Youth Justice Work Group Subcommittee #1: Youth Development and Diversion

*What can we design that equitably reduces the size and scope of the legal system by addressing root causes and pathways for youth? How can we make sure that youth don’t need to be criminalized to access resources?*

**Chairs:** Tshaka Barrows, W. Haywood Burns Institute; Anthony Robles, Youth Justice Coalition; Taylor Schooley, Los Angeles County Division of Youth Diversion and Development

**Objectives:** This subcommittee will aim to conduct research, survey existing resources, and draft recommendations related to the design of components in a youth development model that effectively and equitably reduce the size and scope of the legal system for youth.

**Context:** In 2018, there were over 980,000 young people between the ages of 10 and 17 and an additional 1,400,000 youth under the age of 10 in Los Angeles County. Approximately 60% of young people in Los Angeles County are Hispanic/Latinx, 18% White, 10% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 7% Black/African American and 3% Multiracial or “Other.” According to the most recent available data on four-year cohort graduation, the high school graduation rate in Los Angeles County is about 79%. That same year—the most recent year of available data and the year before the Los Angeles County Division of Youth Diversion and Development (YDD) began implementing pre-arrest alternatives to arrest in 10 communities across the county—there were over 8,000 youth arrests reported by law enforcement agencies in Los Angeles County and over 9,000 youth referred to Probation. Although the overall number of youth arrests decreases each year, the disproportionate burden of arrest and referral to Probation for youth of color and Black youth in particular persists. In Los Angeles County, Black youth are consistently 6x more likely to be arrested than their white peers.

Approximately 80% of youth arrests each year are for status, misdemeanor, or low-level felony offenses that are legally eligible for referral to community-based alternatives. In the second half of 2019, network of community-based organizations providing diversion and development services began receiving pre-arrest diversion referrals from local law enforcement partners. As of January 2020, 177 young people had been referred to YDD programs in lieu of arrest or citation. Referrals reflected the demographic characteristics of youth in Los Angeles County. Of youth formally referred to diversion, 24% were referred for alleged felonies, 67% were referred for alleged misdemeanors, 6% were referred for status offenses or infractions. Although the percentage of referrals for alleged felonies is promising, referrals for low-level misdemeanor and status offenses or infractions are not currently aligned with YDD policy guidelines. In April 2020, YDD will share it’s second quarter of data to give an update on the number and characteristics of young people who currently have access to community-based support in lieu of arrest.

**Subcommittee Focus:**

This subcommittee will focus on identifying components of a successful youth development model that would prevent root causes of and pathways to justice system involvement for young people in Los Angeles County:

- Outlining implications of a youth development framework on considerations for a continuum of support and communicating findings to the Work Group and broader community;
- Assessing existing youth development and diversion resources;
- Assessing the experiences, needs, and vision for improvement of young people impacted by youth-serving systems countywide—including education, child welfare, mental health, and community-based youth development;

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1 Los Angeles County youth data from kidsdata.org.
2 California Department of Education Data from kidsdata.org.
3 California Department of Justice data from Public Records Act requests submitted by the Division of Youth Diversion and Development and W. Haywood Burns Institute.
4 In accordance with California Welfare and Institutions Code 625.3, current policy for the Los Angeles County Office of Youth Diversion and Development states that law enforcement officers may counsel and release or divert a young person unless they are 14 years of age or older and have been taken into custody by an officer for the personal use of a firearm in the commission or attempted commission of a felony or for any offense listed in section 707(b).
• Exploring opportunities to expand access to youth-serving resources;
• Exploring opportunities to coordinate and fund expanded youth-serving resources;
• Exploring workforce needs for youth development infrastructure and expanded community-based youth-serving resources.

Build On:
• Division of Youth Diversion and Development’s Roadmap for Advancing Youth Diversion in Los Angeles County and subsequent implementation plans
• Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council’s Countywide Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan
• Guidelines for Implementation of Senate Bill 439
• Office of Child Protection Prevention Plans
• Office of Violence Prevention Strategic Plans
• The Ready to Rise Initiative
• The Department of Arts and Culture

Opportunities to Engage the Broader Community:
• Conduct listening sessions and focus groups with youth in the following categories:
  - Youth eligible for pre-arrest diversion,
  - Youth with mental health needs,
  - Youth currently or formerly put on juvenile probation and/or incarcerated in a juvenile hall or camp
  - Youth involved in the child welfare system,
  - Youth enrolled in public schools across the county,
  - Youth participating in community-based arts, recreation, mentoring, and leadership programs,
  - Youth participating in gang intervention and violence prevention programs.
  - Providers of community-based youth services in arts, recreation, mentoring, and leadership programs
• Communicate findings from youth development research; qualitative research; and data from education, child welfare, mental health, law enforcement, and diversion to the Work Group and broader community.

Related Questions Raised by the Work Group:
• How can we build on and strengthen the existing infrastructure and implementation of youth development and diversion?
• How will a new model address issues that contribute to justice system involvement (i.e., economic conditions, policing, disinvestment, education, mental health, and trauma)?
• What are early measures and supports we can put in place for early adolescence?
• How will a new community-based youth development model engage and interact with governmental agencies responsible for providing services to youth such as public schools, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Health Services, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Arts and Culture?

Key Readings: