts is below:

2001

EBC's Books Not Bars campaign successfully fought to close five of the eight California youth prisons, resulting in an 85% reduction in the youth prison population. At Books Not Bars' Summer Jam to End the Prison Scam event (hosted with the Youth Force Coalition), more than 20 local groups came together to demand that the \$2.3 million intended for the new youth facility be reinvested into social service programs to help people stay out of jail.

2002

Books Not Bars hosted the "Still Not Down with the Lockdown II" rally to protest the building of a new detention center for youth

2005

Books Not Bars held memorials and mass marches for youth whose lives have been lost to California youth prisons, including: Dyron Mandell Brewer, Roberto Carlos Lombana, Durrell Feaster, Deon Whitfeld, Hector Rodriguez, and Joseph Maldonado.

2004

Books Not Bars' Close California Youth Authority campaign launched with the goal of closing all state youth prisons. This campaign created the first statewide network of families with incarcerated children, known as *Families for Books Not Bars*, which grew to include more than 1,400 family members.

2007

The Books Not Bars campaign successfully passed its first bill, *The Family Connection and Youth Rehabilitation Act* (AB 1300 - Price), which eliminated barriers to family connection and expanded the purpose of the Division of Juvenile Programs to include promoting family ties between the youth and their families.

2008

The organizing led by the Books Not Bars campaign led to the closing of two of California's eight youth prisons. In addition, *The Family Communication Act* (SB 1008 - Becker) was signed into law with bipartisan support, which required families to be notified about youth parole hearings and medical emergencies.

2008

EBC partnered with the California Teachers Association (CTA) and led a campaign resulting in 70% of voters saying “no” to Proposition 6, a ballot measure targeting youth as young as 14 for adult incarceration.

2009

EBC launched the Heal the Streets youth fellowship with the goal of training Oakland youth to become community leaders and violence prevention advocates.

2010

Books Not Bars won a Prevention for a Safer Society Award.

2013

EBC partnered with Justice for Families to launch the Night Out for Safety and Liberation (NOSL) campaign, an alternative to the police-centric National Night Out event held on the first Tuesday of August every year. NOSL invited community members to redefine ‘public safety’ to be more focused on building community, instead of surveillance and policing. EBC also reintroduced legislation to end youth solitary confinement. The proposed bill defined and limited the use of solitary confinement, prohibited its use for punishment or retaliation, and required reporting of how the practice is used.

2011

Preston Youth Prison, number four of eight California prisons targeted by Books Not Bars, closed and the state announced that Norwalk prison will close in 2012.

2014

EBC hosted the first Night Out for Safety and Liberation event in Oakland, where community members came together to redefine what public safety means to them beyond policing.

2015

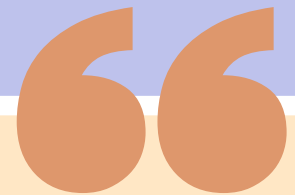
NOSL expanded to four additional cities, widening EBC’s efforts to redefine what public safety means for our communities: dignity, opportunity, and power.

2019

After nearly two decades of organizing by families, Governor Newsom announces his intention to end juvenile imprisonment in California. EBC joins several local organizations to launch the Free Our Kids coalition (FOK).

2016

EBC helped pass the landmark *Youth Solitary Confinement Bill* (SB 1143 - Leno) which limited the use of long-term isolation or ‘room confinement’ in California’s juvenile facilities, and set standards for its use.



“They laughed at us years ago when we told them we’d shut down all the California Youth Prisons. It didn’t happen overnight, but the state is finally moving toward justice. Now they need to provide the tools that will actually help these kids.”

- Laura Talkington-Brady,
Parent Organizer

2020

EBC published the report "Reimagining Youth Justice: A Blueprint for Alameda County." Free Our Kids coalition is victorious in stopping Alameda County from rebuilding a juvenile detention center known as Camp Sweeney.

2022

EBC launches the Youth Participatory Action Research Project in Alameda County.

2023

California’s brutal youth prisons, also known as the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), close for good. EBC published the report "What We Need to Thrive: A Youth-Led Vision for a Just Alameda County."



FREE OUR KIDS COALITION

EBC is in partnership with a number of community organizations and coalitions dedicated to decarcerating our youth. As a founding member of the Free Our Kids (FOK) coalition, EBC works with several local organizations to reimagine a new model for youth justice in Alameda County based on principles of health, equity, and community. As a part of its work, FOK's Youth Coach Up group—designed to educate and coach the youth—created a 10-point plan that reimagines a system of youth justice that is fiscally efficient and equitable, and that transitions the system away from a law enforcement punishment-based response to y. Its key tenants are outlined below:

FREE OUR KIDS COALITION'S 10 POINT PLAN

FOK believes a reimagined system must:

1. End youth incarceration. Transform the way the county approaches “rehabilitation” from the common U.S. carceral practices rooted in punishment that have established a school to prison pipeline.
2. Divest from law enforcement, probation, and juvenile halls to Reinvest in communities and in a juvenile justice system that centers healing, education, and positive youth development.
3. All youth that come in contact with the Justice System deserve a Restorative and transformative process that repairs harm and promotes healthy accountability.
4. Allow the families and local community to envision and participate in a healing centered Youth Justice System.
5. Demilitarize and end surveillance in all youth spaces including, but not limited to, juvenile halls, group homes, and school campuses.
6. We the people demand access to basic human necessities to thrive; including healthy food, water, housing, health care and a living wage.
7. Defund and demilitarize the local police departments to transform the county approach to public safety and community transparency.
8. Invest and remodel public education and expand access to financial literacy to build equitable opportunities.
9. Expand access to affordable housing, rent stability, and tenants’ protections both housed and unhoused.
10. Expand access to free health care, including mental health care, for all.



4.

YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

A YOUTH-LED APPROACH



OUR RESEARCH

In anticipation of California counties being responsible for young people who would have otherwise been reprimanded to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), it became clear our focus needed to turn local. In order to better understand the needs of Alameda County youth during this transition, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) partnered with Ceres Policy Research to survey impacted youth, families, and communities. Our aim was to gather input from those most affected by the issues to inform future policy, local organizing and advocacy efforts.

CERES POLICY RESEARCH

To conduct this research, EBC partnered with Ceres Policy Research, an organization that provides training and guidance for strategic, policy-related research. Ceres' approach is rooted in participatory development strategies that engage those who are most affected by an issue to conduct the research. Ceres supported the research, education, and instrument development process for EBC's researchers.

YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

For this study, EBC and Ceres employed Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methods, training young people to design and conduct research in their communities. This approach recognizes that the community best understands the truth of their experiences. By utilizing YPAR in our study, our goal was to not only gather community input, but also to empower systems-impacted youth, family, and community members to become active participants in systemic change.

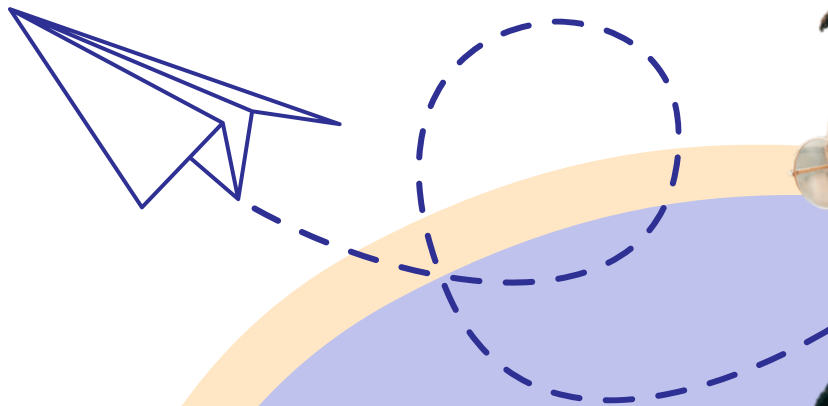


Photo courtesy of Ceres.

OUR RESEARCH FELLOWS

After developing a project plan with Ceres, EBC invited community members to participate in the research project. We hired seven Community Research Fellows who designed the project from start to finish. Fellows were trained by Ceres Policy Research staff and supervised by EBC's former Senior Organizer and Advocate, Monifa Akosua. Learn more about our researchers, below:



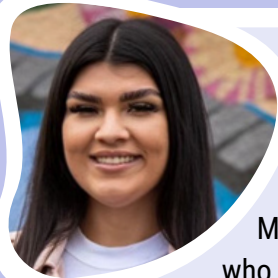
MONIFA "NIFA" AKOSUA

Nifa is a Richmond native with a passion for advocating and healing communities. Her mission is to heal systematic trauma and help people reach Black/Brown joy. She first became passionate about the community while working at Youth Radio. There she found her drive for youth development and community wellness. She spent 7+ years working in communities and knows what it takes to empower and elevate the people to seek change. She believes that healing through action and turning pain into passion are the stepping stones toward building healthy communities.



BARBARA DOSS

Barbara is the mother of Dajuan Armstrong, who was asphyxiated in Santa Rita Jail in 2018. It's been four years and she is still fighting for justice for her son. Barbara is dedicated to fighting this fight so other families don't have to experience this pain. She is grateful for the support of the Ella Baker Center, the Anti-Police Terror Project (AFTP), and other organizations for their support in her on-going fight for justice.



EVELYN CANAL

Evelyn is a 21 year-old member organizer with Urban Peace Movement. She is an Afro Latina who grew up on stolen Ohlone land -- more commonly known today as East Oakland. She's a proud daughter, sister, Afro Peruviana and young scholar. Evelyn has been in many organizing spaces, such as Oakland Hops, CURYJ, and Young Women's Freedom Center.



MARNAE HAZZARD

Marnae is 30 years old. She currently resides in Richmond, CA, but has deep roots in East Oakland. She is a hair stylist with a passion for making her clients feel better on the inside by looking good on the outside. She is grateful to be involved in this Community research program with the Ella Baker Center.

OUR RESEARCH FELLOWS , CTD.



FIANI JOHNSON

Fiani is a self-identified Social Justice Warrior. She is a mother of four in her final year of graduate school, pursuing a dual degree in counseling and forensic psychology, with a special emphasis on trauma. She is the Founder of The Araminta Ross Foundation, which focuses connecting formerly incarcerated men and women to services that will keep them successful as they reintegrate back into society.



DESMOND WANZO

Desmond is originally from Massachusetts, but grew up in Oakland, CA. He attended Mack in West Oakland. He enjoys playing basketball and soccer to stay active. Desmond also enjoys traveling back home to the East Coast from time to time.



JADALYN YIN

Jadalyn is a 20-year-old young mother from Oakland, CA who believes she is "here for a purpose." Her favorite thing to do is spend family time with her son and family. She also enjoys going out to do adventurous things and be with mother nature herself. Jadalyn loves organizing and helping her community.



LARRY HOLMES

Larry grew up in Oakland, CA but has lived all over the Bay Area. He attended Frick Middle School in East Oakland, and then later the Oakland Military Institute in North Oakland. Larry says he has always been entrepreneurial minded and very creative. Some hobbies of his include playing basketball, gaming, and going to the range with his brothers.

“

“I am formerly incarcerated. I experienced homelessness and have been diagnosed with PTSD due to past trauma, which is why I’m so passionate about the social injustices faced by men and women of color. So I’m here to represent the underrepresented.”

OUR METHODS

Seven Research Fellows began this project in June 2022. An outline of their work is below:

PHASE 1: JUNE 2022 - DECEMBER 2022

TRAINING

EBC and Ceres hired and trained seven Community Research Fellows in Participatory Action Research methods. Fellows learned how to plan a research project, lead interviews, facilitate focus groups, code and analyze data, and present their research. In addition, EBC complemented these research skills with organizing training, where Fellows learned power-mapping, story-telling, and base-building skills.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Fellows conducted a community assessment to better understand the lived experiences of those impacted by the criminal legal system in Alameda County. Fellows designed an interview protocol to ask impacted community members about their experiences with the criminal legal system, community divestment, and over-policing. Fellows recruited over 20 people to conduct in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups with community members. Fellows conducted a qualitative data analysis of the interview results to determine what additional information they needed to complete the full picture of community resource needs. The interviews aimed to understand the lived experience of impacted community members.

PROJECT PLANNING & CREATION

Fellows began planning survey design, methodology, and dissemination. Although EBC and Ceres had initially planned to create a survey to engage both impacted youth and families equally, Fellows proposed that the research should focus primarily on youth input, allowing young people to share their own experiences of marginalization. Fellows proposed a two-step research process: first, they would survey impacted youth in Alameda County; then, they would create a report to disseminate the findings more widely.

SURVEY DESIGN

The community assessment, interviews, and focus groups laid the foundation for designing our survey questions (See Appendix for full survey). The survey's primary goal was to gather a county-wide snapshot of the current carceral landscape and what investments could be made into the community as alternatives to incarceration.

PHASE 2: DECEMBER 2022 - FEBRUARY 2023

SURVEY DISSEMINATION & DATA COLLECTION

To collect their data, Fellows recruited over 160 people to take the survey. In addition, they presented to various community-based organizations and local schools to inform people about the importance of the research to recruit respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once all the surveys were completed, Fellows conducted a demographic analysis to better understand who took the survey, as well as their recommendations. In addition, they studied responses for frequencies and commonalities that point to larger patterns in community sentiment, as it relates to alternatives to incarceration.

KEY LEARNING:

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

We first distributed the survey through our networks, conducting outreach through our coalition partners, our newsletter, and through social media. We got a low response rate – so, we went out to the streets. We spoke to young people and their families, sharing information about the opportunity to shift youth justice, listening to them as they shared their journeys, answering their questions, and building relationships. This organizing approach to research led to a critical shift in our response rate. As part of the program's base-building efforts, EBC engaged youth in five Alameda County high schools, met with young people in their neighborhoods and community centers, and reached out through partner organizations like Youth Alive!, BAY-Peace, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ), and Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY).

5.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

YOUTH SPEAK OUT...

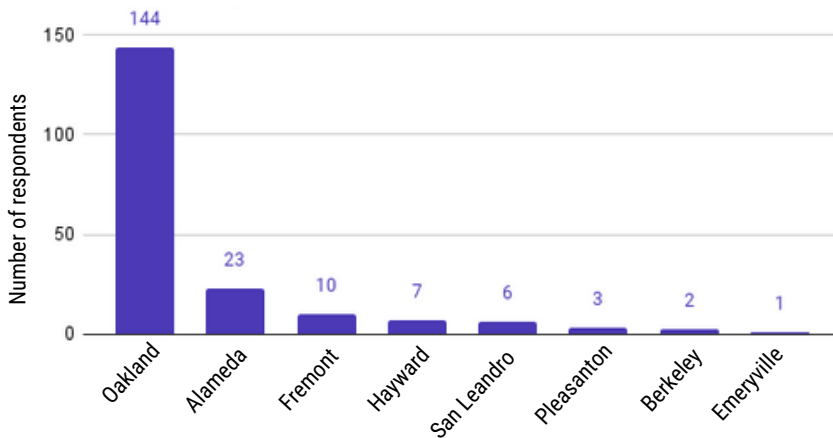


OUR SURVEY WHO TOOK IT?

In the end, more than 160 people took our survey. The majority of our survey respondents are currently living in Oakland (77%) and have lived in Alameda County for varying lengths of time, with the highest percentage having lived there for 16-20 years (21%). Most of our survey respondents are between the ages of 16-24 (50%).

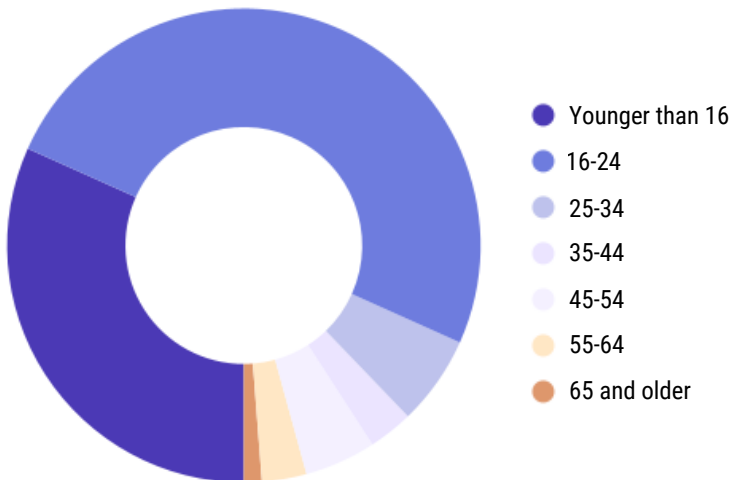
160+
**SURVEY
RESPONDENTS**

Where are our respondents from?



77%
**OF RESPONDENTS
CURRENTLY LIVE
IN OAKLAND**

How old are our respondents?

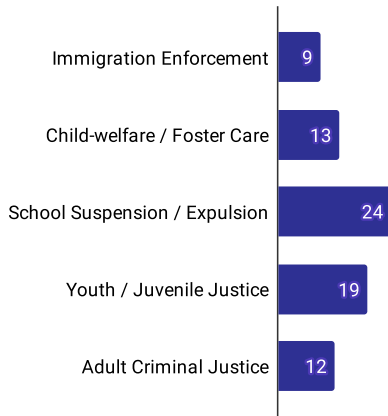


50%
**OF RESPONDENTS
ARE BETWEEN THE
AGES OF 16-24**

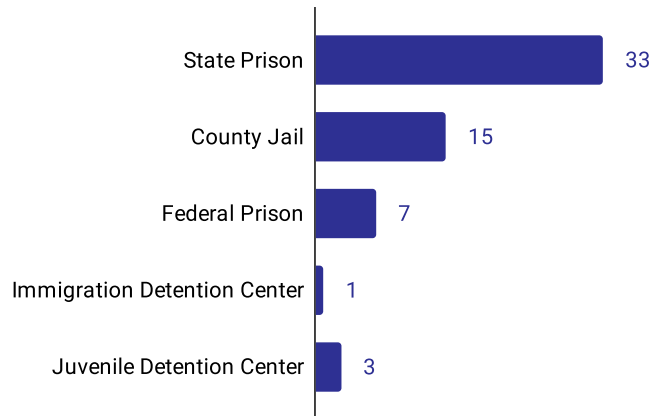
SYSTEM-IMPACTED RESPONDENTS

32% of respondents are system-impacted, meaning they have come into contact with school suspension or expulsion, the juvenile justice system, the adult/criminal justice system, the child welfare or foster care system, and/or immigration enforcement. System-impacted respondents have come most into contact with school suspension/expulsion (24), the juvenile justice system (19), and the child-welfare/foster care system (13), respectively. A significant portion of respondents (30%) currently have a family member or loved one incarcerated, with the majority of them being in state or federal prison (63%).

What system(s) have respondents been involved in?



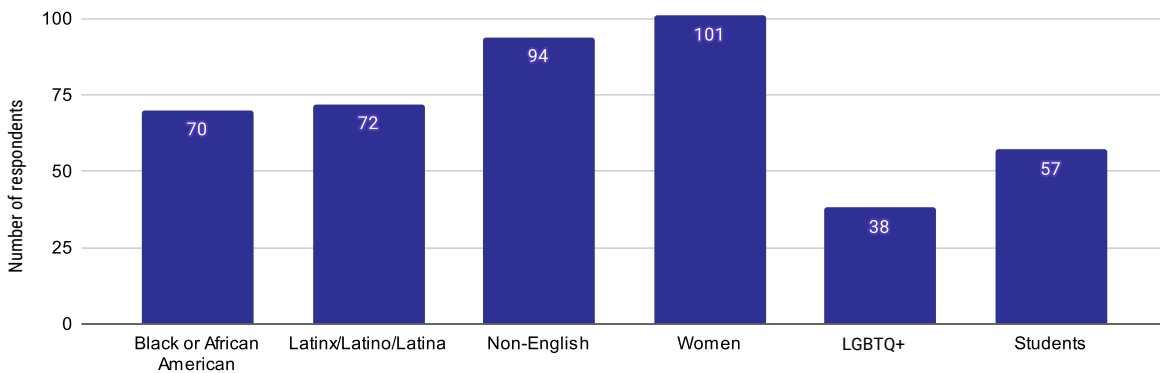
What system(s) have respondents' loved ones been involved in?



DEMOGRAPHICS: RACE, GENDER, EMPLOYMENT, ETC.

The largest racial/ethnic group represented in the survey is Latinx (43%) followed by Black (41%). The most common language spoken by respondents is English (82%), followed by Spanish (43%). The majority of respondents identify as Women (61%) and a significant portion identified as LGBTQ+ (21%). About one-third of respondents are Students (32%), while a smaller percentage are unemployed (15%) or work part-time (18%).

Notable Respondent Groups



6.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

...AND THIS IS WHAT THEY SAY



RESEARCH FINDINGS

... AND THIS IS WHAT THEY SAY

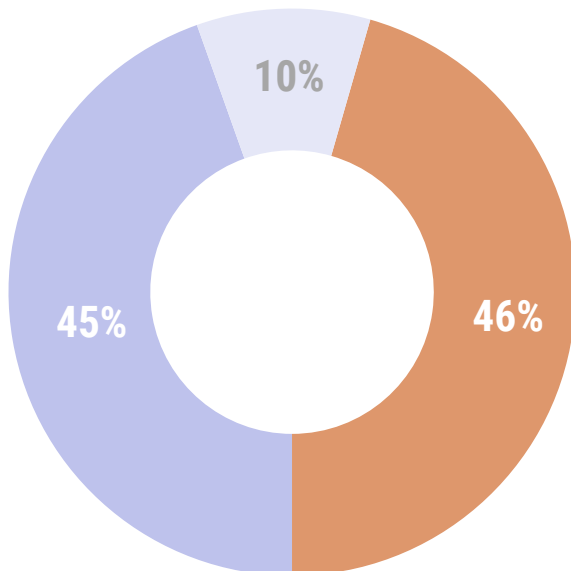
In this survey, we aimed to investigate youth perspectives in Alameda County regarding community safety, policing, and incarceration, as well as youth development programs and supports. We position these findings under the backdrop of changing demographics and politics in Alameda County. Below, we outline our findings in detail.

1. Community organizations in Alameda County need more resources to support youth.

Our survey results indicate that only 45% of respondents had ever participated in youth development programs, and that only 27% utilize community programs “often.”

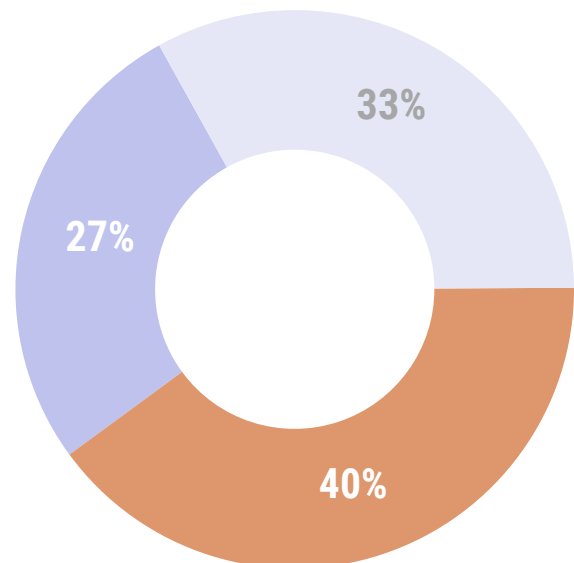
Have you ever participated in youth development programs?

● Yes ● N/A ● No



How often do you utilize community programs in Alameda County?

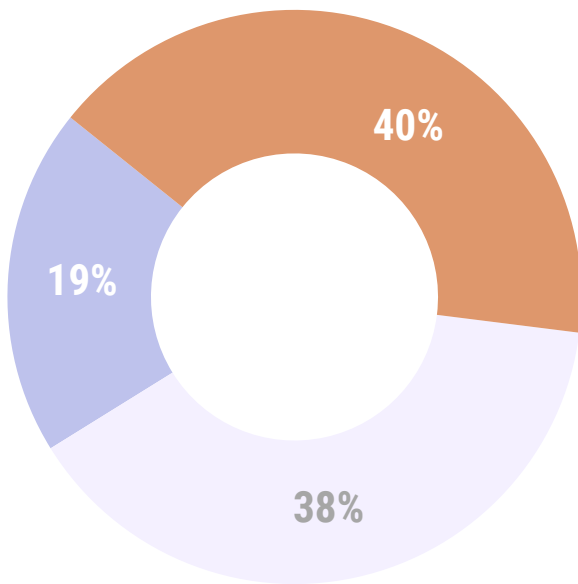
● Often ● Sometimes ● Never



Respondents were less optimistic when asked about the availability of outlets for young people to express themselves creatively in the community. Only 19% of respondents felt they had resources available to them, 40% said they did not, and 38% did not know. Our findings also show that overwhelmingly, 68% of respondents expressed a strong desire for increased youth support in the county.

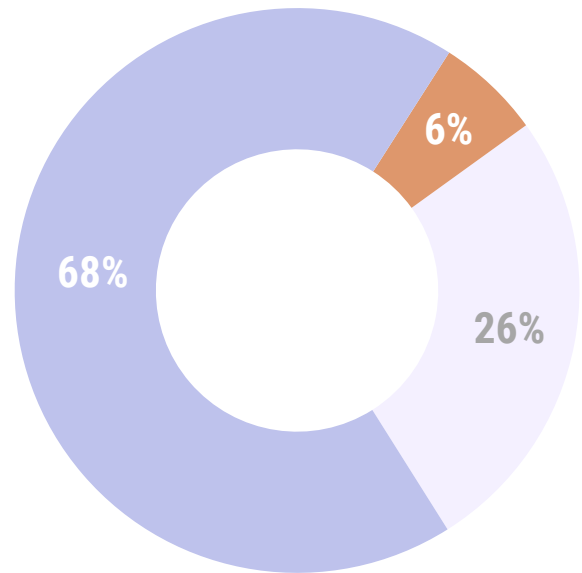
Do you think youth have enough outlets in the community to express themselves creatively?

● Yes ● No ● IDK



Do you believe that community organizations in Alameda County could be doing more to support youth?

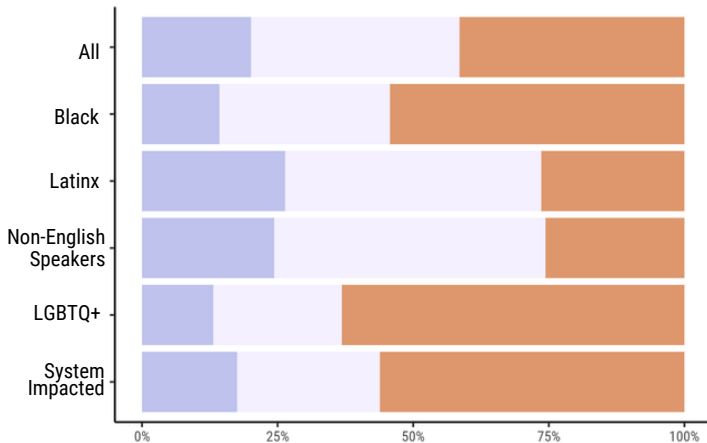
● Yes ● No ● IDK



Interestingly, our survey also found that Black, Latinx, and non-English speakers expressed even more need for support, indicating potential disparities in services received by different demographic groups.

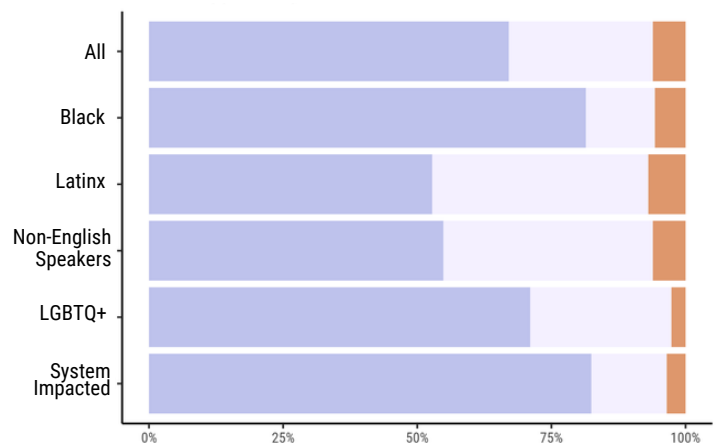
Do you think youth have enough outlets in the community to express themselves creatively?

● Yes ● No ● IDK



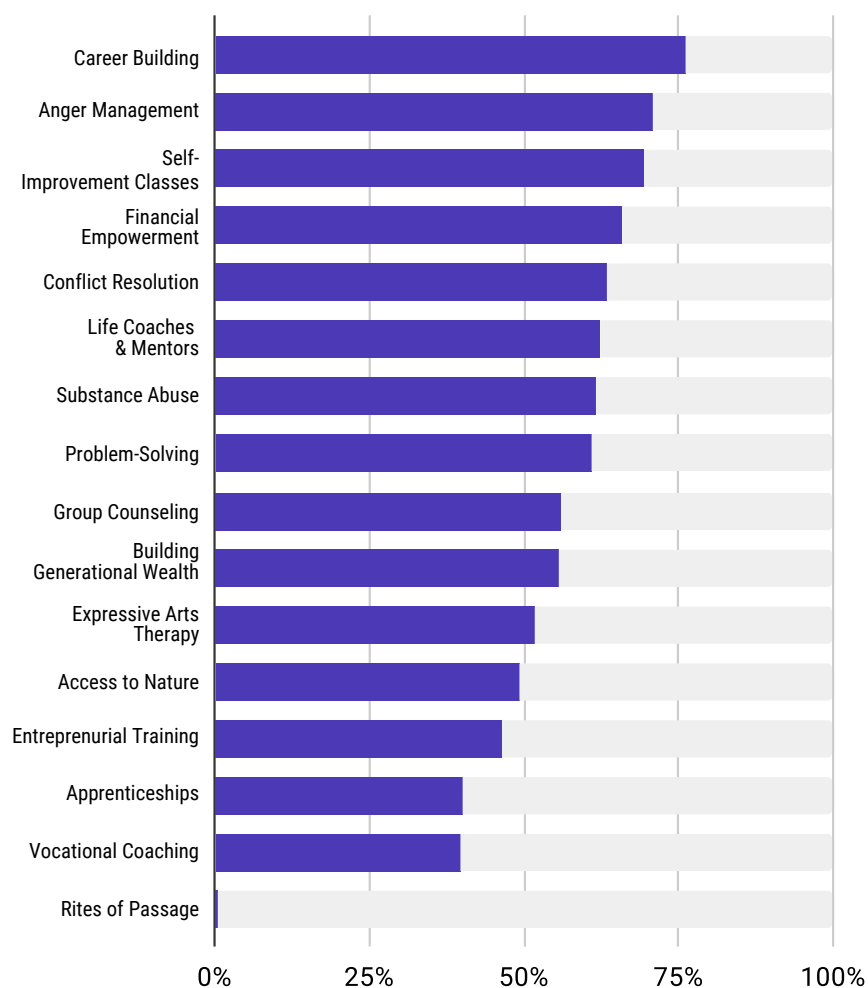
Do you believe that community organizations in Alameda County could be doing more to support youth?

● Yes ● No ● IDK



When asked about the types of youth programming they would like to see in Alameda County, respondents indicated they were most interested in programs related to career building, anger management, self-improvement classes, financial empowerment, and conflict resolution.

What youth programs are most needed in Alameda County?



“So many of our Bay youth have been displaced or even just faced an increase of financial struggle due to gentrification. With the financial difficulty we are seeing in the bay many people naturally resort to ‘crime’ to simply survive. The prison industrial complex thrives off the incarceration of young people trying to survive.”

- Anonymous Respondent

When asked about what types of programs youth in Alameda County need, survey respondents answered:

- "Provide youth with spaces they can get paid and enjoy themselves."
- "Offer more jobs and internships to increase excitement."
- "More positive community involvement and job opportunities."

2. Gentrification is disrupting support systems in many communities of color.

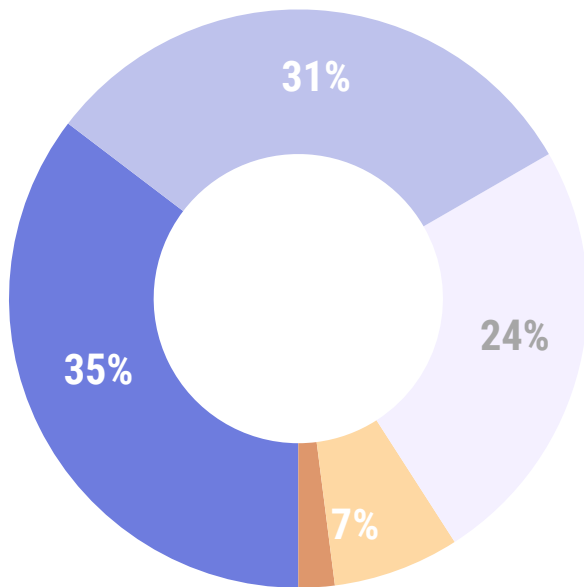
Survey results suggest that the gentrification of many neighborhoods in Alameda County has pushed many families out of their homes and has disrupted the cohesion of many communities of color. When asked about the effects of gentrification on their lives, survey respondents shared qualitative responses like:

- "Gentrification is kicking out generations of communities out of their homes, creating disadvantages and barriers for our youth to thrive."
- "It's pushing young, poorer kids out of neighborhoods and away from opportunities."
- "Gentrification has caused many of our youth to feel erased from the overall makeup of the communities in which they live."

Gentrification and displacement are particularly concerning to youth. 66% of respondents Agree or Strongly Agree that the government has taken away resources from their community, which motivates people to consider committing a crime. Respondents also overwhelmingly believe (72% agree) that community plays an important role in decreasing youth interaction with the justice system.

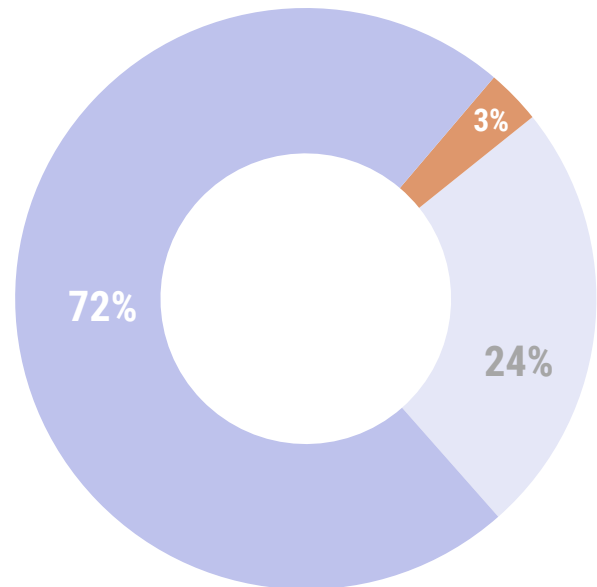
The government has taken resources/money away from my community, which motivates people to consider committing a crime.

● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree



Do you think community plays (or could play) an important role in decreasing youth interaction with the justice system?

● Yes ● No ● IDK

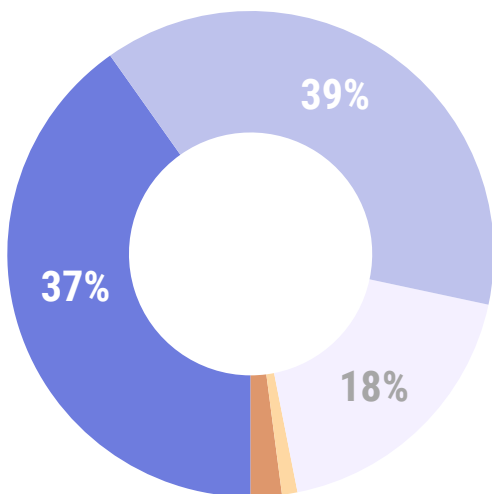


3. Youth need less interactions with law enforcement.

Survey results strongly indicate the need to find ways to reduce the number of times youth have interactions with law enforcement. 76% of respondents Strongly Agree or Agree that crisis management teams should respond to family fights and mental health crises instead of police. 69% of respondents also Strongly Agree or Agree that a young person who has had a fight should be given a "time-out" at home instead of jail or a detention center.

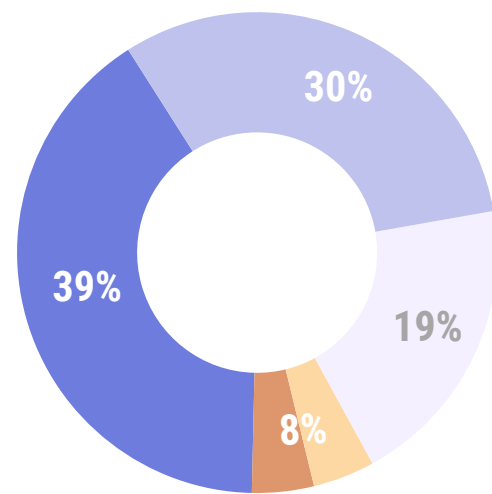
I support having a crisis management team respond to family fights and mental health crises instead of the police.

● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree



I support sending a young person who has had a fight at school or at home to a "time-out" at home instead of jail or a detention center.

● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree



When asked what solutions could be implemented to help reduce the number of times youth have negative interactions with law enforcement, survey respondents shared:

- "I think not having to interact with them as a first responder would be best. We have communal groups out here that are willing to do violence prevention, mental health calls, drug and alcohol abuse calls etc. So having someone else in the middle between law enforcement and our young people is key."
- "Defund and dismantle the police departments and build better, safe places for learning and engagement for our young people!"
- "Stop over-policing our neighborhoods."
- "Fewer police in communities of color."
- "No police in schools."

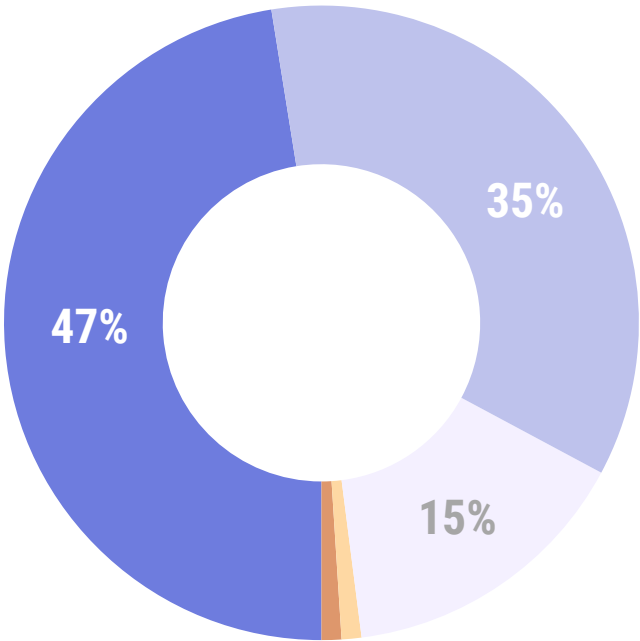


4. Youth need more options for meaningful employment.

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents expressed the need for youth in Alameda County to have more opportunities for employment. 82% of respondents Strongly Agree or Agree that youth need access to cash and employment to decrease crime in their community.

I believe youth need access to cash and employment opportunities in order to decrease crime in our community.

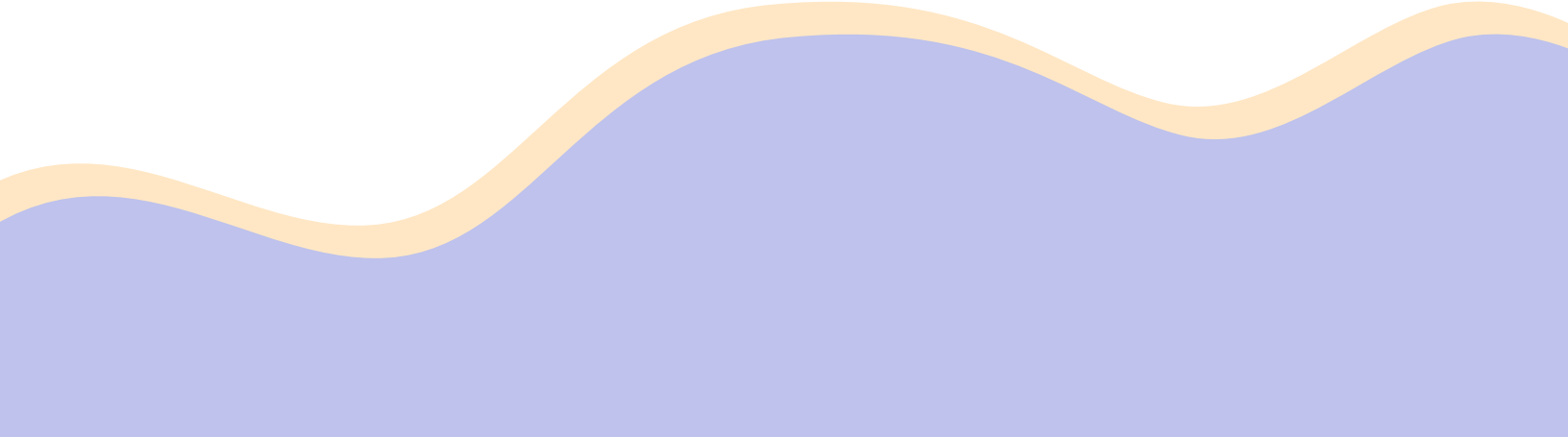
● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree



“The youth have very little hope of being able to make a living wage or even feel that they belong in their own community.”
- Anonymous Respondent

When asked about what types of programs youth in Alameda County need, survey respondents answered:

- "Provide youth with spaces they can get paid and enjoy themselves."
- "Offer more jobs and internships to increase excitement."
- "More positive community involvement and job opportunities."

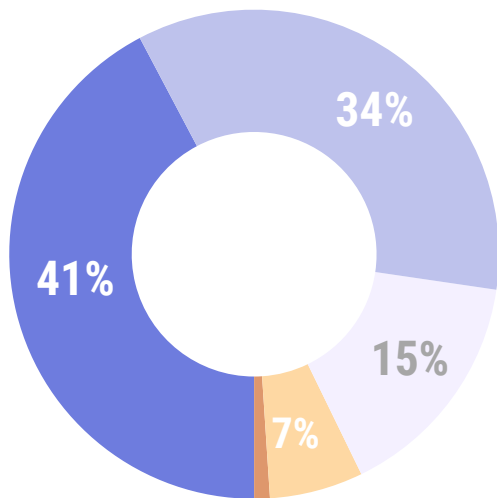


5. Youth should not be tried in the adult court system, deserve more alternatives to incarceration, and want better responses to criminalized behavior.

Regarding the court system, respondents overwhelmingly favored youth being separated from adults in the court system, with 75% indicating agreement or strong agreement.

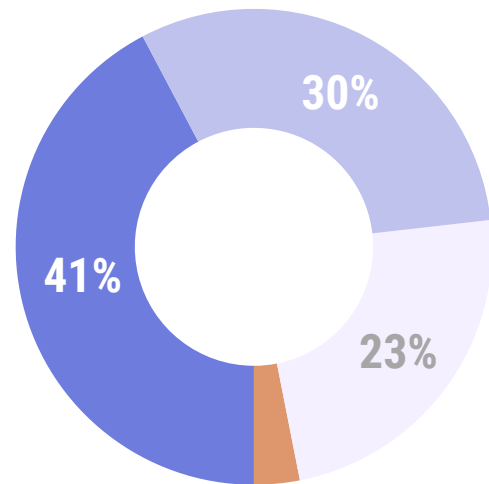
Youth should not be in the same court system as adults.

● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree



California law should ensure that youth are always treated as youth in the justice system.

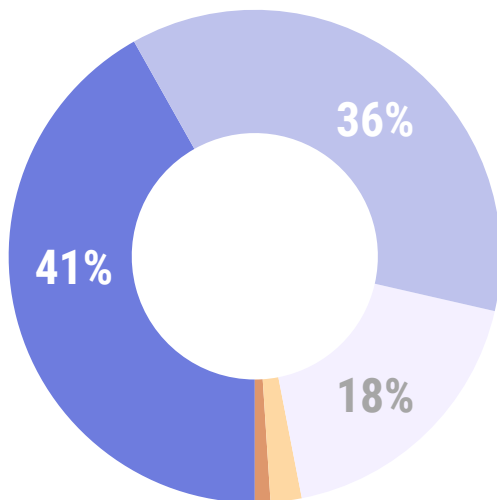
● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree



Respondents also expressed a desire (77% agreed) for young people who are arrested with guns but have not hurt anyone to be given access to community programs instead of being treated as an adult. 51% of respondents support the movement in Alameda County to develop alternatives to detention for youth who have committed serious crimes.

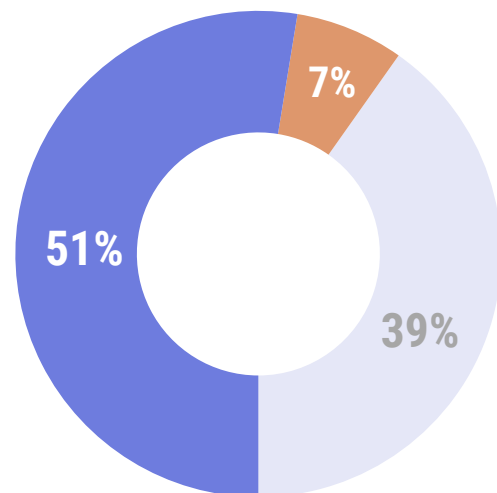
Youth who are arrested with guns but who have not hurt anyone should have access to community programs instead of getting treated as an adult.

● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree



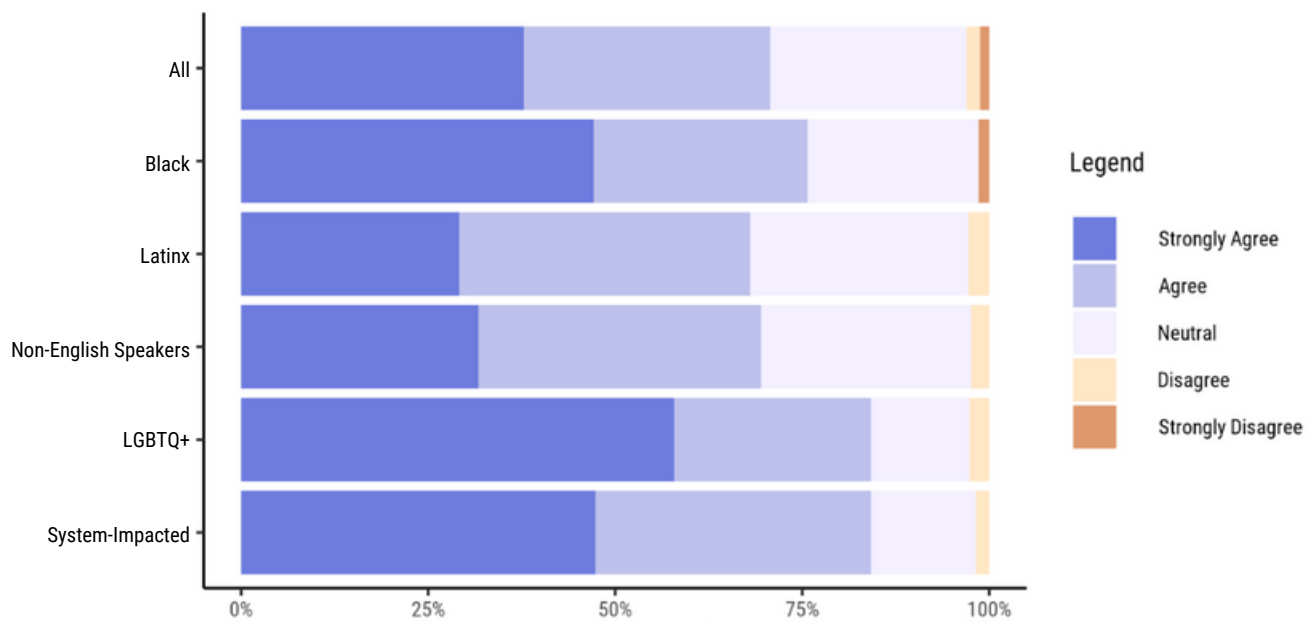
Do you support the movement in Alameda County to develop alternatives to detention for youth who have committed serious crimes?

● Yes ● No ● IDK



Respondents were also asked about their beliefs regarding the impact of childhood trauma on the outcomes of youth in the justice system. The majority of respondents agreed that consideration should be given to the impact of childhood trauma on the outcome of criminalized behavior, with 38% strongly agreeing and 32% agreeing. LGBTQ+ respondents were more likely to agree than their counterparts, indicating a potential need for greater awareness of the impacts of childhood trauma on LGBTQ+ youth and their involvement in the justice system.

I believe before a youth is sentenced in the justice system, there should be a consideration of the impacts of childhood trauma (if any) on the outcome of the crime.



Overall, the findings suggest a need for increased support for the youth in Alameda County, particularly among Black people, Latinx people, and non-English speakers. The survey also highlights the need for greater access to creative outlets and youth development programs, as well as increased awareness of the impact of childhood trauma on youth in the justice system.

7.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

As the juvenile justice landscape continues to evolve in Alameda County and across California, we offer readers, decision-makers, and allies the following recommendations based on the findings from this research. These recommendations were formed in response to feedback collected from the survey and in alignment with the value of centering those most impacted by incarceration and policing—in this case, young people of Alameda County.

1. Increase investment in community-based, trauma informed youth development programs.

The most prominent result from the survey is the necessity for more resources to be invested into programming for young people in Alameda County. It is recommended that more federal, state, local, and philanthropic funding be made available for a variety of youth development programs and initiatives to meet the needs of young people in the community. This includes increased funding for after-school programs, mentorship programs, restorative justice, mental health services, and other creative and arts-based initiatives to support youth development. Priority investments should focus on programs that address the impact of childhood trauma on youth, particularly for LGBTQ+ young people. These programs must be healing informed, culturally relevant, located in the neighborhoods where young people live, and be accessible by public transportation.

2. Address disparities in access to youth development programs.

To ensure that all young people in Alameda County have access to the support they need to thrive, it is recommended that targeted outreach and education efforts be undertaken to reach Black, Latinx, non-English speakers, and LGBTQ+ youth. Decision-makers should partner with community organizations and leaders—including youth leaders—to increase awareness of available programs and services in order to identify and address participation barriers.



3. Operate youth development and restorative justice programs independently from law enforcement.

The survey results suggest that youth in Alameda County do not see law enforcement as a source of safety and are eager for more avenues to address conflict without engaging or encountering the police and criminal legal system. It is recommended that expanded youth development resources be run independently from law enforcement, including the Alameda County Probation Department.

4. Increase investment in meaningful employment opportunities for young people.

The survey results indicate a need for greater investment in programs and initiatives that pay young people. With gentrification driving up the cost of living in Alameda County, it is recommended that more federal, state, local, and philanthropic resources be allocated to job readiness, internship programs, and paid work for youth and focused on ensuring that these programs are available within the neighborhoods that youth live and accessible to public transit.

5. There needs to be further research and analysis on decriminalization and reducing law enforcement interactions with young people.

The need to find ways to reduce the number of times youth have interaction with law enforcement was strongly indicated in the survey findings. Further research is needed to identify what types of activities are driving youth interactions with law enforcement, including criminal and non-criminal behavior and which of these activities could be either decriminalized or responded to by a non-law enforcement agency. For example, the survey results point to youth being arrested with a firearm who did not harm anyone, as a recommended group for alternative to incarceration. Further analysis is needed on a holistic approach to reducing firearm possession and gun violence in Alameda County.



8.

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

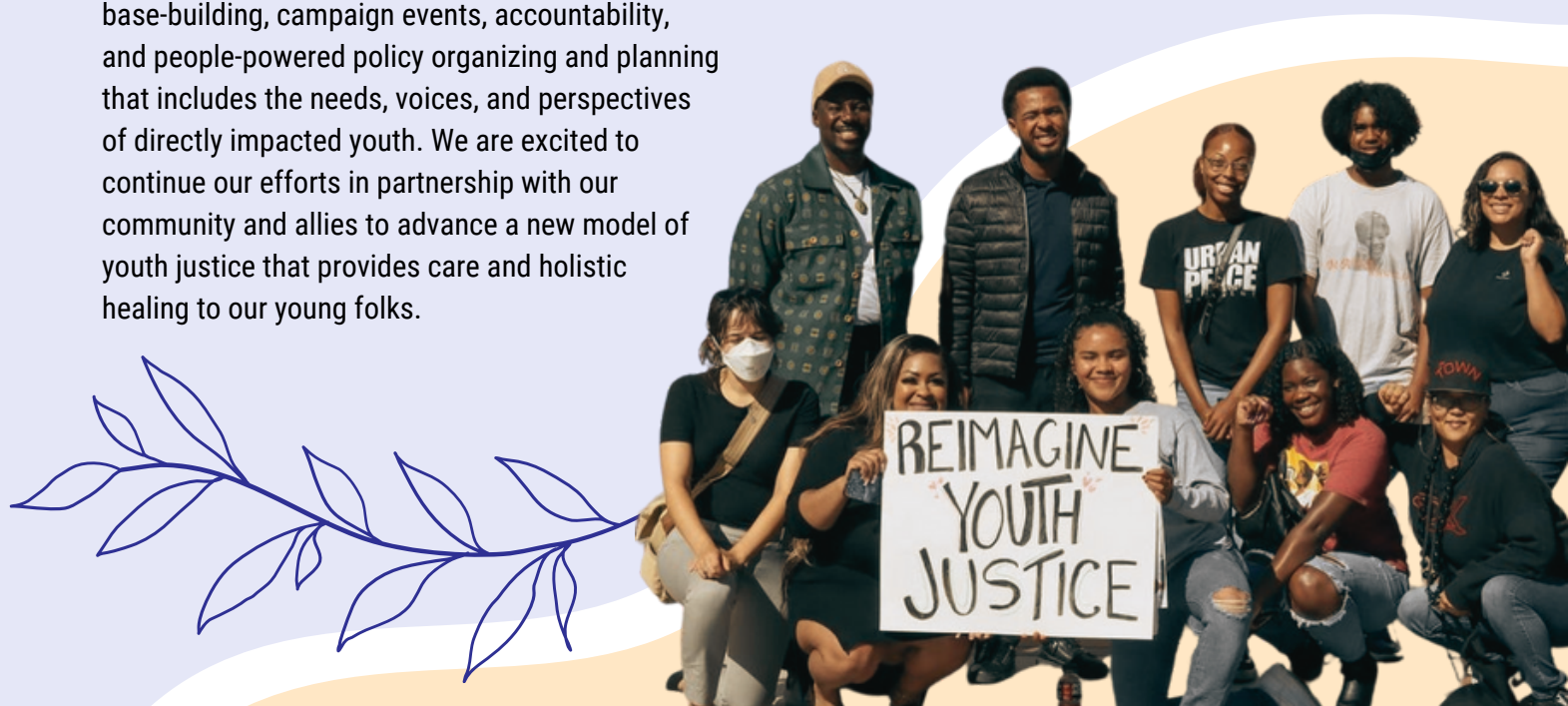
This research project has been a valuable opportunity for the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) to support community-driven research, enabling us to better understand the needs and vision of the young people we are building power with in Oakland and across Alameda County. The project has provided leadership investment in the community by building skills and opportunities for knowledge production.

Through the implementation of the project, EBC has affirmed three key takeaways: (1) we need to continue building power with impacted youth, (2) we need to continue making meaningful investments into community members through skills-building opportunities (i.e. training in research), and (3) holistic research and data collection methods requires relationship-building.

In addition, EBC plans to leverage the report's findings to continue to reimagine youth justice in Alameda County, focusing on youth leadership, base-building, campaign events, accountability, and people-powered policy organizing and planning that includes the needs, voices, and perspectives of directly impacted youth. We are excited to continue our efforts in partnership with our community and allies to advance a new model of youth justice that provides care and holistic healing to our young folks.

The findings in this report highlight the current needs that young people have identified in Alameda County. Our goal at EBC is to advance a Zero Youth Incarceration agenda locally. To do this, we spoke to directly impacted young folks in Oakland and across Alameda County to see where we should be investing resources to support their healing and self-determination, as we continue to push for alternatives to policing and prisons.

To do this, we know we must increase investment in community-based youth development programs, including more investment in meaningful paid employment programs, restorative justice and trauma-informed healing practices that are run independently from law enforcement. Not only do outreach and education efforts need to be targeted to LGBTQ+ young people, Alameda County must address broader disparities for various communities in accessing youth development programs.



APPENDIX



SURVEY RESULTS

Below is a summary of the complete findings from the "What We Need To Thrive" survey. Following each question, we provide the percentage of respondents who answered each question.

Do you believe that community organizations in Alameda County could be doing more to support the youth?

Yes - 68%
No - 6%
I Don't Know - 26%

How often do you utilize community programs in Alameda County?

Often - 27%
Sometimes - 33%
Never - 40%

Do you think youth have enough outlets in the community to express themselves creatively?

Yes - 19%
No - 40%
I Don't Know - 38%
Other - 2%

Do you support the movement in Alameda County to develop alternatives to detention for youth who have committed serious crimes?

Yes - 51%
No - 7%
I Don't Know - 39%
Other - 3%

In your opinion, what are some solutions to help reduce the number of times youth have negative interactions with law enforcement?
(Qualitative Responses)

How do you think gentrification has impacted youth interaction with the criminal justice system?
(Qualitative Responses)

Do you think community plays (or could play) an important role in decreasing youth interaction with the justice system?

Yes - 72%
No - 3%
I Don't Know - 24%
Other - 1%

I believe youth can benefit from learning about their constitutional rights and how oppression operates in society to help increase their self-awareness of how the criminal justice system works.

Strongly Agree - 50%
Agree - 34%
Neutral - 15%
Disagree - 1%

The government has taken resources/money away from my community, which motivates people to consider committing a crime.

Strongly Agree - 35%
Agree - 31%
Neutral - 24%
Disagree - 7%
Strongly Disagree - 2%

Have you ever participated in youth development programs?

Yes - 45%
No - 46%
N/A - 10%

If so, how well did the program(s) prepare you to transition out and apply what you have learned in your adult life?
(Qualitative Responses)

SURVEY RESULTS , CTD.

I believe before a youth is sentenced in the justice system, there should be a consideration to the impacts of childhood trauma (if any) on the outcome of the crime.

Strongly Agree - 38%
Agree - 32%
Neutral - 26%
Disagree - 2%
Strongly Disagree - 1%
Other - 1%

I believe youth are better served by those with lived experiences.

Strongly Agree - 32%
Agree - 35%
Neutral - 29%
Disagree - 2%
Strongly Disagree - 3%

I believe youth need access to cash and employment opportunities in order to decrease crime in our community.

Strongly Agree - 47%
Agree - 35%
Neutral - 15%
Disagree - 1%
Strongly Disagree - 1%
Other - 2%

Youth need the following programs:
(Multiple answers)

Youth should not be in the same court system as adults.

Strongly Agree - 41%
Agree - 34%
Neutral - 15%
Disagree - 6%
Strongly Disagree - 1%
Other - 3%

California law should ensure that youth are always treated as youth in the justice system.

Strongly Agree - 41%
Agree - 30%
Neutral - 23%
Disagree - 3%
Other - 2%

Youth who are arrested with guns but who have not hurt anyone should have access to community programs instead of getting treated as an adult.

Strongly Agree - 41%
Agree - 36%
Neutral - 18%
Disagree - 2%
Strongly Disagree - 1%
Other - 2%

I support sending a young person who has had a fight at school or at home to a "time-out" home instead of jail or a detention center.

Strongly Agree - 39%
Agree - 30%
Neutral - 19%
Disagree - 4%
Strongly Disagree - 4%
Other - 4%

I support having a crisis management team respond to family fights and mental health crises instead of the police.

Strongly Agree - 39%
Agree - 37%
Neutral - 18%
Disagree - 1%
Strongly Disagree - 2%

WHAT WE NEED TO
THRIVE

A YOUTH-LED VISION FOR A JUST ALAMEDA COUNTY

AUGUST 2023