

# KEY ELEMENTS OF TRANSITION PLANNING TO PREVENT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Almost half of all youth experiencing homelessness have been incarcerated in the juvenile or criminal justice system. Many intersecting factors are likely involved in this trajectory, including housing and employment discrimination against individuals with records, the impacts of trauma, and the educational and social disruptions that occur when youth are removed from their homes and communities. Juvenile justice systems should avoid secure placements for youth whenever possible, and should take affirmative steps to provide transition-related services to youth in their care. This includes early and comprehensive transition planning and services that allow each young person to leave the system prepared to become a successful and self-sufficient adult. Transition planning should address the issues below, and should be undertaken in partnership with youth and their families, and available while youth are in residential placements and on probation.

*Housing:* Transition planning should address where young people will live after they exit justice system custody, but should also involve working with the young person to identify and strengthen backup options and supports in case their planned living arrangements do not work out. Justice systems also need to partner with other community agencies to ensure that there are adequate temporary and long-term housing resources available in the community. (orts/TER2017.pdf)

## **Resource:**

Texas Juvenile Justice Department's Treatment Effectiveness Report also includes a Re-Entry and Re-Integration report detailing its work in those areas, as mandated by a 2009 state law. In addition to transition planning and services, the report includes several housing-



specific items. For example, the agency is “exploring a long-term, multi-agency initiative with community partnerships to develop tiny house options...to provide affordable housing to homeless youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four.” Access the full report at <https://www.tjjd.texas.gov/publications/rep>.

*Access to vital documents:* Every young person exiting a juvenile justice facility or on probation should have their birth certificate and a state-issued identification document. (This document should not indicate that it was issued by a corrections agency, as this could impede employment and housing prospects.)

**Resources:**

- The Legal Action Center has compiled information on “what obstacles exist in each state for people newly released from prison to obtain proper identification” as well as some promising practices from Minnesota, Oregon and California. A complete list of this information is available at <https://lac.org/toolkits/ID/ID.htm#summary>.
- California law provides that homeless children and youth are entitled to free certified birth certificates.LXVI (The law also allows homeless status to be verified by a homeless services provider.)

*Education support:* Youth who have not completed high school have a 346% higher risk of experiencing homelessness.LXVII All youth need to earn credits that will allow them to “keep up” while incarcerated and also should be assisted with re-engaging in school after disruption. For youth who are or will be 18 or older when they leave the juvenile justice system, professionals should also help with navigating state and federal entitlements to a high school education past age 18 (e.g., through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)), and accessing college-level coursework.



This includes classes available while in custody as well as assistance applying for higher education admission and financial aid, as well as accessing programs and services that can offer additional support while in college.

**Resource:**

SchoolHouse Connection ([www.schoolhouseconnection.org](http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org)) provides information as well as technical assistance on educational protections and best practices for youth experiencing homelessness.

*Employment-related planning and services:* Many resources are available to help youth develop needed skills and connect to employment, including services supported by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Juvenile justice systems should collaborate with local workforce agencies to bring programming in to residential facilities and to ensure that youth in non-residential care can connect to them. Youth should learn both hard and soft skills (writing a resume, interviewing, time management, professionalism). Youth should be connected to national and community-based providers that offer job readiness services, work experience and other programming to all young people (e.g., AmeriCorps, Job Corps), and juvenile justice stakeholders should work with those programs to ensure that justice involvement is not a barrier to participation.

**Resource:**

Youth Advocate Programs and the National Youth Employment Coalition published a useful guide titled *New Funds For Work: Connecting Systems For Justice-involved Young People*, available at <http://www.yapinc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Fact%20Sheets/Connecting%20Systems.pdf>.

*Life skills and healthy relationships education:* Youth who are incarcerated may have very different daily lives than their non-incarcerated



peers, and may exit justice system custody without the same social or everyday life skills that other youth have as they transition to adulthood. One formerly incarcerated young adult described this experience as being “frozen in time” and re-entering society feeling, in some ways, like the teenager she was when she entered state custody instead of the twenty-something she was when she exited. As stated above, young people should receive rehabilitative services in their own homes and communities whenever possible; when youth must be in residential settings, these placements should be as “real-world” as possible:

- Youth should have opportunities to learn basic life skills such as how to cook meals for themselves, and how to manage personal finances, and exposure to different subjects so they can identify interests that could help put them on a career path.
- Given that many youth in the juvenile justice system may have experienced family conflict, abuse or neglect, homelessness, or long-term institutional care, youth may also need support and services related to forming healthy relationships, dealing with trauma and anxiety, and other issues.

*Mentoring:* Youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system should be connected to mentors while in residential care or as soon as they are on probation/parole. Youth may benefit most from having mentors who are like them, e.g., similar past experiences, same race or ethnicity, adults in their late twenties or early thirties. Ideally, youth should have mentors who meet with them regularly but are also available to them any time they experience a crisis or find themselves facing a time-sensitive and difficult decision or situation. Youth mentors with lived experiences should be in a stable and healthy place in their own lives, to ensure that mentoring relationships can be mutually beneficial and not trigger any unresolved trauma for the mentor, or be disrupted in ways that could harm the mentee.





### Resources:

- Preparing Leaders of Tomorrow (<http://www.plotforyouth.org>), a mentoring program for youth aged 9 to 21 in Brooklyn, New York, serves many young people who were involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system. Their program includes mentors from the same communities and with similar life experiences to their mentees.
- The Credible Messenger Justice Center ([cmjcenter.org](http://cmjcenter.org)) has identified several other mentoring programs that use Credible Messengers (described as “mentors who have passed through the justice system and sustainably transformed their lives”), including:  
ARCHES Transformative Mentoring, which serves youth aged 16–24 on probation and has been shown to reduce recidivism.
- AIM: Advocate Intervene Mentor, which serves youth aged 13–18 who are in danger of violating probation. AIM provides each young person an advocate who is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is working with no more than 3 other young people at the same time.
- Next STEPS (Striving Toward Engagement and Peaceful Solutions), a group mentoring program for youth aged 16–24 focused on specific public housing developments and surrounding areas.
- Credible Messenger mentoring is also offered in Washington, D.C. through the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (<https://dysr.dc.gov/page/credible-messenger-initiative>) and in California through Project Kinship (<https://www.projectkinship.org/>) and other agencies.

*Physical and mental health care and services:*  
Transition planning for young people in the juvenile justice system should emphasize services and coverage for any



ongoing behavioral and physical health issues, as well as preventative care. Unaddressed health issues can interfere with a young person's transition back into their community, as well as their ability to maintain employment (and therefore housing). Young people who have been in juvenile justice system custody for a long time, or even a shorter period that included their 18th birthday, may have different needs (e.g., may need to transition from a pediatrician to an adolescent or general practitioner, may need to re-enroll in Medicaid or to obtain their own health insurance if they are no longer eligible to be covered under a parent's plan.) Juvenile justice agencies should partner with local public health departments and other relevant agencies to support transitioning youth (as well as all youth under supervision or in custody). These groups are often eager to connect with difficult-to-reach uninsured populations.

**Resource:**

Savannah's Campaign for Healthy Kids included city employees working with juvenile courts and probation staff to enroll youth (particularly those receiving behavioral health services as part of their court involvement) in health care coverage.<sup>LXVIII</sup>

*Assistance with clearing/expunging juvenile records:*

As part of their transition planning, youth should be educated on what records can be cleared or expunged and when, and should be connected to local groups who can help (if not already included in case management services). Youth should also receive counseling on what they do and do not need to share about their records on a job or housing application (e.g., the difference between a criminal conviction and a juvenile adjudication). Juvenile defender offices, civil legal aid providers or pro bono legal clinics can help both with general education on these issues and with assisting individual young people.

**Resources:**

- The Clean Slate Clearinghouse



(<https://cleanslateclearinghouse.org/>) provides information on clearing and expunging juvenile and criminal records for all U.S. states and territories.

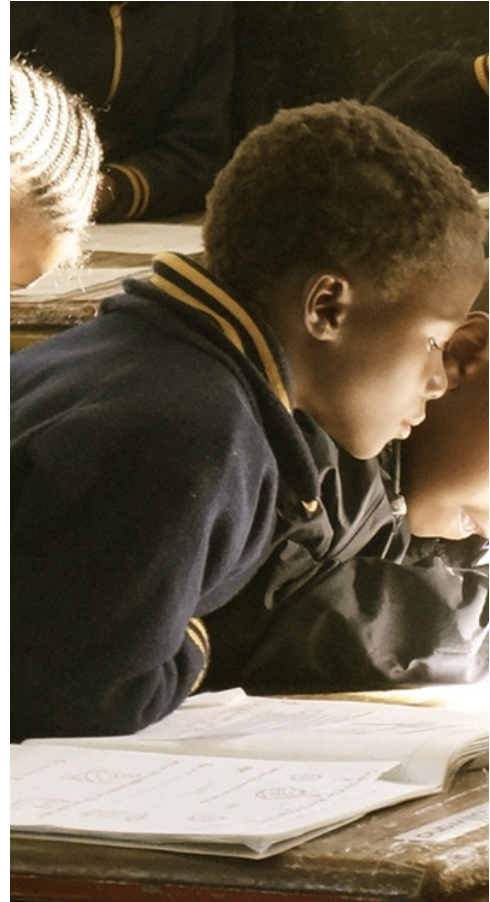
- Additional resources are available through local bar associations, or the National Juvenile Defender Center (<http://njdc.info/>).

*Legal assistance:* Beyond records, youth may need assistance with addressing new or pending delinquency or criminal charges, collateral consequences of justice involvement, appealing or challenging benefits or housing denials, and many other issues. Young people should be encouraged to review their own records (e.g., arrest report, credit history) and work with an attorney to fix any inaccuracies. Also young people aged at least 18 (and minors in some cases) are entitled to direct their own representation, and to select their own attorney (except in the case of court appointments).

**Resource:**

The Homeless Youth Legal Network has information on common legal needs of youth experiencing homelessness and a directory of legal services and pro bono attorneys, available at [www.ambar.org/hyln](http://www.ambar.org/hyln).LXIX

*Family and other relationships:* While youth are in juvenile justice placements, they should be supported in maintaining and strengthening healthy relationships. Youth should have ample contact and visitation not just with parents, but with other relatives, significant others, and anyone the youth considers to be family. Healthy and supportive relationships can sustain young people after they leave the juvenile justice system (but must be desired by youth; agencies should not assume a young person wants to have a relationship with every person they are biologically related to, wants a mentor, etc.). Youth adjudicated for sex offenses: Youth who have been adjudicated for sex offenses and may be required to register as sex offenders will face even



greater challenges accessing housing and employment and may be more vulnerable to homelessness. As a result, more intensive transition planning, as early as possible, is essential--particularly for youth who cannot return to their parents' homes.

### **San Francisco Juvenile Reentry Court**

San Francisco's Juvenile Reentry Court includes a cross-disciplinary collaborative team that works closely with youth and their families to develop and carry out a case plan for successful transitions back into the community.<sup>LXX</sup> The planning process begins at disposition and each court participant has a complete plan three months prior to leaving their residential placement, which "may include housing, vocational training, education, therapy, drug treatment, and any other services" that the young person may need to be successful.



#### Notes

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AB 1733 (2014) available at [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201320140AB1733dy](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1733dy).

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Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. *supra* note 1.

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II National League of Cities Institute For Youth, Education, and Families. "Cities Promoting Health Care Coverage for Children and Families." (2017).

Available at [http://nlc.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/CEHACF%20MAG\\_FINAL\\_pages.pdf](http://nlc.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/CEHACF%20MAG_FINAL_pages.pdf).

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Note that even with a pro bono or legal services attorney, individuals may still need to pay fees to the state or courts, e.g., for record sealing or to file a case, though fee waivers may be available.

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Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco. "San Francisco Collaborative Courts: Juvenile Reentry Court." (nd) Available at <http://www.sfsuperiorcourt.org/sites/default/files/images/Juvenile%20Reentry%20Court%20fact%20sheet%20MARCH%202014%20FINALFINAL.pdf>. Also see <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/555-local-spotlights>.