

# Street Outreach Convening Report

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# Introduction

Youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are at extraordinary risk of exploitation, particularly commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). In San Francisco, as of April 2025, 78 active cases of CSE<sup>1</sup> were reported, many involving youth who had been disconnected from these very systems. This disconnection often occurs after young people experience systemic trauma, are repeatedly moved between unstable placements, or go missing from placement (MFP). Without trusted adults or consistent support, these youth are left exposed to harm and isolation, with exploiters often stepping in to fill that void. There is evidence that traffickers specifically target youth with such backgrounds<sup>2</sup>; research indicates that once on the streets, these young people can be approached within as few as 48 hours by traffickers.<sup>3</sup>

In response to this urgent need, a coalition of Bay Area service providers organized a Street Outreach Convening (SOC) in October 2023 to identify concrete, local strategies to better support these youth—especially those who are homeless, MFP, and/or experiencing sexual exploitation. The Convening brought together youth with lived experience, street outreach teams, public agencies, community-based organizations (CBOs), and legal advocates to chart a path forward. Considering the ongoing threats to the social safety net for disconnected youth in the Bay Area, we thought it important to highlight the recommendations from the Street Outreach Convening and the progress that has been made to begin moving forward these recommendations. If there are major cuts to support for these youth, we not only

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<sup>1</sup> Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Steering Committee Meeting, April 17, 2025, “Data Presentation from San Francisco Human Services Agency, Family and Children’s Services”.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, K. California Child Welfare Council, Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California, Child Welfare Council, referencing Francine T. Sherman & Lisa Goldblatt Grace, *The System Response to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls, in Juvenile Justice: Advancing Research, Policy, and Practice* 336 (Francine T. Sherman & Francine H. Jacobs eds., 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, Know the Facts: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, 13 Connections 2 (Summer 2011), available at <http://www.wcsap.org/sites/wcsap.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/uploads/documents/CommericalSexualExploitationofYouth2011.pdf>

move backwards, losing years of work and resources, but we also put the health, well-being, and very lives of these young people at risk.

## **Seven key recommendations emerged from the SOC:**

1. Create stable and responsive placement options that minimize disruption and offer low-barrier, youth-informed alternatives for young people who are MFP or experiencing exploitation, including providing creative opportunities for systems-involved youth to access short-term emergency shelter in San Francisco.
2. Center youth voice and experience in service design and delivery by expanding peer navigator programs and ensuring youth participation in key decision-making forums.
3. Increase access to mental health and substance use services, including non-traditional models such as drop-in wellness support.
4. Make services more accessible by reducing paperwork barriers, co-locating services, providing transportation and phones, and ensuring youth can access help without fear of arrest or forced return to systems.
5. Strengthen coordination among providers, including expanding multi-disciplinary teams to include street outreach partners and developing a citywide directory of services.
6. Support pathways to employment through career preparation, job placement programs, and wraparound support for disconnected youth.
7. Distribute practical, youth- and provider-facing materials that increase awareness of rights, available supports, and effective engagement strategies.

These recommendations reflect a deep understanding of the challenges disconnected youth face and the opportunities to build a more responsive, youth-centered ecosystem of care.

# Progress Implementing the Recommendations Since the Convening

San Francisco has developed innovative partnerships and programs to support disconnected youth. Although there is much more to be done, these collective efforts have steadily created a safer and more supportive environment—in which we should continue to invest—for disconnected youth. Some of the effective low-barrier models for disconnected youth are now at risk of significant cuts in funding, and perhaps even closure.

## 1. Responsive and Supportive Models for Disconnected Youth (Relates to Recommendations One - Six)

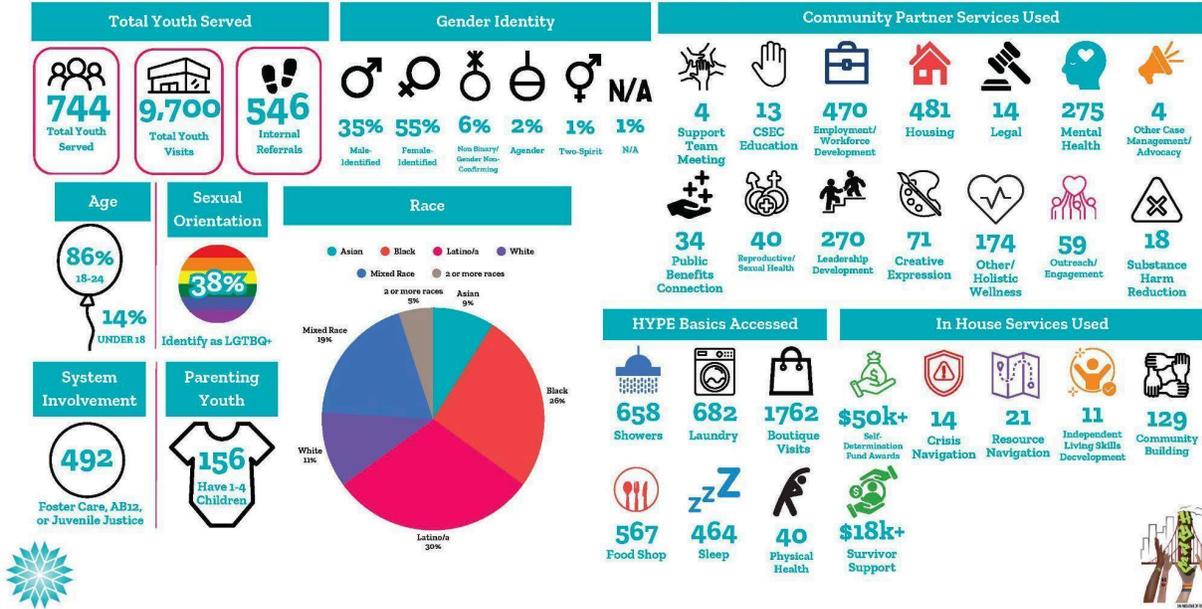
### a. HYPE (Helping Young People Elevate) Center

With support from the California Department of Social Services and the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women (DOSW), Freedom Forward designed a youth center, the HYPE Center, that truly centers the voices of young people, ensures the services and space are responsive to their needs, and addresses young people’s struggle with accessing and utilizing effectively the many services in San Francisco. In order to ensure the HYPE Center would meet youth needs, Freedom Forward gathered information from many young people about their experiences and what pushed them into homelessness and situations of exploitation. The key needs identified included housing, employment, education and legal support, mental health services, health and wellness services, financial literacy, and access to basic needs.

The HYPE Center is a low-barrier, safe, and non-judgemental space where services are co-located along with access to basic needs, including food, showers, laundry, clothing, hygiene supplies, a computer lab, and a self-determination fund. Currently, HYPE Center partners with 3rd Street Youth Clinic, Art of Yoga, WestCoast Children’s Clinic, Village is Possible, Larkin Street, RAMS, New Door, LYRIC, Sacred Root, Arms of Care, BAY Peace, Bay Area Legal Aid, Planned Parenthood, Umoja

Health, La Casa de Las Madres, Mental Health Association, and Safer Together. In the last year, HYPE Center recorded over 400 instances of youth sleeping at the Center.

## HYPE Center Service & Demographic Data 3/23-02/25



### b. Peer Mentors Supporting Placements

Through the California Department of Social Services CSEC Pilot Grant, DOSW supports Village is Possible, a lived-experience, community support organization that cultivates healing-centered spaces of BEing for families caught within systems of human trafficking, child welfare, and incarceration. Through their Sage Survivor Leader program, youth receive peer support from those with similar life experiences, and they are guided through their healing journey and future planning through Healing-Centered Engagement, an asset-driven approach aimed at the holistic restoration of well-being. The approach comes from the idea that people are not harmed in a vacuum, and healing and well-being

come from transforming the root causes of harm at each level – personal, interpersonal, and institutional.

Support from a Sage Survivor can look like:

- Developing wellness and safety plans
- Setting short-term and long-term goals
- Budgeting/Life Skills and preparing for the real world
- Creation of a Village Tree

In Summer 2025, Village is Possible will roll out Family-Centered Treatment, an evidence-based trauma treatment model of home-based family services focusing on family goals related to family functioning, preservation, permanency and reunification. The goal will be to collaborate with SF-dependent youth already connected to family.

Finally, Village is Possible hosts monthly wellness experiences for youth to exist in the community and build a village called Village Vibes. In the last year, they have served over a hundred youth through Village Vibes, allowing youth to do things for the first time, like host a Friendsgiving, attend a concert, explore their identities through reflection and music, encourage emotional healing, self-compassion, connection and intention-setting for the new year, participate in a wellness retreat and an intergenerational tea party.

## **2. Partnering with Street Outreach Organizations (Relates to Recommendation Five)**

Since the Convening, when appropriate, San Francisco Human Services Agency, Family and Children’s Services (FCS) has attempted to include relevant street outreach organizations in case consultations for MFP youth at-risk of or experiencing commercial sexual exploitation. One instance included sharing the youth's missing persons report with street outreach teams and collaborating with these providers to get the youth to the HYPE Center, where they were provided basic needs and offered additional services. The opportunities and processes for partnering regularly with street outreach teams continue to be reviewed and formalized.

### **3. SOC Convening Participants Collaboration on Policy (Relates to Recommendations Two and Five)**

After the SOC, several Convening Participants (CPs) formed a coalition regarding planned revisions to the San Francisco Police Department's (SFPD) General Order (DGO) 7.01, "Policies and Procedures for Youth Non-Psychological Detention, Arrest, and Custody." The group advocated for SFPD to align its policies with the already existing system-wide protocols for serving foster youth and youth that are at risk of exploitation. The recommendations were aimed at: (i) utilizing police interactions with system-involved youth to increase youth engagement in the systems responsible for their care through connections to trusted resources and (ii) enhancing collaboration among stakeholders so that officers in the field would get the support and information they need to ensure the safety of youth. Although most of the recommendations have not been accepted, the coalition is working on a strategy to elevate our concerns and input to the San Francisco Police Commission.

# Recommendation Deep Dives

The following sections detail the context of and collaborative process to create the recommendations as well as the background related to developing the SOC. The Convening and the recommendations that arose are grounded in the lived experiences of young people and the frontline providers who support them.

## **Recommendation One: Create Stable and Responsive Placement Options**

A consistent theme before and during the Convening was the need to address both frequent disruption of placements and the lack of low-barrier placements for disconnected systems-involved youth who are MFP or homeless.

Frequent changes in foster care placements are a key risk factor for CSE.<sup>4</sup> Recurring moves within the foster care system disrupt stability, create lack of trust in authority figures, and leave youth feeling unwanted. There is evidence that traffickers specifically target youth with such backgrounds and readily exploit these vulnerabilities.<sup>5</sup> Youth who leave homes, group placements, or treatment facilities are also targeted for exploitation.<sup>6</sup> The Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California report by the Child

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<sup>4</sup> Eraka Bath, Elizabeth Barnert, Sarah Godoy, Ivy Hammond, Sangeeta Mondals, David Farabee, Christine Grella, *Substance Use, Mental Health, and Child Welfare Profiles of Juvenile Justice-Involved Commercially Sexually Exploited Youth*, 30 JADPET 389, 389 - 397 (2020).

<sup>5</sup> Walker, K. California Child Welfare Council, Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California, Child Welfare Council, referencing Francine T. Sherman & Lisa Goldblatt Grace, *The System Response to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls, in Juvenile Justice: Advancing Research, Policy, and Practice* 336 (Francine T. Sherman & Francine H. Jacobs eds., 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Walker, K. California Child Welfare Council, Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California, Child Welfare Council, referencing Francine T. Sherman & Lisa Goldblatt Grace, *The System Response to the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Girls, in Juvenile Justice: Advancing Research, Policy, and Practice* 336 (Francine T. Sherman & Francine H. Jacobs eds., 2011).

Welfare Council highlights the impact of this instability. A young survivor of CSE shared:

**“[B]eing in foster care was the perfect training for commercial sexual exploitation. I was used to being moved without warning, without any say, not knowing where I was going or whether I was allowed to pack my clothes. After years in foster care, I didn’t think anyone would want to take care of me unless they were paid. So, when my pimp expected me to make money to support ‘the family’, it made sense to me.”<sup>7</sup>**

This statement underscores how the instability of the foster care system can normalize a lack of power and safety for youth, increasing their susceptibility to exploitation. Addressing the cycle of frequent placement disruptions is critical to reducing the risk of CSE to young people in care.

Moreover, many youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems feel disconnected from their multiple placements and leave, moving between MFP, re-entering placement, and needing emergency placement. As noted above, this instability creates serious risk of sexual exploitation. One significant gap reiterated at the Convening is the need for more low-barrier and emergency placement for youth in San Francisco experiencing and at risk of CSE. Essential aspects of additional low-barrier and emergency placement options are entities that are safe, incorporate youth feedback, support youth maintenance of their placement through such things as peer supports/navigation, incorporate de-escalation, and provide crisis and conflict resolution training for staff and caregivers as well as other healing modalities.

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<sup>7</sup> Ending the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Call for Multi-System Collaboration in California referencing an E-mail from Catherine Pratt, Comm’r, Los Angeles County Superior Court, to author (Jan. 11, 2013, 13:51 PST) (on file with Walker, K.).

One particular challenge with emergency placements that the CPs identified was that system-involved youth under 18 in the Bay Area cannot access the short-term emergency shelter system. This is due, in part, to statewide policy and legal constraints. CPs, nevertheless, suggested looking for ways to address the issue on a local level and recommended that a starting point would be to form a San Francisco working group with the Human Services Agency (HSA), Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), the Office of the Mayor, Community Care Licensing, and local youth shelter providers, such as Larkin Street Youth Services and Huckleberry Youth Programs.

## **Recommendation Two: Center Youth Voice and Experience**

A key recommendation from both the youth focus groups and the CPs is the inclusion of youth voice in service planning and delivery. Youth have critical knowledge about the realities of seeking support while out of placement or in crisis; this can help to improve the efficacy of services. The Convening highlighted that youth frequently experience a lack of trust, choice, agency, and autonomy when dealing with various systems. We can address this and improve services by including youth in shaping and participating in what support looks like in communities even as these youth are building capacity to identify their needs.

One important way to do this is greater utilization of young adult peer navigators. Humanity and connection are necessary elements within this work, and by placing those with lived experience in positions to support others, we can create a people-first culture which—despite gaps within systems of foster care and juvenile justice—centers understanding, trust, and empathy. The existence of a shared experience makes it easier for many youth to trust peer navigators. Moreover, peer navigators can leverage their experience with sexual exploitation and/or homelessness to meet youth where they are, increase outreach to youth who are not fully aware of the support available, and act as guides and models to show that through accessing available services, there can be a positive future for these disconnected youth. Peer navigator roles also have the benefit of creating paid employment for youth and particularly when supported by a living wage, can be a stepping stone to a variety of other career opportunities. As survivors of trafficking

and homeless youth highlight, access to pathways for financial independence is critical to helping them transition to a healthy and positive adulthood.

Other ways to incorporate youth voice include ensuring there are staff with lived experience in various roles in public and nonprofit organizations, helping to support these youth, develop joint projects, and conduct regular surveys and focus groups to gather youth input. CPs recommended leveraging youth feedback to identify common challenges that make placements unappealing or unsustainable and to implement changes based on their insights.

Finally, youth participants in the Convening reported that systems-involved/dependent youth are often not provided an opportunity to participate in Child and Family Team meetings (CFTs) in a meaningful way and that more weight should be given to their identified needs and priorities during CFTs. CFTs are an essential part of child welfare, and the primary goal of these meetings is to bring together the child, their family, and key professionals to collaborate on decisions and ensure that the voices of both the child and family are heard throughout the dependency process. Recommendations to address this are to train CFT facilitators to amplify and elevate the voices of youth, develop a process that ensures the people—who the youth identifies as important participants—are able attend CFTs, and engage peer navigators, who are trained to support youth, in the meetings.

### **Recommendation Three:**

### **Increase and Improve Mental Health Services**

There was a significant amount of discussion at the Convening about the challenges of finding a sufficient number of mental health providers for youth, specifically providers with the requisite expertise to provide services to youth who have been unhoused and may have been exploited. CPs also emphasized the need for expanded services to support youth struggling with substance abuse. Mental health providers are needed to truly meet these disconnected youth where they are, i.e., potentially transient, experiencing exploitation and challenges with substance use, and lacking trust in the systems that may have failed them for years.

Participants at the Convening also highlighted the need to provide alternatives to traditional talk therapy to find what may work best for youth who are transient. One example is drop-in wellness sessions which would support those youth who are unable to access scheduled mental health services.

Another recommendation was the need to develop policies, practices, and protocols that would ensure consistent access to service providers rather than predicating access on a youth's particular placement or location. Even when disconnected youth, especially those experiencing exploitation, might move between different placements and living situations, they often form bonds with particular community organizations or service providers that they trust. Youth at the Convening stressed the importance of being able to maintain these established connections regardless of whether there was a change in their living situation. CPs also noted that staff turnover within agencies and organizations contributes to service provider inconsistencies. Although staff turnover is a challenging broad-based issue that is not specific to disconnected, systems-involved youth, CPs did make the short-term suggestions of: (i) ensuring smaller caseloads for service providers to prevent burnout and (ii) avoiding placing youth with more complex needs with interns and new staff who are more likely to have a short tenure with organizations.

Finally, at the Convening, there was a recommendation that organizations and public agencies serving disconnected youth, make a commitment to the whole family, including supporting parents, partners, co-parents and siblings. This would not only help to better engage youth that are MFP, but would also broaden and increase the stability of a youth's support system by enhancing natural support systems.

## **Recommendation Four: Make Services More Accessible and Available to Youth**

In addition to mental health services, CPs emphasized the need to ensure youth experiencing homelessness and/or exploitation have greater access to and awareness of other resources and services available in their communities. While the participants agreed that the growth of peer navigator programs (see Recommendation Two) would be the most effective way to increase youths' access to services, they also made the below recommendations.

### **A. Streamline Paperwork**

One significant barrier for disconnected youth to access services is often a lack of a reliably safe place to store IDs and other important identity documents or paperwork required to receive support and services. Potential ways to address this are the development of a common form that contains information relevant to multiple service providers and could be shared with the youth's consent or the creation of digital lockers that would allow youth to maintain electronic copies of essential documents. Finally, simply utilizing digital applications that can be emailed to youth for access on handheld devices would help to ensure youth have consistent access to the documents they need to receive services in a timely manner.

### **B. Co-locate Services**

Access to services could also be increased through co-location of services where appropriate. This would be particularly helpful if providers were to locate in easy-to-find places where youth are already going for services. MFP youth, who are reluctant to engage in services, would be more likely to take advantage of services in a place where they already feel comfortable and trust the providers. CPs noted that the ideal would be a youth-centered place where youth could get their basic needs met, interact with peers and peer navigators, and access therapeutic and other mental health services.

### **C. Provide Transportation to Services**

CPs also suggested that providing disconnected youth with free transportation would improve access to needed services and reduce reliance on exploiters. Ideas for free transportation included special bus passes or free rides as well as free or reduced rate access to bikes, and/or scooters from rideshare companies.

### **D. Remove Fear of Arrest or Return to Placement**

CPs made clear that one of the biggest challenges to engaging youth in services is youths' fear that they might be detained, arrested, or pressured to engage with the dependency or delinquency systems when they sought services. CPs, thus, recommended that youth should have a safe place where they can rest and get essential services, such as medical and mental health services, without fear of immediate intervention by police or child welfare. In addition, it was recommended that no such interventions should occur at school so that youth who are MFP may attend school without fear. Although there was an acknowledgment that under the current law, a mandated report may need to be made, there was a hope that this could be done without any immediate intervention during the time the youth was receiving care or engaged in services.

Finally, CPs recommended that comprehensive harm reduction training for all service providers working with MFP youth, including law enforcement, would increase feelings of safety. CPs specifically suggested that law enforcement enhance engagement with MFP youth in ways that better support youth interaction with systems of care. For example, foster youth who are MFP should not be handcuffed or transported in a patrol car. Instead, service providers or natural supports could meet youth in the field and provide support through a harm reduction model.

## **E. Provide Access to Phones**

Specifically for youth being trafficked, CPs emphasized the importance of ensuring that they have access to a personal phone that is separate from any device provided by those exploiting them. To achieve this, CPs suggested that programs provide phones and/or that phone providers visit service sites specifically for youth.

## **F. Ensure Pet-Friendly Placements and Service Spaces**

CPs highlighted the important role pets play for youth who are experiencing the trauma of living on the street and thus, would like to see placements and service spaces that allow pets.

In San Francisco, many youth who have experienced CSE adopt pets while living on the streets. These animals provide the only stable and healthy relationships in their lives, offering unconditional love, emotional support, and

even safety.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the limited availability of pet-friendly foster placements in San Francisco poses a significant barrier for these young people. Many youth are unwilling to leave the streets if it means abandoning their beloved pets, which prolongs their homelessness and increases their risk of continued sexual exploitation. To address this issue, CPs recommend expanding the availability of foster placements that allow young people to keep their pets. Recognizing the critical role pets play in the lives of homeless youth, CPs advocated for service spaces that accommodate pets, ensuring that young people do not have to choose between safety and their animal companions. Providing pet-friendly foster placements and service spaces would remove a major obstacle to stability for CSE victims.

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<sup>8</sup> Although there is limited research on the effectiveness of animal assisted therapy (AAT) for CSE victims, studies have demonstrated AAT's efficacy in treating trauma, abuse, and neglect. Hamama et al. (2011) studied AAT's incorporation into counseling for teenage girls who had experienced physical or sexual abuse and found a decline in PTSD symptoms as well as a reduction in the risk to develop PTSD among the participants who used AAT. Therapy animals offer unique benefits that human therapists and support workers cannot always provide. Physiological benefits include lowered heart rate, reduced blood pressure, and the release of oxytocin, the bonding neurochemical, when interacting with animals. Additionally, animals offer unconditional love, loyalty, and a judgment-free relationship. As noted in Parish-Plass, 2008, p. 13, animals "do not prejudice and are not critical, or concerned with . . . failures, outer appearance, social or economic status and so on[.]" This unconditional acceptance from animals can serve as a secure attachment relationship for victims, fostering a sense of safety and stability. For victims of CSE, AAT can play a crucial role in building trust, increasing feelings of security, and encouraging engagement in therapy. Complex PTSD can be difficult to treat, particularly in individuals who are distrustful of new people, such as therapists or other support people. However, the predictability and stability of a relationship with a pet can offer a sense of safety. Victims who have experienced trauma bonding with exploiters, may especially benefit from AAT, as it provides an opportunity to form a healthy bond with an animal that offers consistent, unconditional love and affection. While AAT may not be appropriate for all CSE survivors, for many, it could be a valuable part of the healing process. See Chandler, C. K. (2012). *Animal assisted therapy in counseling* (2nd ed.). Routledge; and Zilcha-Mano, S., Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2011). Pet in the therapy room: An attachment perspective on animal-assisted therapy. *Attachment & Human Development*, 13(6), 541–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2011.608987>, Hamama, L., Hamama-Raz, Y., Dagan, K., Greenfeld, H., Rubinstein, C., & Ben-Ezra, M. (2011). A preliminary study on group intervention along with basic canine training among traumatized teenagers: A 3-month longitudinal study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(10), 1975–1980. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.05.021>, and Parish-Plass, N. (2008). Animal-assisted therapy with children suffering from insecure attachment due to abuse and neglect: A method to lower the risk of intergenerational transmission of abuse? *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 13(1), 7–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104507086338> and Dietz, T. J., Davis, D., & Pennings, J. (2012). Evaluating animal-assisted therapy in group treatment of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 21(6), 665–683. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2012.726700>.

## **G. Provide Better Incentives.**

The participants at the Convening also identified that providing financial incentives, such as Venmo payments and gift cards, to disconnected youth are important for engagement in services.

Youth in the foster care and/or juvenile justice systems are accustomed to being disappointed by the adults in their lives. Before entering the system, many have already experienced neglect or abuse by their parents– the very people meant to protect and guide them. Once in foster care or the juvenile justice system, this pattern of instability often continues with frequent changes in placement, caregivers, social workers, schools, and other supports. Constant disruptions make it difficult for young people to build trust, leading many to disengage from the services that are designed to support them.

To help bridge this gap, CPs highlighted the need for meaningful financial incentives in exchange for youth accomplishments, such as checking in with their social worker, engaging with services, and enrolling and attending school /programs. The incentives would serve as a catalyst for youth engagement with supports and services and would also help to rebuild trust as promised incentives would be received after the youth fulfills their agreed-on goal.

## **Recommendation Five: Strengthen Collaboration Among Providers**

A primary goal of the Convening was to increase collaboration to help ensure San Francisco's ecosystem of support is better coordinated and operating as effectively as possible. Although San Francisco is extremely fortunate to have multiple government and nonprofit providers working to support disconnected youth, it can be challenging to navigate and understand the multiple resources available.

### **A. Create a City-Wide Directory of Services and Supports**

One strategy to increase awareness of available services and resources is to create a directory of the public and nonprofit providers and their services. Once this is completed, the directory would need to be updated periodically. This resource would allow members of the support system for disconnected youth to more nimbly connect youth with the appropriate resources and supports and would also help identify service duplication and existing gaps in services.

### **B. Develop City-Wide Working Groups that Include Street Outreach Organizations**

CPs recommended establishing working groups of public and nonprofit providers to improve coordination and collaboration and allow for innovative approaches to supporting disconnected youth. No one service provider can alone address the complex challenges that disconnected youth face; creating ways for service providers to work together will enhance the quality of support and its impact in the community. City-wide workgroups could also help identify duplicative services that can lead to over-capacity in some areas and under-capacity in others.

At the Convening, CPs discussed the fact that there are already ongoing meetings that include multiple providers working with disconnected youth. It would make sense to build on these existing structures and find ways to expand the participants, including street outreach teams and other providers that may be nontraditional partners.

For example, as part of San Francisco's Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Program, the CSEC MDT has a monthly CSEC Working Group that helps to identify systems issues with the CSEC Program, determine ways to better address the needs of CSE youth or those at risk of exploitation in a coordinated manner, and develop strategies for improving the CSEC Program. There is also a CSEC Steering Committee—comprised of partners to the city-wide CSEC MOU and some non-MOU members—that provides ongoing oversight and support to ensure that San Francisco agencies and nonprofit partners effectively collaborate to better identify and serve children who are victims of CSE or at risk of becoming exploited. The Steering Committee is responsible for: (i) overseeing and implementing the city-wide CSEC MOU, (ii) collecting and analyzing aggregate data for the CSEC Program, (iii) assessing the sufficiency of San Francisco resources to support youth experiencing or at-risk of exploitation, (iv) identifying and responding to systems-issues related to the CSEC Program, and (v) helping to ensure collaboration of the MOU partners.

### **C. Include Street Outreach Organizations in Multidisciplinary Team Case Consultations**

CPs emphasized the need to include street outreach organizations in multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings when there are discussions of youth who are MFP. Street outreach teams may be the only providers interacting with MFP youth and are often trusted by the communities they serve. There are currently two established meeting structures to collaborate on support for individual youth who are being exploited or are at risk of exploitation. The first is Human Services Agency, Family and Children's Services (FCS) case consultations for youth involved in the child welfare system. FCS conducts case consultations for all dependent youth when there are concerns regarding the risk of sexual exploitation or current exploitation (based on screening results from the CSE-IT tool). FCS case consultations may occur during various points while the youth is a dependent. FCS invites appropriate partners from the CSEC MDT, and at times, may invite other providers connected to the youth, to help ensure enhanced services and support for these youth through a multidisciplinary response. The second established meeting structure, for non-dependent youth, is the CSEC MDT (M.O.V.E.), which is available monthly

for de-identified case reviews Any CSEC MDT partner may request a case review and may ask to invite providers, such as mentors, that are not part of the CSEC MDT but are connected to the youth. There was a collective agreement at the Convening that some of these existing meeting structures should broaden to include street outreach organizations and other community-based organizations that regularly work with disconnected, unhoused youth as they may have contact with the youth when their child welfare social workers and other system-involved providers do not.

## **Recommendation Six: Support Access to Employment Opportunities**

For youth experiencing exploitation and/or homelessness, there is a substantial need for greater access to employment opportunities, particularly those that provide a living wage. Once they are unhoused, youth face significant obstacles in finding and keeping employment. This traps youth in poverty and increases the pressure to rely on illicit means to secure their basic needs.

In order for these youth to gain access to long-term living wage jobs and careers, there needs to be greater investment in programs and resources to prepare youth for employment. This could include assistance with necessary educational attainments, such as a high school diploma, GED, associate or bachelor degree, certificate, or completion of a vocational program. It is also important to invest in various workforce development opportunities. Moreover, since disconnected youth may not have had many opportunities to work in professional settings, they might also need support with soft skills and general guidance on behavior in a work environment that can be necessary to obtain and maintain employment.

## **Recommendation Seven: Distribute Key Information**

Service providers, parents, and guardians often experience hurdles when working to support young people who are experiencing or have experienced CSE and/or homelessness. Although there is a continued need for more in-depth training and education around this, one relatively simple action would be to develop some concise information pamphlets or one-page handouts that include information on such things as school enrollment rights and best practices when engaging with these disconnected youth. Best practice guides should prioritize: (i) treating youth with dignity and respect, (ii) providing transparency around decisions and implications, and (iii) honoring youths' needs and goals. By equipping service providers and guardians with the essential information, they will be better prepared to address and respond to the needs of these young people. Another recommendation was developing a more robust Know Your Rights training for youth.

## **Additional Recommendations: Systems-Level Needs**

The focus of the Convening, and therefore this report, is local, concrete strategies to increase collaboration and coordination. However, CPs also discussed several broad systems-level needs that are essential to ensure long-term and transformative support for our most vulnerable young people. We wanted to include the main systems level themes that surfaced during the day for future discussion and work:

- A. Bolster the community's efforts to prevent youth from entering foster care or the delinquency system, with a specific focus on addressing the material conditions and systems that result in breakdowns in families and cause instability for young people; these include addressing poverty in the community, increasing access to affordable housing, offering supportive services to families in crisis, supporting biological families, and prioritizing access to mental healthcare and support for substance use disorders (SUDs);
- B. Improve foster care recruitment and retention;

- C. Ensure providers have the appropriate training and support so that they can be open and transparent with youth and that they are provided living wages to reduce provider turnover which damages continuity and relationships with youth; and
- D. Advocate for changes in laws, regulations, and policies that prohibit foster youth from accessing the emergency shelter system.

## **Advancing the Recommendations:**

The Convening Participants identified several ways to continue moving forward the recommendations. These include the following:

1. Advocate for sufficient resources to maintain San Francisco's current low-barrier services for disconnected youth in the face of severe local budget cuts and loss of federal and state funding for youth that are CSE. (Advances Recommendations One and Two)
2. Create a working group on how to increase capacity for low-barrier and emergency housing for disconnected youth. Key members of the working group would be Larkin Youth Services, Huckleberry Youth Programs, the Human Services Agency, the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, the Office of the Mayor, and state licensing representatives. (Advances Recommendations One and Two)
3. Elevate broad system-level themes through partnerships with policy makers and legal advocacy organizations. In the short-term, identified issues should continue to be brought to the attention of the CSEC Steering Committee and if the group reconvenes, to the Mayor's Task Force on Human Trafficking. (Advances all recommendations)

Form a dedicated work group—or leverage existing ones such as the DCYF Citywide Frontline Collaborative—to evaluate access to services and service delivery for system-involved youth who are MFP. This group should identify service gaps and instances of duplication and provide recommendations, such as those outlined in this report, for improvement to better support these

youth and their unique needs. (Advances Recommendations Three, Four, Five, and Six)

4. Help create peer navigation programs through discussion with potential community-based partners. (Advances Recommendations Two and Four)
5. Explore the possibility of co-located services, non-traditional mental health services and substance abuse services for youth in a designated workgroup. (Advances Recommendations Two, Three, and Four)
6. Create an information-sharing workgroup to increase understanding of what information can be shared to allow for better collaboration and reduction of paperwork. (Advances Recommendation Five)
7. Gather existing educational materials on working with young people experiencing sexual exploitation and/or homelessness; assess and update the materials that continue to be relevant; and create new materials to fill gaps for service providers, parents, and guardians. (Advances Recommendation Seven)
8. Broaden the current multi-disciplinary case consultations to include organizations that respond directly to young people out on the street and provide outreach to systems-involved youth who are MFP. (Advances Recommendation Five)
9. Collaborate with Bay Area police departments to utilize current protocols, such as Be on the Lookout protocol (BOLO), to re-engage youth in systems of care. Advocate for new law enforcement policies that help with youth engagement and increase collaboration between law enforcement and youth-serving organizations. (Advances Recommendations Four and Five)

# Convening Background: Process for Determining Recommendations

Legal Services for Children (LSC),<sup>9</sup> Safe & Sound,<sup>10</sup> San Francisco Court Appointed Special Advocates (SFCASA),<sup>11</sup> and the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women (DOSW)<sup>12</sup> led the development of the Street Outreach Convening. The Convening sought to:

1. **Increase collaboration** between trusted street outreach organizations, traditional youth-serving CBOs, and the public systems that are responsible for providing care for youth involved with the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems;
2. **Align on pathways** that will better support disconnected, systems-involved youth, including those experiencing sexual exploitation, in re-engaging in services and systems of care; and
3. **Outline policies or practices** that promote increased contact among street outreach/crisis services, other youth-serving organizations, and public systems when systems-involved youth are MFP, homeless, and/or disconnected from long-term services.

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<sup>9</sup> Legal Services for Children represents youth in the child welfare system in San Francisco. <https://lsc-sf.org/>

<sup>10</sup> Safe & Sound, a community-based organization, partners with families and communities to prevent and reduce child abuse, neglect, and trauma by strengthening families, building communities, and nurturing childhoods. <https://www.safeandsound.org>

<sup>11</sup> San Francisco Court Appointed Special Advocates (SFCASA) serves children and non minor dependents in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems in San Francisco. <https://www.sfcasa.org/>

<sup>12</sup> The San Francisco Commission and Department on the Status of Women promotes equitable treatment and fosters the advancement of women and girls throughout San Francisco through policies, legislation, and programs. <https://dosw.org/>

To inform the Convening, the planning group conducted two focus groups and multiple one-on-one interviews with over 10 people (ages 18 to 26) who had experienced systems-involvement and/or homelessness as minors in San Francisco. The Convening planning team worked alongside the organization With Lived Experience<sup>13</sup> to conduct the interviews and capture the responses. The planning team sought to center the youth we wish to serve to co-develop the change we are envisioning as a community.

Additionally, to obtain input on the Convening from public agencies, LSC and DOSW met with San Francisco's Human Services Agency - Family & Children's Services (FCS) (child welfare), Juvenile Probation Department (JPD), District Attorney's Office -Victim Services Division, Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH), Department of Public Health - Children, Youth & Families System of Care, Department of Emergency Management (DEM), and Office of the Mayor as well as Alameda's Juvenile Probation Department. The meetings focused on enhancing communication, collaboration, and coordination with existing multidisciplinary and street outreach teams, including those from HSH and DEM. Additionally, discussions were held with FCS and JPD about harm reduction and the ability to think outside the box regarding youth who are MFP.

The Convening planning group developed the agenda with input from attendees, including those with lived experience, CBO partners, government agencies, and street outreach teams. The convening kicked off with two panels, one with providers who had lived experience and child welfare experts and the other with former foster youth. Both panels: (i) anchored attendees in the reality that disconnected systems-involved youth are facing, (ii) discussed harm reduction approaches, and (iii) flagged potential risks when we coordinate support. There was an additional panel with legal experts that outlined when and how providers can share information and what information they can share to collaborate on behalf of youth. This included an active discussion on how to protect youth privacy while ensuring teams are collaborating to meet the youth's needs.

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<sup>13</sup> With Lived Experience, founded in 2021, is aimed at helping those with marginalized lived experiences connect with each other and change the systems that impact them. <https://www.withlivedexperience.org/>

The rest of the day attendees (see attachment A for a list of Convening registrants) participated in workshops. In order to ensure recommendations were based on broad and diverse perspectives, the planning group for the Convening assigned participants to pre-arranged groups which included individuals with different roles within the continuum of care for system-involved youth, as well as individuals with lived experience. The groups identified the unique needs of systems-involved youth that are not being met adequately in the Bay Area, honed in on the challenges that prevent youth from getting these needs met, brainstormed potential solutions and possible unintended consequences of those solutions, and discussed next steps. To make their recommendations, the groups utilized a case example based on information from the Convening's youth panel and the participants' lived experience or experience working with Bay Area systems-involved youth who are MFP. After each session, individual groups reported back and ranked the gaps in services for disconnected, systems-involved youth. At the end of three break-out sessions, the full group came back together to workshop and prioritize solutions to the identified needs and challenges. The recommendations reported above arise from this full group discussion as well as the pre-convening meetings with stakeholders.

# Conclusion

The Street Outreach Convening provided an opportunity for youth with lived experience and service providers from public agencies and community-based organizations to discuss tangible improvements that could be made to support systems-involved youth now currently disconnected from the child welfare and juvenile justice systems—particularly those who are unhoused and/or experiencing sexual exploitation.

Within the current environment when services are strained and under threat of drastic cuts, the work of the SOC shows a way forward for serving young people living in incredibly difficult circumstances. It also shows the real, incalculable pain and suffering that could be caused by cutting support.

## Attachment A: Street Outreach Convening Registrants

3Strands Global Foundation	MISSEY, Inc.	San Francisco Public Defender's Office
Alameda County Children and Family Services	National Center for Youth Law	San Francisco Safety, Opportunity, and Lifelong Relationships
Alameda County Juvenile Probation	Safe & Sound	San Francisco Unified School District
California Department of Social Services, CSEC Program	San Francisco CASA	Seneca Family of Agencies
Child and Family Policy Institute of California	San Francisco Community Clinic Consortium	SHADE Movement
Covered California	San Francisco Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families	Superior Court of California
Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing	San Francisco Department of Emergency Management	University of California Law, San Francisco
East Bay Children's Law Offices	San Francisco Department on the Status of Women	University of California, Berkeley
First Place for Youth	San Francisco Department of Public Health	University of California, San Francisco Division of Trauma Recovery Services
Freedom Forward	San Francisco District Attorney's Office -Victim Services	Village Is Possible
Huckleberry Youth Programs	San Francisco Human Services Agency, Family and Children's Services	VOICES Youth Center
Larkin Street Youth Services	San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department	WestCoast Children's Clinic
Legal Services for Children		With Lived Experience
LYRIC Center for LGBTQQ+ Youth		Youth Law Center

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