



Report Back: Elevating Youth Voices - Interviews with Young People in San Francisco Juvenile Hall

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Elevating Youth Voices— Project Overview

- JPD wanted to learn from the experiences of **young people currently housed in the Juvenile Justice Center** to inform policy and program development:
 - What can we learn from young people to do our best work?
 - How can we measure progress over time?
- JPD worked with the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families (DCYF) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to develop the ***Elevating Youth Voices*** study.
 - The American Institutes for Research, or AIR, is a non-profit research organization that was contracted by DCYF to evaluate juvenile justice programs in San Francisco.
 - The study received approval from the City Attorney, City Risk Manager, Defense Counsel, and the Superior Court, as well as an Institutional Review Board for the Study of Human Subjects, as required by federal regulation.

Elevating Youth Voices— Project Overview

- Between November 2022 and March 2023, **AIR interviewed 30 young people** detained or committed in San Francisco Juvenile Justice Center.
- These interviews were **anonymous and confidential**, as required by the Court Order.
- AIR presented their findings to the Juvenile Probation Commission in November 2023.
 - Findings are often consistent with other sources over time, including the Young Women’s Freedom Center report (“Through Their Eyes”), Close Juvenile Hall Work Group listening sessions, youth focus groups, and other observations.
- The JPD Executive Team meets regularly to review and respond to youth concerns and recommendations, and track progress over time.
 - Note: All concerns associated with the Quarantine Unit have been addressed as pandemic restrictions have been lifted.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Application of Rules, Consequences, & Rewards

Concern	JPD Status
Inconsistent application of rules, consequences, and rewards	<p>JPD is updating policies and developing a training plan for staff, including developing procedural justice protocols for communicating to youth what is happening and why.</p> <p>JPD is developing a new Positive Behavioral Development Program— a trauma-informed skill-building and repair program, to encourage positive behaviors and promote accountability that will create a framework for consistent staff responses.</p>
Room confinement as a punishment	JPD has implemented a new Room Confinement Check List and Reintegration & Safety Plan to ensure that room confinement is used only when necessary, as a safety measure and in compliance with BSCC regulations.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Application of Rules, Consequences, & Rewards

Concern	JPD Status
Group, rather than individual, consequences	<p>New Room Confinement, Positive Behavioral Development Program, and communication policies should reduce necessity of unit-wide responses. However, for safety reasons, there are times when unit-wide responses are necessary, which will be conveyed to youth.</p> <p>If youth need to be separated from each other for safety reasons, staff are required to complete a new Separation Checklist to ensure such measures are used only when necessary. The check list, which must be completed every shift, documents why there is an ongoing need for separation, and how all programming and educational needs will be met for all youth.</p>
Staff favoritism/ bringing in items to youth	<p>As of 2023, staff have been instructed not to bring in any items for individual youth. The new Positive Behavioral Development Program policy will include opportunities for all youth to obtain free items from the JJC Store, which has been rolled out on a pilot basis.</p>

Youth Concerns Regarding: Grievance Process

Concern	JPD Status
<p>Most youth stated that they had never filed a grievance, and the ones that had communicated that they did not experience any changes.</p> <p>Youth expressed not feeling comfortable voicing their complaints in the Hall.</p>	<p>There are now two grievance processes available to youth, both of which are described during orientation: a state ombudsperson and a local ombudsperson.</p> <p>JPD has disseminated and posted materials (posters, brochures, forms) related to the state Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) ombudsperson in all units.</p> <p>In January 2024, JPD developed and disseminated new brochures describing the local grievance process. Brochures are available on every living unit in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, and Samoan.</p> <p>JPD has an open Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for local Ombuds Services, with proposals due June 14 at 12 PM. JPD is seeking in-person services to create a more responsive grievance process. The new contract will also include data tracking to improve monitoring of grievances and their outcomes.</p>

Youth Concerns Regarding: Prejudice & Bias

Concern	JPD Status
Differential treatment by gender	JPD is developing a new Positive Behavioral Development Program— a trauma-informed skill-building and repair program, to encourage positive behaviors and promote accountability that will create a framework for consistent staff responses. JPD will collect and review data to ensure fair application by gender, race, etc.
Differential treatment by race/ethnicity; bias against Spanish speaking youth	<p>Upon learning of this issue, the Director personally visited all units, reviewed the grievance processes, and communicated her availability to all youth.</p> <p>JPD has prioritized hiring culturally and linguistically responsive JJC staff, with the goal that units with monolingual Spanish speaking youth are always staffed by Spanish speaking staff.</p>

Additional efforts: On June 20, in collaboration with Adult Probation, JPD is hosting a **Ceres Policy Research** training: Working with System Involved LGBTQ/GNCT Populations. This 2-hour mandatory training will focus on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Food

Concern	JPD Status
Poor/mediocre food quality; lack of seasoning; small portions/ not filling; failure to accommodate dietary restrictions	JPD has increased the variety of fruit available on the units. Starting in 2024, JPD is using a new nutrition software application to develop menus and ensure BSCC caloric requirements are met. The new menus are being designed with the input of youth living on the Commitment Units.

Additional efforts: Young people get opportunities to cook and eat the food they make through SFUSD’s Horticultural Science/Culinary Art Program, Sunset Youth Service’s Culinary Program, and through cookout opportunities facilitated by JJC staff. Additionally, JJC provides outside food for celebrations such as graduations.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Phone Calls

Concern	JPD Status
Phone calls as privileges; variation in phone call privileges; removing phone call privileges as punishment	Most youth may make one phone call per day, 5 days per week . In accordance with the Juvenile Youth Bill of Rights (WIC 224.71), youth may make “at least two free telephone calls within an hour after initially being placed in a juvenile facility following an arrest.” The minimum standard, which applies to youth in some circumstances who have violated the rules, is one 15-minute phone call, 2 days per week.
Limited schedule for phone calls/ schedules that don't work for families/ call time limits, especially for youth under 18	The phone call schedule is designed not to interfere with school or programming. Youth under 18 are required to attend school for much of day, and therefore have less time throughout the day than young adults to make phone calls. The minimum call time is 15-minutes. If time permits, additional time is provided to each young person on the unit.
Lack of privacy	For safety reasons, counselors must be present for all calls, except those with attorneys, which are confidential. Attempts are made to create privacy among young people on the unit, but there are physical constraints.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Phone Calls

Concern	JPD Status
Not enough phones	Due to both staffing and physical constraints, there are only two phones per unit. To address this limitation, JPD has increased the frequency of phone calls.
Restrictions regarding approved callers	<p>Counselors initiate all phone calls for young people.</p> <p>For the safety of youth in detention and the community at large, Probation Officers must approve all callers. Approved callers are tracked in JPD’s case management system, AutoMon, to enable efficient information sharing with JJC staff.</p> <p>Youth living on the Commitment Units may call anyone they like, with the exception of individuals identified by JPD as inappropriate or disallowed (e.g. due to a stay away order)</p>
When young people receive international calls, they are not able to then receive local calls from other family members	All youth are only allowed to make one phone call, domestic or international, during their scheduled phone time. However, they may speak with different callers on different days.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Visits

Concern	JPD Status
<p>Visitation schedules that don't work for families/ insufficient opportunities for visitation.</p>	<p>Effective August 2023, JPD added one additional visitation day, as well as an additional hour on each visitation day. In person family visiting hours occur on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.</p>
<p>Slow permission process for visitors/ limits on who may be approved for visitation.</p>	<p>For safety reasons, the assigned Deputy Probation Officer must approve all visitors. Approved visitors are tracked in JPD's case management system, AutoMon, to enable efficient information sharing with JJC staff, and DPOs make every effort to approve visitors in a timely manner. For detained youth, only parents/guardians and CBO providers will be approved for visitation. For committed youth, anyone over age 21 may be considered for visitation, pending DPO approval.</p>
<p>Virtual visits available inconsistently across Units.</p>	<p>Virtual visits are now available on every unit and may be scheduled on any day of the week. Virtual visits undergo the same approval process by the DPO as phone calls and in person visits. Youth may access virtual visits once per week if their family is unable to attend in person visiting. Additional virtual visits may be available to youth as an earned opportunity.</p>
<p>In person/ virtual visits as a privilege/ cancelling visits as punishment.</p>	<p>In very rare circumstances, visitation may be impacted by a safety issue. Every effort is made to support regular visiting and maintain youth connections to loved ones. In May 2023, JPD sent staff a notice regarding visitation rights as guaranteed by the Youth Bill of Rights: JPD staff cannot revoke any type of approved and/or scheduled visits as a form of consequence, sanction, or a form discipline.</p>

Youth Concerns Regarding: Physical & Behavioral Health

Concern	JPD Status
Long waiting periods to receive medical attention when requested or receiving ineffective treatment.	DPH/SPY nurses are available during all shifts. If a young person asks for medical attention, they will receive same day service.
Medical staff withholding treatment when upset with young people	When youth file a grievance or stakeholders raise a concern, SPY holds an internal review to understand the details and context, review existing policies, remind staff of patient care expectations, and enhance monitoring and accountability through regular audits. Additionally, SPY continues to offer training around trauma-informed care and conflict resolution for all DPH-SPY staff.
Lack of opportunities for social support and mental health promotion, especially for youth who experience less contact with supportive family members	Credible Messenger Life Coaches are now on-site during all waking hours and across all units in the facility, especially on units 7 & 8, to build rapport and provide social support. Staff and Life Coaches play games/ provide alternate programming to youth who do not have visitors.
Discomfort about being emotionally open due to nature of the facility, concern that feelings are dismissed.	DPH/SPY behavioral health staff are available on a daily basis, as are Credible Messenger Life Coaches. Additionally, JPD continues to implement space softening projects to create a more normative and homelike environment to support emotional wellbeing. Through ReWire CBT training, we are providing all sworn staff skills to support young people through challenging emotional experiences.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Living Setting

Concern	JPD Status
Limited opportunities to go outside	Each unit has a courtyard, which young people may access during their free time. Weather permitting, all units may participate in the SFUSD Horticultural Science/Culinary Art in the garden on weekdays. The Border Youth Tennis Exchange Program (BYTE) engages youth in tennis, soccer, and ping pong, among other physical recreational activities on unit courtyards and in the large outdoor area. Youth on Commitment Units participate in Sunset Youth Services' Culinary Program in the garden area once a week. JPD staff regularly play basketball with youth on the outdoor courts. Sometimes, there are staffing or safety issues that prevent outside programming.
8:30 PM bed time is too early	Through the new Positive Behavioral Development Program, JPD is exploring how to create opportunities for later bedtimes.
Lack of privacy/ alone time	Due to regulatory constraints, youth cannot be completely alone in the facility. During the school day, detained youth have access to a calm down room in the Education Center. On the Living Units, young people may spend time in the classroom or courtyard, both spaces that JPD has targeted for physical improvements. They may also self-place in their rooms.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Living Setting

Concern	JPD Status
Uncomfortable bedding/mattresses	<p>Current regulations require that detention facilities provide only mattresses that meet flammability standards. JPD has connected with the BSCC, CPOC, the State Fire Marshall, and the Bureau of Home Furnishings to determine if these regulations can be revised to allow for more comfortable bedding.</p> <p>Youth on the Commitment Units have the opportunity to select their own sheet sets and blankets. Youth on the Detention Units have been provided with additional, new fleece blankets.</p> <p>JPD is coordinating with DPW to obtain an estimate for removing the concrete beds and replacing them with safety compliant furniture.</p>
Low quality hygiene products	<p>Youth on the Commitment Units have the opportunity to select their own hygiene products and reorder them regularly. JPD is exploring how to upgrade hygiene products for youth on the Detention Units, given the variability of that population.</p>

Youth Concerns Regarding: Programming

Concern	JPD Status
Lack of Spanish speaking programming	JPD strives to ensure that units with monolingual Spanish speaking youth are always staffed by Spanish speaking staff, and we encourage CBOs to recruit Spanish speaking staff. Currently, at least 7 programs have Spanish language capacity including but not limited to Border Youth Tennis Exchange, Sharp Circle, Success Centers, The Beat Within, Young Women’s Freedom Center, Sunset Youth Services, FLY, and San Dimas.
Lack of vocational/ certification programming	Certification opportunities are offered to youth who have completed high school via online certification programs. JPD is working with City College and the County Office of Education to bring in additional vocation pathways, starting in Summer 2024. Additionally, JPD is working with partner agencies to commence construction and barbering programs in the coming months.
Lack of choice for programming; feeling like programming is mandatory and declining participation will result in consequences	Roughly 20 programs are offered regularly to youth in the JJC. JPD works continuously to identify additional programming opportunities that may be of interest to youth in our facility, both through programming procured by DCYF, as well as volunteer programs. Youth are encouraged to participate in programming, by staff and Credible Messenger Life Coaches, but they are always offered an alternative. Youth committed to the Secure Youth Treatment Facility must participate in programming to fulfill the requirements of their court-ordered Individual Rehabilitation Plans, and participation or lack there-of is reported to the court.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Programming

Concern	JPD Status
Lack of youth input on programming offerings/ lack of follow through by JPD	JPD regularly asks youth on the Commitment Units what kinds of programming they would like to participate in. When there are new programming opportunities, program staff present to youth to gauge their interest before commencing the program. Through these efforts, JPD has brought in the following programming requested by youth: soccer, tennis, basketball, cooking, candle-making, and gardening. JPD is actively working on bringing vocational programming requested by the youth in the coming months.

Youth Concerns Regarding: Staffing

Concern	JPD Status
<p>Some activities occur infrequently or not at all because there aren't enough staff to facilitate certain activities</p>	<p>JPD meets BSCC staffing ratio and programming requirements. At times, we may not have sufficient staffing to support San Francisco's full array of programming options. For the last year, JPD has been hiring new Counselors to optimally staff the facility, and we continue to do so.</p>
<p>Concern that JJC staff do not have enough support. Young people notice when staff experience stress at home or there appear to be staffing shortages, and feel that these external stressors affect staff and their ability to show up for youth</p>	<p>Overtime is a significant problem for the Juvenile Justice Center, which impacts staff and the young people they serve. On average, each counselor has worked almost 11 weeks of overtime in 12 months. Last summer, JPD changed the overtime scheduling process to create more opportunities for staff choice, and we continue to explore ways to reduce the need for overtime, in addition to hiring.</p> <p>To boost JJC staff morale, JJC leadership has implemented additional staff appreciation events and opportunities to support Counselors.</p>

Next Steps

- JPD Executive Team continues to meet regularly to review JJC Transformation Scorecard, report on progress, and develop and implement action plans.
- The Zellerbach Family Foundation just awarded the Youth Leadership Institute a grant to continue this important work by updating youth on practice and policy changes and centering youth voices in research and action.

Questions?