Youth Experiences in the San Francisco Juvenile Hall

Juvenile Probation Commission

Maura Shramko, PhD, Qualitative Lead | Candace Hester, PhD, Project Director

November 8, 2023

Agenda

1. Overview

2. AIR Background: Mission and Portfolio

3. Youth Interviews: Methods

4. Youth Interviews: Findings

5. Questions and Answers

AIR®

The mission of the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world.

AIR®

AIR's Research, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance

What does it include?

- rigorous research design and analysis,

- measurement and surveys,

- needs assessment, monitoring, and continuous improvement services,

- knowledge translation and dissemination, and
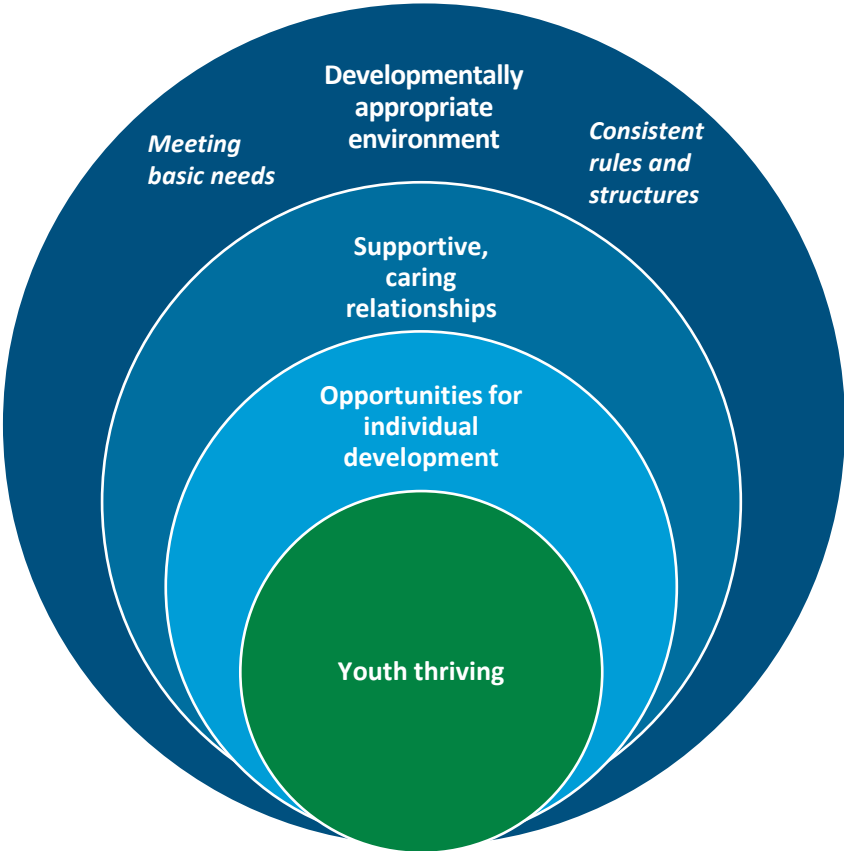
- participatory approaches.

◆AIR®

AIR Portfolio for Advancing Justice

AIR advances justice by addressing the root causes of harm and trauma to promote safety, dignity, and thriving.

AIR
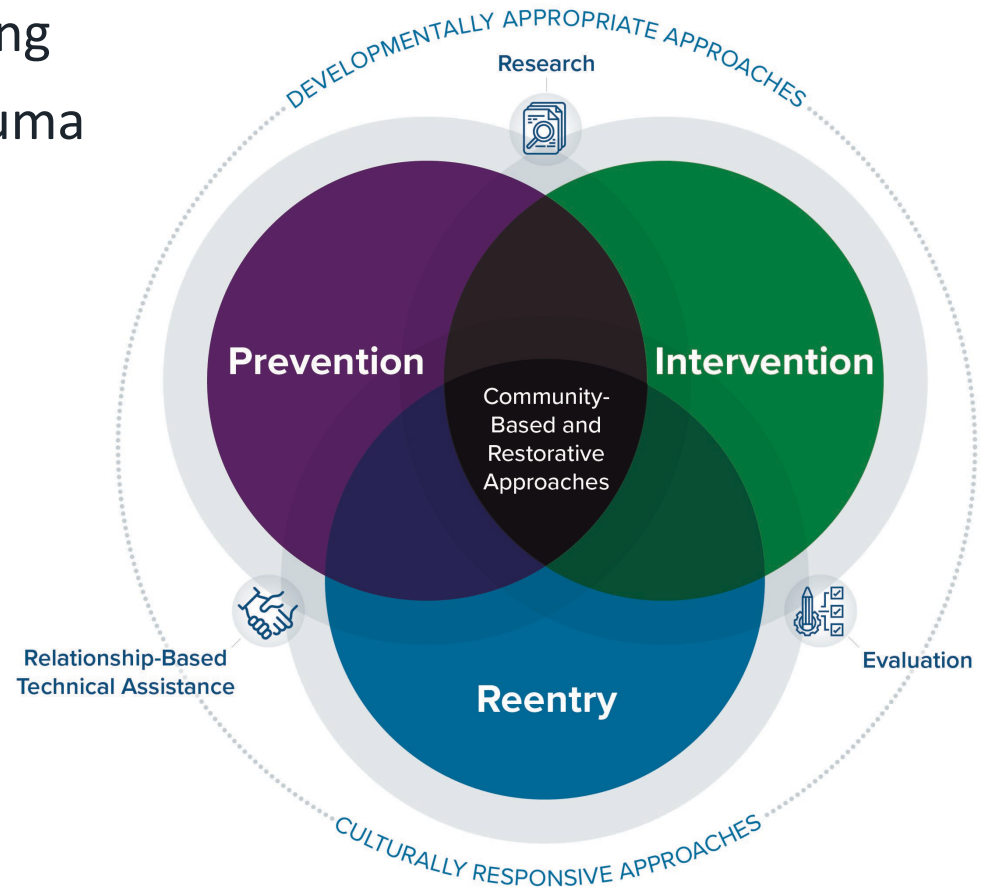
Developmental Lens

How do juvenile detention centers support youth development?

Benson et al., 2007

AIR®

Method and Data Collection

Youth Interviews at San Francisco Juvenile Hall

Data Collection

- Thirty youth in 40 separate interviews from November 2022 through February 2023.

- We used in-person and virtual data collection methods.

- Conducted in English and Spanish.

- Youth housed in the quarantine unit were interviewed virtually.

- We obtained parent consent and youth consent/assent, and received a court order authorizing our data collection process.
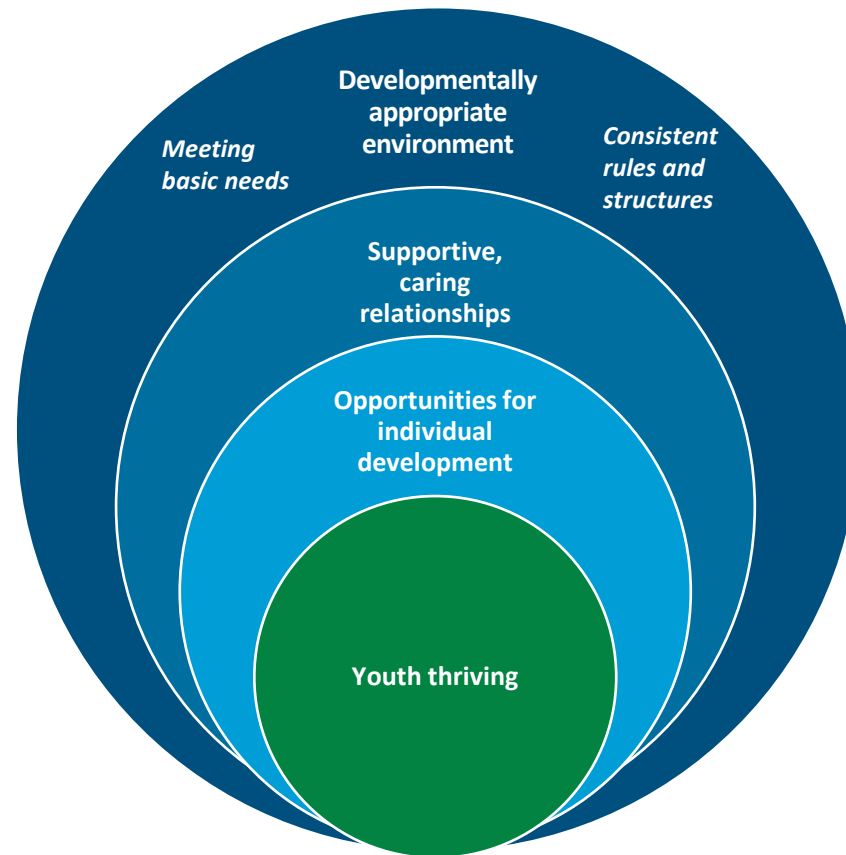
To protect anonymity, we do not provide demographic information for youth in the Hall.

Note. https://nicjr.org/noab/.

AIR

Findings

Youth Interviews at San Francisco Juvenile Hall

Developmental Lens

Developmentally appropriate environment

Meeting basic needs

Consistent rules and structures

Supportive, caring relationships
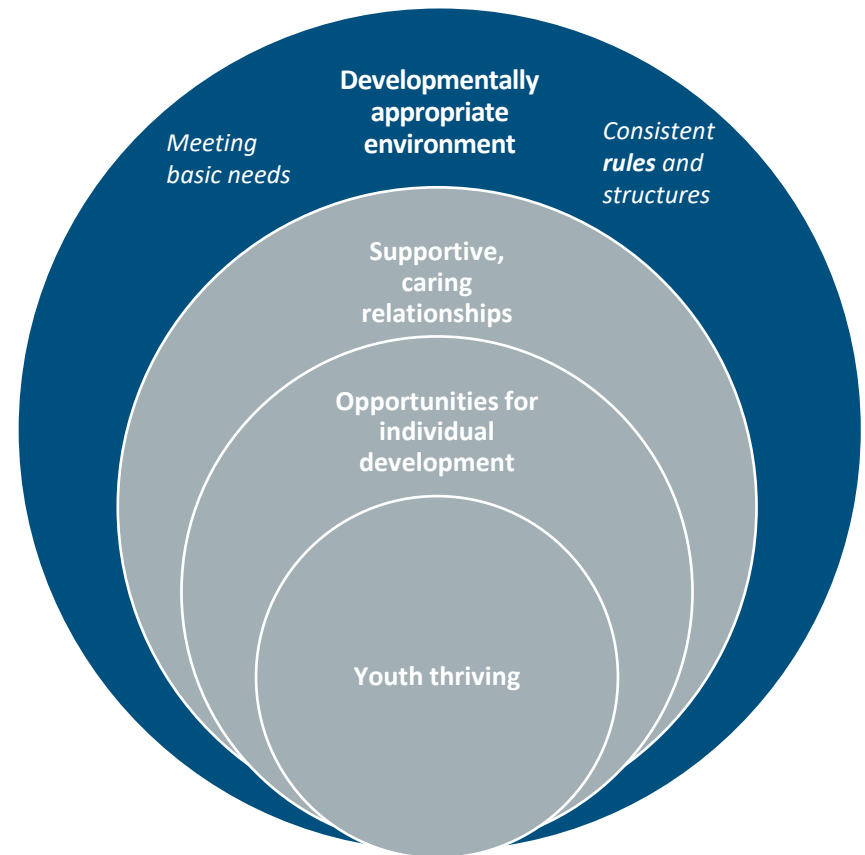
Opportunities for individual development

Youth thriving

Benson et al., 2007

AIR

Meeting Basic Needs

Developmentally appropriate environments should meet young people's basic needs, including safety, a place to sleep, nutritious food, and space to be alone.

Benson et al., 2007; Osher et al., 2020

AIR®

Meeting Basic Needs—Physical Safety

Most youth reported feeling **physically safe:**

- One youth shared that:

- "[N]obody in here that's really a threat. Everybody chill. Everybody gets along in here."

A couple of youth did not feel safe in the Hall.

- Example: Felt physically unsafe after emergency due to experience with care.

Meeting Basic Needs—Emotional Safety

Most youth reported feeling **emotionally safe**:

- "It's honestly a positive environment, more than the outside is. The kids in here, we respect each other. Staff, if you have a problem or you just need to talk to someone, you can talk to the staff or you can call . . . and somebody will come up to talk to you. So, there's a lot of different ways to express your feelings and also feel safe, too."

On the other hand, many youth also described limits to that emotional safety, sharing that they don't feel comfortable sharing their emotions in the Hall.

- One youth shared: "I just be like, you can't really show your emotions in here."

Meeting Basic Needs—Mental and Physical Health Care

Several youth expressed general satisfaction with their **mental and physical health** care at Juvenile Hall.

Youth did report some challenges with physical health care:

- amount of time to receive care,

- offer of treatment not perceived to be effective, and

- nurse withholding medication as a punishment.

Meeting Basic Needs—Food

Overall, youth perceived **the food** provided at Juvenile Hall to be mediocre or poor.

- A few youth spoke about how Juvenile Hall does not serve enough food and that the food itself is not filling.

- On the flip side, several youth shared that they couldn't complain or were grateful for the food.

AIR®

Meeting Basic Needs—Sleeping

Most youth expressed discomfort **sleeping** in the Hall**,** including from the physical conditions.

- One youth shared:

  - "Our beds are, we use yoga mats to go to sleep. These very thin mats. And then right underneath the mat, it is concrete. So, it's like we always have regular . . . back pain."

- Other youth who reported not sleeping well described it more generally that "it's jail," not home.

AIR

Meeting Basic Needs—Hygiene

On the whole, youth were dissatisfied with the **hygiene products.**

- Some youth shared they had negative reactions to the products:

- "I don't like it. It breaks my body out. When I go home, I have stuff around my mouth, like rashes. Rashes on my back, my legs, everything."

- However, sometimes youth can obtain higher quality hygiene products.

- As one youth described it:

- "Some people have relationships with the staff, good relationships and they can ask different things and they'll bring it. That's why they get it."

AIR

Meeting Basic Needs—Time Alone

Most youth found it possible to take **time alone** when they wanted it. However, many noted that this was possible only in their rooms.

One youth described the limitations of alone time like this:

- "The only time I would be able to take time to myself is when I go to my room. That's the only time I could get some sort of privacy. And you still really don't get that anyways, because you're in a cell with glass windows and somebody walks by your room all the time and looks at you."
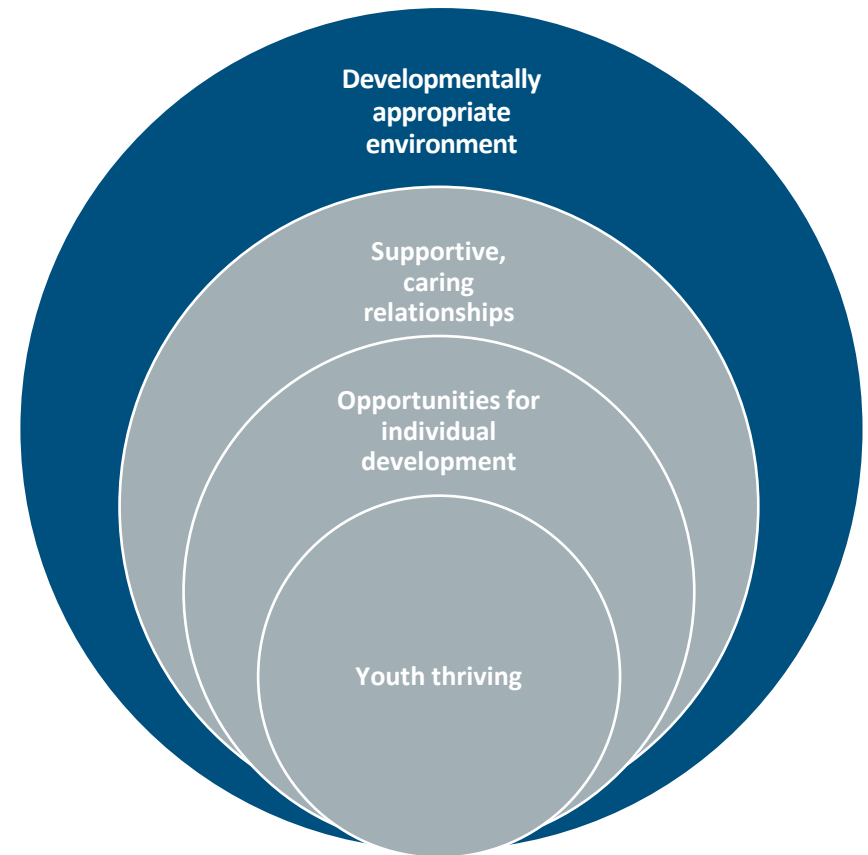
AIR

Meeting Basic Needs— Time Outside

- A majority of youth said that they rarely or never spent **time outside**.

- As one youth put it:

- "We never go outside. . . . It's hard because everything is indoors now, so we can go right there. . . . There's no view, there's nothing you can see that will calm you down. All you see is just concrete walls."

AIR

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

Developmentally supportive environments provide consistent structure, including rules and consequences that are applied fairly, boundaries and limits that are age appropriate, and social norms that outline expectations for behavior.

Developmentally appropriate environment

Supportive, caring relationships

Opportunities for individual development

Youth thriving

Benson et al., 2007; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Lerner et al., 2012

AIR®

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

Youth provided an array of examples of **the rules**, with variation across interviews.

- Some rules were common in other youth-serving environments:
  - Raise your hand, listen to staff, no fighting or play fighting.

- Other rules were unique to the secure environment:
  - Controlling youth movements, preventing escalation of violence.

AIR®

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

Most youth described a **reward system** where young people earn points daily, leading to multiple tiers based on point totals.

- The top tiers reportedly had corresponding privileges:
  - Tablets, MP3 player, additional time for phone calls or virtual visits

- One youth described the system as follows:

- *"So [the reward system has] four levels. Go up levels and you get more stuff like your tablet, MP3 player, stuff like that. You get rewarded for being good."*

AIR®

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

- Youth described a wider array of **negative consequences** that deviated from the point system.

- Commonly reported punishments included:

  - Being sent to their room.

  - Losing points in the merit system.

  - Losing phone call or virtual visit privileges.

AIR

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

- Many youth described receiving group punishment.

- One youth described it as follows:

  - "Someone breaks the rules, I mean, everybody don't want to.… Like, two people fighting, right now, they going to make everybody go in their rooms. And that it's like it falls on everybody. It don't fall on them two. It falls on everybody."

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

Youth also shared mixed perspectives on the extent to which rules were enforced consistently.

- One youth described:

  - "It's for everyone…They treat all the kids the same. The rules is just follow the instructions. Your time will be easier. Simple as that."

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

Some youth shared differences in treatment and application of rules.

For example, one young person gave an example of inconsistent application of the rules based on gender:

- "… it was boys and girls [in our unit] just a minute ago and it was boys and girls. But they had to switch it because I felt like the girls was getting special treatment. They get into arguments, they get time to chill out, cool down outside a hour. If it was the boys, they would've sent us straight to our room but now they got their own unit and stuff."

AIR

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

Another youth shared an example of differential application of **the rules** by racial/ethnic group, where staff treated Latinx youth worse:

- "I feel that there's a selection of kids that they choose who to let the rules pass by with. And for me, I'm [not] one of those kids. They won't treat me fair. I don't know why it's like that. But I feel like it's a racial thing toward us."

Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

Educational and programmatic activities can provide meaningful opportunities for adolescent skill and knowledge development as well as for young people to explore their interests.
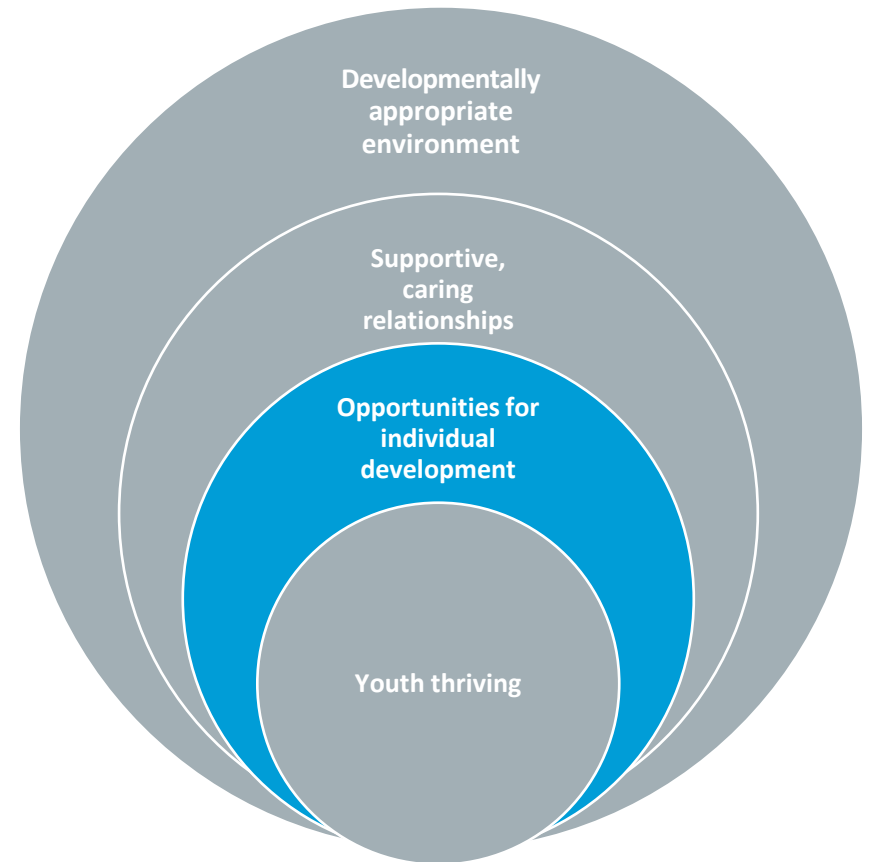
Benson et al., 2007; Berk et al., 2018; Simpkins et al., 2017

◆AIR®

Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

Overall, most youth identified **programs** they viewed positively.

- Sunset Youth Services was the most popular program among the youth interviewed.

- Youth appreciated the opportunity to create their own music.

- One youth described their experience in the program and how it fostered independence:

- "…when kids was rapping, the lady let me take control of it. And I was doing good. She was just telling me, "You're doing good at this" I was doing everything I like."

◆AIR®

Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

However, many youth told us that they participated in **programs** and education to stay busy or due to a lack of other options in the Hall.

- Youth shared that that the Hall rarely took youth input into account when they decided which programs to host.

- One youth explained this lack of youth input:

- "They'll never come ask our insight on what programs we want to do, nothing. It's just they set up a program, they say that it's a program coming through and we got to do it, because it's expected for us to rehabilitate ourselves and that's what the judge want to see for people like us to go home. "

Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

On the quarantine unit, youth told us that there were no in person activities (programs, classes).

- Multiple youth in the quarantine unit described receiving a self-directed packet of educational materials, but no instruction.

- Youth described the lack of in-person interaction as challenging.

AIR

Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

Warm, responsive family relationships are a fundamental resource throughout adolescence. For young people who are detained, continued access to positive family relationships is important. This is only possible through phone calls and visits.

Developmentally appropriate environment

Supportive, caring relationships

Family

Opportunities for individual development

Youth thriving
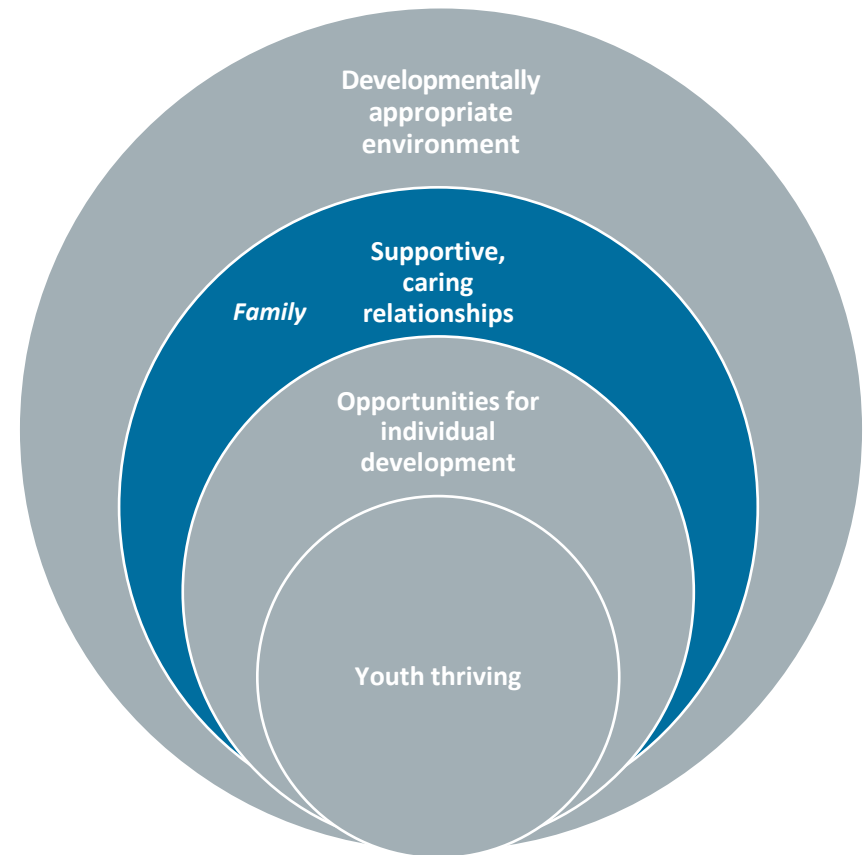
Osher, Cantor, et al., 2020; Osher et al., 2020; Smetana & Rote, 2019

AIR®

Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

For **phone calls**, youth shared that the number of youth on the unit limited the amount of time they received for phone calls to family.

- One youth explained:

- "It's different the more people you have in the unit. Because if everybody ask for a phone call, they got to do certain time limits and stuff like that. But the smaller the unit, the more freedom you get."

AIR®

Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

Youth described a few additional challenges with **accessing phone calls**, including

- difficulty reaching family (e.g., family availability outside phone call hours),

- phones located in common areas and not private,

- needing points in merit system to access phone calls.

Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

Some youth shared that they had not yet had an **in-person visit.**

Reasons included

- short stays,

- waiting for permission to have a visit, and

- challenges with family members' schedules.

◆AIR®

Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

Youth in the quarantine unit did not have access to **in-person visits**, but many shared that they wished they were possible.

One young person suggested that the unit use more frequent testing to allow for in person visits:

- "Yeah, I don't get that because when we get here we get COVID tested and then still it come back negative. We still got to be here 10 days and they keep testing us, keep testing us and then the staff said they get tested only if they feel like that they have symptoms or something."

AIR®

Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

Youth identified an array of barriers to **virtual visits**:

- Logistics of tablet access,

- Removal of tablet and virtual visit privileges,

- Challenges with family schedules.

- One youth mentioned that their unit manager took away virtual visit privileges from their entire unit:

- "No, we're not allowed to have virtual visits. . . . One day, there was like . . . I don't know, I forgot what happened, but the unit manager was like, . . . you guys can't have visits virtually . . . for some reason."

AIR®

Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

Relationships with nonparental caring adults have been demonstrated to support positive developmental outcomes. In the context of juvenile detention, staff have the potential to foster such caring relationships with young people.
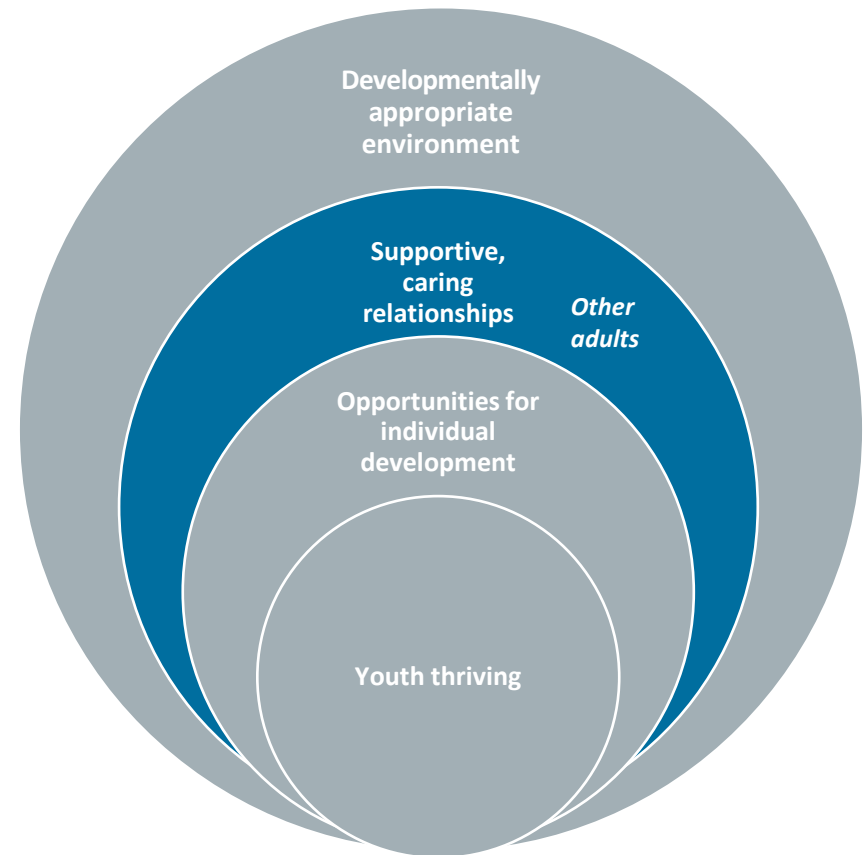
Benson et al., 2007; Bowers et al., 2015; Osher et al., 2020; Raposa et al., 2019

AIR®

Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

Overall, many youth shared that they experienced respectful and caring relationships with some staff.

- One youth shared that a staff member responded to an urgent situation quickly that made them feel cared for and supported. They said:

- "Well, one staff, yesterday, he came to check on me. …. And I felt like somebody was there for me."

AIR®

Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

- Another shared their perspective that most staff do care:

- "Majority of the staff, they actually care, and they want us to, I want to say, be as happy as you can be inside here. So they will try and make you comfortable and try strongly to work with you."

AIR®

Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

Youth opinions were split about whether staff were consistently **fair** in their relationships with youth.

Some youth agreed that everyone was treated the same, but others had witnessed differential treatment.

- In an alarming example, one youth mentioned that staff treat Latinx youth worse:

- "Yeah, some of them are racist too. They're racist to Hispanics. A lot of them are racist to people that don't speak English. They make fun of them, telling them to go back to their country, like, 'I don't know why you came here.' They be talking crazy."

AIR

Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

- Another area that youth saw **unfair treatment** was in terms of inconsistent application of rules and consequences.

- Some youth described the different ways staff favored some youth (including themselves) over others.

◆AIR®

Youth Recommendations

Youth Recommendations: Meeting Basic Needs

- Improve food quality, specifically giving youth larger portion sizes, dietary accommodations, and better seasoning.

- Increase young people's access to higher quality hygiene products than the commonly used Bob Barker brand.

- Provide better quality bed and bedding, especially for youth who experience pain when sleeping in the Hall, even if the current bedding meets Hall standards.

- Change Hall curfew from 8:30 p.m. to a later time.

- Organize more trips and activities outside.

AIR

Youth Recommendations: Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms

- Identify alternative punishments to being sent to room.

- Do not apply punishments to the entire group of youth for the actions of a few youth.

Youth Recommendations: Opportunities for Individual Development

- Seek youth input about their interests to inform programming.

- Increase access to trade certificate and workforce programs that will provide young adults with concrete employment options upon release.

- Create more opportunities to access programming and educational services in the quarantine unit, whether virtually or by using daily testing to allow face-to-face engagement.

AIR®

Section 4: Supportive Relationships With Family and Loved Ones

- Allow more opportunities for phone calls.

- Allow more opportunities for in-person visits.

- Allow in-person visits in the quarantine unit.

- Identify additional opportunities for social support and mental health promotion, especially for youth who experience less contact with supportive family members.

AIR

Section 5: Supportive Relationships With Other Caring Adults

- Ensure adequate staffing to allow for greater flexibility in activities (e.g., leave the unit to go to the basketball court or go to the gym).

- Provide more support for staff.

- Staff should not exhibit racist speech or actions.

AIR®

Limitations

Limitations

- Findings may not be generalizable beyond San Francisco Juvenile Hall.

- The degree of surveillance, which is legally required by the Hall, may have limited youth willingness to disclose their experiences with researchers.

- In addition, we were not able to share the results directly with young people and get their feedback, or solicit additional recommendations from youth in that process.

AIR®

Closing

Q & A

What questions can we answer for you?

References

Arthur, A. M., Smith, M. H., White, A. S., Hawley, L., & Koziol, N .A. (2017). *Age-sensitive instrument design for youth: A developmental approach.* The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED590480.pdf

Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., Hamilton, S. F., & Sesma, A. (2007). Positive youth development: Theory, research, and applications. In W. Damon & R.M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology, Theoretical Models of Human Development* (1st ed., pp. 894–941). John Wiley & Sons.

Berk, J., Rosenberg, L., Cattell, L., Lacoe, J., Fox, L., Dang, M., & Brown, E. (2018). *The external review of Job Corps: An evidence scan report*. Mathematica Policy Research. https://www.mathematica.org/download-media?MediaItemId={6F75790D-7A60-4029-A07F-0D452E635618}

Bowers , E. P., Johnson, S. K., Warren, D. J. A., Tirrell, J. M., & Lerner, J. V. (2015). Youth–Adult Relationships and Positive Youth Development [Review of *Youth–Adult Relationships and Positive Youth Development*]. In E. P. Bowers, G. J. Geldhof, S. K. Johnson, L. J. Hilliard , R. M. Hershberg, J. V. Lerner, & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Promoting Positive Youth Development: Lessons from the 4-H Study* (pp. 97–120). Springer. https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-319-17166-1.pdf

Guerra, N. G., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2008). Linking the prevention of problem behaviors and positive youth development: Core competencies for positive youth development and risk prevention. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, *2008*(122), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.225

Lerner, R. M., Bowers, E. P., Geldhof, G. J., Gestsdóttir, S., & DeSouza, L. (2012). Promoting positive youth development in the face of contextual changes and challenges: The roles of individual strengths and ecological assets. New Directions for Youth Development, 2012(135), 119–128. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20034

Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed., Vol. 41). SAGE Publications.

Nelson, M. L., & Quintana, S. M. (2005). Qualitative clinical research with children and adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, *34*(2), 344–356.

AIR®

Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2020). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science, 24*(1), 6–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650

Osher, D., Pittman, K., Young, J., Smith, H., Moroney, D., & Irby, M. (2020, July). *Thriving, robust equity, and transformative learning and development.* American Institutes for Research and Forum for Youth Investment.

Raposa, E. B., Rhodes, J., Stams, G. J. J., Card, N., Burton, S., Schwartz, S., Sykes, L. A. Y., Kanchewa, S., Kupersmidt, J., & Hussain, S. (2019). The effects of youth mentoring programs: A meta-analysis of outcome studies. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 48,* 423–443. https://doi.org/10964-019-00982-8https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-00982-8

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2017). *A guide to GPRA data collection using trauma-informed interviewing skills.* https://www.ddap.pa.gov/Documents/GPRA/SAMHSA%20GPRA_Data_Collection_Using_Trauma-informed_Interviewing_Skills.pdf

Simpkins, S. D., Riggs, N. R., Ngo, B., Vest Ettekal, A., & Okamoto, D. (2017). Designing culturally responsive organized after-school activities. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 32*(1), 11–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558416666169

Smetana, J. G., & Rote, W. M. (2019). Adolescent–parent relationships: Progress, processes, and prospects. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, *1,* 41–68. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-121318-084903

Wang, L., & Quandt, K. R. (2021). *Restorative justice for Oakland youth*. (n.d.). National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform. https://nicjr.org/noab/

Woodgate, R. L., Tennent, P., & Barriage, S. (2020). Creating space for youth voice: Implications of youth disclosure experiences for youth-centered research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19* https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920958974

AIR®

AIR®

Advancing Evidence.
Improving Lives.

Maura Shramko, PhD & Candace Hester, PhD

mshramko@air.org
chester@air.org

Supplementary Slides

Methods

Purpose: Gather feedback from young people about their perspective of San Francisco Juvenile Hall programming, services, staff, and physical environment.

Semi-structured interview guide (Creswell, 2007).

- Predetermined interview questions

- Allow flexibility for order, phrasing, and number of questions

Open-ended interview questions (Maxwell, 2013; Nelson & Quintana, 2005)

- Youth were invited to share as much or little as they wished.

- Designed to solicit open-ended feedback on what is working well and what could be improved.

◆AIR®

Strategies for Interviews at San Francisco Juvenile Hall

Developmentally appropriate approaches (Arthur et al., 2017)

- The questions were at an age-appropriate reading level.

- The session length was 45 minutes.

- We built rapport and trust at the beginning of the interview (Woodgate et al., 2020).

Cultural competence in practice

- Our project team has a diversity of backgrounds, lived experiences, and training.

- Our team has addressed potential for bias in the data collection tools and process.

- Our team has experience in qualitative approaches to elevate young people's voices (Woodgate et al., 2020).

AIR®

Strategies for Interviews in Juvenile Hall

Trauma-informed approach to the data collection (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017).

- We designed the questions to offer choices for youth.

- We did not include sensitive or personal questions.

- We were aware of and provided options in the physical environment.

AIR®

Logistics

Parent consent

- For minors, AIR contacted parents approximately 24 hours before the interview.

How we recruited young people

- Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) placed AIR flyers around the Hall.

- AIR interviewers explained the project generally to all youth present.

- AIR interviewers were situated in a classroom on the unit:

  – Individual youth could approach one on one to learn more.

  – An open door meant youth could come in if they chose.

  – AIR interviewers and individual youth were the only people in the space.

- Youth assent/consent:

  – Youth learned about the interviews and decided whether to proceed.

AIR

Interview Process

Interview process (approximately 45 minutes)

- AIR interviewer recorded interview audio.

- AIR interviewer read all questions out loud.

- Youth shared their responses in as much detail as they chose.

- At the end of the interview, the interviewer turned off the audio recorder.

Confidentiality

- AIR interviewers did not share information with JPD, including those youth who assented or declined to be interviewed.

- Audio recordings do not include identifying information (or if any was mentioned by the youth, it was stripped by AIR prior to analysis).

AIR®

Section 3: Opportunities for Individual Development

- Many youth shared that they liked the Beat Within Program for:

  - Offering snacks as a reward for completion

  - Being relatively easy to complete

- A couple of youth also liked a program where an adult with prior justice involvement shared their experiences and how they changed their life for the better after incarceration.

Providing Consistent Rules, Boundaries, and Positive Social Norms – Grievance Process

Most youth had not filed a grievance.

Some youth directly addressed any issues with staff themselves, instead of using the grievance process.

Most of the youth who were asked about their beliefs about the grievance process believed it was ineffective.

Examples:

Several youth believed grievances would not be resolved quickly.

Several youth felt that staff would not use their feedback to improve the Hall.

AIR®