

An Evaluation of San Francisco's Young Adult Court (YAC)

Findings on Planning and Early Implementation

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I. Introduction

San Francisco’s **Young Adult Court (YAC)** is a groundbreaking model for rethinking how the developmental characteristics of transitional age youth (TAY) should inform the criminal justice system’s response to this population. As described in *The New York Times*, San Francisco’s YAC is “tailored to the biology and circumstances” of young adults age 18-25. Eligible young adults may participate in the YAC program instead of the regular criminal court process, with the aim of supporting positive life outcomes and avoiding recidivism.

The YAC is part of a larger movement to recognize young adults as a distinct group in the justice system. The unique nature of San Francisco’s model is due not only to its deep roots in neuroscience—which indicates that critical portions of the brain regulating risk-taking and impulsive behavior are still developing substantially until the mid-twenties—but also in its acceptance and prioritization of participants who have committed serious felony offenses. In this way, San Francisco is demonstrating a commitment to altering the composition of San Francisco’s in-custody population where TAY are overrepresented, as well as the life trajectory of young adults with serious crimes and barriers.

San Francisco’s YAC draws on the city’s particularly rich experience developing and implementing alternative “problem-solving” courts, its identification of transitional age youth as a citywide priority group, and its track record of tailoring services to this specific population, including among criminal justice agencies.

As of early spring 2017, the YAC has been operational for just over 1.5 years and enjoyed national media attention from *The Economist*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times*. This evaluation report on the YAC’s planning process, program components, and early implementation yields important insights that can inform the future of San Francisco’s promising model, as well as the efforts of other interested local areas.

Disconnected youth in San Francisco ages 16-24—also called transitional age youth (TAY)—are one of the most vulnerable populations in the City. Roughly 8,000 TAY are at risk of not transitioning successfully into adulthood, or reaching adulthood at all.¹ They face significant challenges, such as chronic unemployment, homelessness, involvement with the justice system, and lack basic academic and work readiness skills to prepare for the world of work.

Further, the TAY age group is disproportionately represented in San Francisco’s local adult criminal justice system and nationally. Recent estimates² show that approximately 25% of San Francisco adult arrests were young men and women age 18 to 24, and that young adults under age 25 comprised 20% of the jail population, 25% of criminal court cases, and 21% of adult probation’s

¹ https://www.sfgov.org/youthcommission/sites/default/files/FileCenter/Documents/48565-D%20-%20TAYSF_PolicyPrioritiesdoc.pdf. Downloaded on 2/17/26.

² This data is from January 2012 to March 2014; San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) proposal to California Board of State and Community Corrections (CBSCC).

active caseload. **Young adults in the justice system are also overwhelmingly and disproportionately minorities.** Approximately 60% of adult probation’s young adult caseload is African American, while African Americans comprise only 6% of San Francisco’s population. The recidivism rate for individuals (adults and young adults) returning from prison is 76%.³

It is in this context that the City of San Francisco established the Young Adult Court (YAC) model, an alternative court program designed for TAY ages 18-25. Reflecting brain development research and needs specific to young adults, and recognizing the importance of providing these young adults an opportunity to change their life trajectory and exit the cycle of recidivism, California’s Board of State and Community Corrections (CBSCC) awarded San Francisco’s Department of Children, Youth and their Families (DCYF) a three-year Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) to implement two programs designed to reduce recidivism of young adults and decrease the school-to-prison pipeline. These programs— Juvenile Alternatives to Suspension (JASP) and Young Adult Court (YAC)—aim to address the needs of San Francisco’s vulnerable young adults by providing participants with access to wraparound services, job referrals, case management services and other supports.

In the spring of 2015, DCYF contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to conduct a three-year evaluation of the programs funded by the JAG grant. The goal of the evaluation is to document the planning and implementation of the program models, how they evolve over time, and outcomes at the participant- and system-levels. Due to delays to implementing the JASP program, the evaluation is focusing on the planning, implementation, and outcomes of the YAC program.

This YAC report—which weaves together information from multiple data sources to provide a snapshot of the planning and early implementation phases—sets the stage for the final YAC outcomes report due in December 2017.

The Young Adult Court Program (YAC)

San Francisco’s Young Adult Court is a collaborative, “problem-solving” court for young adults ages 18-25 arrested in San Francisco, “who have legal and social service needs, and are given the opportunity to participate in YAC instead of the regular criminal court process.”⁴ The YAC program in San Francisco represents a significant effort to support positive outcomes and reduce recidivism for approximately 80 disconnected transitional age youth (TAY) per year.

The YAC program also represents a significant leap forward compared to other young adult court models. The YAC’s unique nature is based not only on its grounding in research on young adults’

³ San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) proposal to California Board of State and Community Corrections (CBSCC). Note that this rate applies to the county at large, not only young adults.

⁴ Zeira, Y. and M. Baldwin, 2016.

brain development, but also in its acceptance and indeed its prioritization of young adults who have committed serious felony offenses. A 2016 scan of national and international innovative young adult justice initiatives highlighted San Francisco’s Young Adult Court as the only court model that accepts a range of risk levels, including violent and non-violent misdemeanors and felonies.⁵ By comparison, at least four of the other five young adult courts in the United States only accept misdemeanors and/or low-level, first time felonies.⁶ The prioritization of young adults with felony offenses, as codified in the YAC’s formal eligibility criteria, demonstrates not only “a leap of faith,” but also a commitment to “moving the needle” on the nature of San Francisco’s in-custody population where TAY are overrepresented.

Key Partners

The JAG grant to San Francisco County—totaling \$1,045,625 for three years—provides funding to six City partner agencies to expand their capacity and coordination efforts to connect YAC participants to critical resources in the areas of mental services, housing, and employment. The partners are expected to work together in ways that would significantly expand the level of services provided to participants and enhance coordination of these services in San Francisco. Partners hired or designated staff to deliver services under the grant, dedicating between .20 FTE to .85 FTE to support this effort.

Key YAC team members and partners include the YAC Judge and Superior Court, San Francisco District Attorney’s Office, San Francisco Public Defender’s Office, Adult Probation Department, Community Assessment and Services Center (CASC), Felton Institute/Family Service Agency (FSA), Goodwill Industries, treatment providers, San Francisco Department of Children, Youth, and their Families (DCYF), and the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department. These partners and their roles are displayed in the YAC Organizational Chart (see Appendix A), though some modifications have been made.

In the course of preliminary research on other YAC models in the U.S., SPR was able to interview two other YAC programs: Douglas County Young Adult Court and Kalamazoo County Young Adult Diversion Court.* Capsule summaries of these two YAC programs can be found in Appendix E. The YAC program in San Francisco is similar to these two models in terms of: the goals of reducing sentencing/improving justice outcomes, the use of service phases, and a system of sanctions and incentives, a focus on intensive case management support, and the frequency of monitoring participant progress. However, both the Douglas and Kalamazoo County programs differ from San Francisco in that young adults must be on probation in order to be eligible. By contrast, San Francisco has deliberately designed a program where young adults can participate without having to be sentenced to probation, even for relatively serious offenses.

* SPR reached out to five Young Adult Court programs in the U.S. to conduct phone interviews, and these were the only programs that responded to our request.

⁵ Zeira, Y. and M. Baldwin, 2016.

⁶ Based on available information on the six young adult courts identified in the National Institute of Justice *Environmental Scan of Developmentally Appropriate Criminal Justice Responses to Justice-Involved Young Adults* (2016). Beyond SPR’s interviews with the Douglas and Kalamazoo County programs, information on the other three non-San Francisco courts included in the scan is based on publicly available documents.

Summary of YAC Model

Below is a summary of the YAC model, including eligibility guidelines, phases of participation, and expected outcomes.⁷

Young Adult Court (YAC) Eligibility

- Young adults age 18-25 years.
- No residence restriction, but priority given to young adults with “connections to San Francisco, including family and other supports.”
- Felony cases have priority over misdemeanor cases:
 - Certain felony charges are eligible on a pre-plea basis, while other felony charges are eligible on a deferred entry of judgment (DEJ) or probation (post-plea) basis.
 - All misdemeanors are eligible on a pre-plea basis with certain exceptions, including drunk driving, gang allegations, and hate crimes.
- If a certain disqualifying condition exists—including but not limited to current offenses involving the use of a firearm and individuals with a prior strike offense—the District Attorney may agree to waive the limitation on a case-by-case basis.

Young adults may be referred to YAC by the Public Defender’s Office, District Attorney, or the Adult Probation Department. The District Attorney’s Office reviews all cases referred to YAC. Potential participants undergo an assessment process conducted by FSA over multiple sessions. The process consists of an initial conversation to put the young adult at ease and address any concerns (e.g., about confidentiality), and then the administration of nationally-recognized assessment tools, including but not limited to the Primary Care Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PC-PTSD) Screen, the PCL-C (a standardized self-reported rating scale for PTSD), the Beck Depression Inventory, and the TCU Drug Screen V.

After assessment, FSA staff makes a recommendation on whether the young adult is suitable for YAC and the attorneys determine whether there is an agreeable legal resolution. **Once young adults are accepted into YAC, they receive services organized into four distinct phases:**

- Phase 1: Engagement and Assessment
- Phase 2: Stability and Accountability
- Phase 3: Wellness and Community Connection

⁷ For the full eligibility guidelines, phases of participation (YAC Participant Handbook), and expected outcomes (logic model), please see Appendices B, C, and D respectively.

- Phase 4: Program Transition (and graduation day)

Each phase comprises various activities and milestones. As participants reach their milestones, they progress to the next phase. How long participants remain in a phase depends on how well they progress toward goals in their Wellness Care Plan, described below. Participants complete the program when they graduate and exit from Phase 4. On average, the timeframe for completing the four phases of service provision is between 10 to 18 months.

Key services and components of YAC include the following:

- **Orientation.** After young adults are accepted into the YAC, FSA provides an orientation to the program by introducing the YAC Participant Handbook—which participants are asked to sign—and showing an orientation video.⁸ The video introduces participants to the YAC’s collaborative environment and to the different agency partners at the table. This has helped ease YAC participants’ early reservations and promote buy-in, and allowed them to see criminal justice partners in a new light. Orientation can occur in a small group format, but it typically happens on a one-on-one basis between the case manager and YAC participant, sometimes in the jail setting.
- **Wellness Care Plan.** Upon enrolling in the YAC program, the case managers develop a Wellness Care Plan jointly with the participants. This plan details the goals for each YAC participant based on individually-identified goals by the participant and their YAC case manager. The plan may include some or all of the following components: (1) case management and therapeutic services;⁹ (2) dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) and Life Skills;¹⁰ (3) meeting with probation officer, if applicable; (4) substance abuse counseling, as applicable; and (5) housing, education, employment and family/parenting support.¹¹ The plan is to be reviewed, monitored, and updated on an ongoing basis.
- **Case management services.** Participants receive intensive case management support from FSA or the CASC. Clients not on probation receive case management support from FSA while clients on probation receive this support from a TAY case manager at the CASC.¹² Case

⁸ FSA and the Superior Court initiated and shepherded the idea of a video after several months of YAC implementation. The video was produced pro bono by San Francisco Academy of Arts.

⁹ Case management in and of itself is considered therapy as FSA staff are caring adults trained in motivational interviewing.

¹⁰ All YAC participants receive DBT and Life Skills instruction (which covers 25 different topics) but depending on the readiness of each young adult, DBT and Life Skills may be delivered individually before moving to a group setting. The frequency of therapeutic contact depends on the individual’s situation and assessment results, generally ranging from 1-3 times per week. A site visit to Roca—an evidence-based intervention model in Massachusetts designed to serve high-risk young people—has informed ongoing efforts to determine how to use cognitive behavioral therapy and interweave it more in the YAC program.

¹¹ Meeting with a mentor is another planned component of the Wellness Care Plan. However, the addition of this component was purposefully delayed until the YAC model was further along and achieved greater consistency in implementation.

¹² These case managers at the CASC are employees of LCA.

managers provide referrals for housing, substance abuse treatment, and other supportive services. Primary workforce development support is provided by Goodwill Industries. In the case of FSA, case managers are also licensed therapists (clinical case managers). Probation case managers can refer their clients to FSA for therapeutic services, as appropriate. Case managers meet with participants on a regular basis, ranging in frequency from weekly, to bi-weekly, to monthly, depending on each participant's phase and level of engagement.

- **Drug testing.** Participants are required to take a baseline drug test during Phase 1 of the program. Additional, random drug testing can be administered while participants are in YAC if substance abuse is suspected.
- **Case conferencing and court appearances.** Participants are expected to make court appearances before the YAC Judge on a regular basis, the frequency of which is determined by progress realized toward their goals in the Wellness Care Plan. For the first several months, participants typically come to court every week. As participants show progress in meeting goals, court appearances are required less frequently. Prior to each court hearing, YAC team members hold case conferencing sessions to discuss individual YAC participants' status along various dimensions—including rated motivation level and stage of change—to develop a unified message and next steps for each participant, and to determine the order in which cases will be called.
- **Rewards and responses.** The YAC Participant Handbook outlines the specific behaviors that can trigger either a reward or a response. At the discretion of the YAC team, special rewards such as gift cards may be given during court appearances for behaviors such as arriving on time for court hearings and engaging in the Wellness Care Plan. Other, non-monetary rewards include public acknowledgement/"shout-outs" by the Judge and other YAC team members for good behavior, as well as a reduction in required court appearances. Responses or consequences are for behaviors such as continued substance abuse, missed appointments with probation, and failure to appear in court. The consequences for these responses range from increased mandated court appearances to termination from YAC.

Evaluation of YAC

The evaluation is designed to assess how well the YAC program achieves its goals of reducing recidivism among YAC participants while connecting them to a critical network of resources and supports to realize positive life outcomes. This evaluation also seeks to understand the lessons that YAC partners learned from planning and implementing the program, and the sustainable system-level effects of these efforts. To accomplish these goals, the evaluation consists of an implementation study and an outcomes study that will address the expected outcomes at the

participant- and system-level listed below.¹³ This report focuses on the early implementation of the YAC program. The Final Report, to be submitted at the end of 2017, will cover YAC outcomes.

Participant-Level Outcomes	Broader Program Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in recidivism • Employment acquisition and retention • Reduced substance abuse • Development of “life skills” • Increased awareness and utilization of community resources • Wellness outcomes • Legal outcomes • Housing status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved coordination between YAC partners via assessments, service planning, and treatment • Adult probation and court access to accurate risk assessment tools • Use of collaborative case conferences

Key research questions that guide the implementation study specifically are as follows:

YAC Implementation Study Research Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What contextual factors are important for understanding the planning, design, implementation, and outcomes of the YAC program? • What was the process of designing and planning YAC? What were the successes and challenges of different partner agencies coming together? • What is the nature of the YAC service design and decisions behind its specific components? • How are the key characteristics and experiences of YAC participants so far informing YAC implementation? • What is the level and nature of ongoing YAC partner coordination and communication? • What have been the main successes, challenges, and surprises of program planning and implementation? How have they informed further development of YAC? • Given implementation thus far, what outcomes at the participant and system level can be reasonably expected to result from YAC?

¹³ These were identified and agreed to by YAC partners as part of a logic model process in fall 2015. YAC partners also identified long-term outcomes: permanent reduction in recidivism/criminal justice involvement; lasting connections to the educational system and/or the labor market; and sustained focus on addressing structural barriers to success among young adults of color. Please see Appendix D for the YAC logic model.

The implementation study examines the YAC partnership model employed in planning and delivering services, the participants served so far, the service delivery components and strategies used, and the successes and challenges encountered in implementing the program. The implementation study’s most immediate purpose will be to inform continuous improvement of YAC, and provide valuable, explanatory context for the evaluation’s final outcomes report. Another purpose will be to share implementation lessons with a broader audience that is interested in successful practices for establishing a young adult court.

Data Sources and Methods

To address the implementation study evaluation questions, this report relies on a number of data sources:

Exhibit I-1: Data Sources

Data Sources	Description
In-person and telephone interviews	<p>SPR conducted interviews with 17 individuals involved with the YAC program. Interviews focused on YAC planning and implementation, service delivery mechanisms, partner coordination and communication, and successes and challenges in running the YAC program. We conducted four in-person interviews and 13 telephone interviews in late summer 2016. The decision to interview respondents in-person or by phone was influenced by the availability of respondents. Interviewees included a mix of the following groups of respondents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Criminal justice system stakeholders</i> (8), including the Public Defender and the District Attorney’s office, as well as staff from Adult Probation, the Sheriff’s Department, and the Police Department. • <i>Superior court staff</i> (2), including the YAC Judge and court staff. • <i>Case managers</i> (5), from LCA and FSA. • <i>DCYF staff</i> (2), Data and Evaluation Analyst and Older Youth Programs & Planning Manager. <p>Additionally, SPR conducted interviews with program staff from two other young adult courts. Interviews focused on program structures and lessons learned. Interview findings are included in Appendix E. SPR interviews with staff from the following court models:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Douglas County Young Adult Court in Douglas County, Nebraska • Kalamazoo County Young Adult Diversion Court in Kalamazoo County, Michigan
Young adult focus groups	<p>SPR conducted two young adult focus groups with participants enrolled in the YAC program in the fall 2016 and winter 2017.</p> <p>Young adults were invited to the focus groups but participation was voluntary and some invitees did not attend. Ultimately a total of 11 young adults participated in the two focus groups. The young adults were not representative of the larger participant populations. Questions addressed participants’ backgrounds and experience with the YAC program, including the services they received, their perception of the quality of services and supports available to them, and program strengths and weaknesses.</p>

Data Sources	Description
Observations	SPR staff conducted two observations of YAC’s case conferencing sessions and formal court sessions held in San Francisco’s Hall of Justice. The observations provided the evaluation team an opportunity to learn first-hand about participant characteristics and their interactions with the diverse array of partners involved with YAC, including the Judge, case managers, probation officers, and staff from the Public Defender and District Attorney’s office. SPR took copious notes during the observations in order to capture the exchanges between young adults and the partners involved in the program.
YAC Database (extract)	YAC Database extracts were provided by Superior Court staff. These extracts contained data on YAC referrals and on YAC participants’ characteristics (including race and ethnicity, living situation, education level, and probation status). In the YAC Evaluation Final Report, participant outcome data from the YAC Database will be reported more fully.
YAC program documents	SPR conducted a review of relevant program documents such as the YAC grant proposal to California BSCC, the YAC Participant Handbook, YAC eligibility guidelines, and a National Institute of Justice environmental scan of similar court models for young adults. We reviewed these documents to prepare for data collection and to examine more closely the policies and practices discussed by interview respondents.

These data sources provide useful information about the YAC model during early implementation. We incorporate quotes from interview respondents throughout the report. The quotes—which are embedded in phrases and in sidebars—are intended to add richness to our analysis.

Remainder of the Report

The remainder of this report presents the key findings from the planning and early implementation of the YAC model. Chapter II presents an overview of the planning process for the YAC program, summarizing how partners came together to design and deliver services.

Chapter III examines in-depth the successes and challenges of early YAC implementation, and briefly reviews some early program participation outcomes. Finally, Chapter IV summarizes key findings and their implications for moving forward with YAC implementation.

II. Planning Phase

While the newness and complexity of the YAC required careful deliberation and planning for YAC program design, the partners were also able to capitalize on important contextual factors and rich experience designing other collaborative court models. This allowed for a relatively rapid YAC rollout and the capacity to move forward with implementation while still adjusting important components of program design. As one partner shared, “We were building the train while hurtling down the track. Like our young people, [the YAC] is very much in development.” The planning process required that partners grapple with several critical questions and issues, including program eligibility and an appropriate system of rewards and responses.

“The motivation for us was finding an alternative for youth involved in the criminal justice process. To get them the skills and resources they need not only to get out of the criminal justice system, but to stay out. Give them the skills they need to get productive and stay productive. And to take those skills back to the neighborhoods they’re from and be examples for the kids there.”

– YAC Partner

Context and Motivation for the YAC

The planning for YAC was facilitated by four significant contextual factors: (1) data on young adults in San Francisco’s justice system, (2) emerging brain development research, (3) the Superior Court’s significant experience with collaborative court models, and (4) the City’s commitment to TAY services.

First, data demonstrated that young adults overall, and young adults of color specifically, were disproportionately represented in San Francisco’s local adult criminal justice system (e.g., adult arrests, jail population, criminal court cases, probation caseload).

These data lent an urgency to the recognition that “we’re not doing a good job with TAY” and “we needed to do something different.” The data also served as additional motivation for finding new solutions for the young adult population.

Second, emerging research on brain development among young adults underscored why this population required alternative interventions apart from the adult criminal justice system. At the same time that local criminal justice data were underscoring the critical need for an alternative approach with TAY, the San Francisco District Attorney, then-Chief Probation Officer, and Chief of Alternative Programs and Initiatives (District Attorney’s Office) attended an Executive Session on Community Corrections at Harvard Kennedy School in March 2014 that covered young adult brain development research and community-based responses to justice-

“There was an environment of: we’re not doing a good job for these young people. We are not looking at their special needs and limitations, like their maturity level. We need to look at them differently.”

– YAC Partner

involved young adults.¹⁴ The research indicated that brain development is still unfolding in critical ways for the TAY population, thus requiring different approaches for engagement and reducing recidivism than those used for older adults or juveniles. This presented research sparked the initial idea for establishing a YAC.

Third, YAC planning was able to capitalize on the Superior Court’s exceptional level of experience with alternative courts. After attending the Harvard Kennedy School session above, the District Attorney’s Office and Adult Probation took their idea for the YAC and the BSCC grant opportunity to the Superior Court, which held significant expertise and experience in designing and implementing specialized, collaborative courts (often called “problem-solving courts”) designed to improve justice outcomes for the City’s most vulnerable populations. These collaborative courts include Behavioral Health Court, Community Justice Center, Family Treatment Court, Adult Drug Court, Intensive Supervision Court, Juvenile Reentry Court, Truancy Court and Veterans Justice Court. As will be discussed below, the Director of San Francisco’s Collaborative Courts and the Superior Court served as the administrative lead of YAC planning, responsible for a number of key development tasks.

Fourth, the City was able to leverage its pre-existing commitment to TAY services—for example the Adult Probation Department’s TAY Unit. This was part of a larger, shared understanding among city leaders that TAY required specialized supports and sanctions that were age-appropriate. It is for this reason that in 2012, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee identified disconnected TAY as a priority group across city departments, and established DCYF as the city agency coordinating TAY services. Soon thereafter, the renewal of the Children’s Fund in 2015 included, for the first time, funding for TAY ages 18-24. This funding would ensure that the TAY population receives age-appropriate services and supports citywide.

Finally, YAC program planning process was facilitated by a rich history of partnership among city agencies and community-based organizations, many of which had worked together on previous collaborative courts. These alternative courts involve close collaboration between the court staff, Judges, attorneys, and probation and service providers to provide intensive services and frequent court hearings to monitor participants’ progress. Interviewees remarked that these courts were “revolutionary” in their efforts to seek alternative sentences to incarceration. Partners had also collaborated on past city-wide efforts and all of the criminal justice partners had deep experience working with community based organizations to provide ancillary services. For example, San Francisco’s District Attorney’s Office and Goodwill Industries (the employment services partner for YAC) partnered on Back on Track, a deferred entry of judgment (DEJ) program for first-time participants between the ages of 18-30, charged with low-level felony offenses.

As a result of the confluence of all these contextual factors—as well as the simple fact that YAC partners “genuinely liked each other”—the City was ripe for YAC planning and launch.

¹⁴ This session was led by Vincent Schiraldi, Bruce Western, and Kendra Bradner.

Coming Together

Interview respondents were especially excited that “the right people were at the table” to move the YAC planning process along.

These included the Judge, whose commitment and passion for this program was described as exceptional, and critical partner staff from the Superior Court, the District Attorney’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office, Adult Probation, and FSA. Partners came to the table with open minds, a willingness to work together, a similar philosophy of rehabilitation, and a shared goal of reducing recidivism among the TAY population. As one interviewee said, “We were all in pursuit of the same goals—just better outcomes for this population.”

“We had this perfect group of people. Who is at the table from each of these agencies makes a huge difference. Even if they have different perspectives, they were very open to listening to each other.” – YAC Partner

That said, when partners came to the table, they differed in their initial level of buy-in to the YAC, and their confidence about the specific roles and working relationships required. While some partners were excited about the prospect of a new court, with a few emphasizing that they “do a really good job of working together,” a small number of others were cautiously optimistic.

Some partners felt they needed clarification on their expected roles and responsibilities. Thus, during the planning phase, the partners engaged in a learning process—including two half-day strategic planning retreats—to ensure a common understanding of program goals and outcomes, as well as roles. One partner reflected, “This has been a journey in [and of] itself. Learning roles, learning what we all want from participants... has been a process since planning.”

Finally, some were uncertain about how partners would work together, suggesting that the YAC program would require fostering trust and a shared vision among partners of fundamentally different orientations. For example, some partners —such as the District Attorney and Public Defender—traditionally differ in their view of how to best resolve cases involving young adults in the criminal justice system. While some partners focused their conversation on holding young adults “accountable” for their actions, others focused more on providing sufficient wraparound services to reduce the likelihood of offending.

“I’m sure everybody had an agenda coming to the table. Everyone had our poker faces on at first. How serious should we take ourselves, and take each other? We don’t want to step on each other’s toes.” –YAC Partner

Despite some initial reservations, partners remained committed to the YAC program, and to collaboration. As one respondent remarked, “We’re going to be partners, full partners all the way through. We have a vested interest [in seeing the program succeed].”

The Planning Process

After representatives from San Francisco’s District Attorney’s Office and Adult Probation Department attended the Harvard Kennedy School session on young adult brain development in March 2014, the planning process included the following milestones:

- **Summer 2014.** The Chief of Alternative Programs and Initiatives, District Attorney’s Office authors a paper proposing a YAC in San Francisco, and approaches the Superior Court and other stakeholders about the possibility.
- **August 6, 2014.** The San Francisco Sentencing Commission—a legislatively established local body of justice stakeholders that works to make recommendations for system and sentencing reforms that advance public safety and rely on best practices in criminal justice—formally endorses the Young Adult Court Workgroup,¹⁵ and the proposal for a Young Adult Court,¹⁶ after holding the first of two meetings in August 2014 focused on neuroscience and young adult brain development featuring experts in the field.
- **Fall 2014.** San Francisco submits the grant proposal for YAC.
- **Winter 2015.** San Francisco is notified of and awarded grant funding for the YAC.
- **April 2, 2015.** The first YAC planning meeting is held, marking the official beginning of the planning period, though a good amount of thinking and work had been done prior to this date.
 - As part of the planning phase, two major YAC strategic planning sessions are held. One of these, organized by the Director of Collaborative Courts, Superior Court featured Dr. Hetty Eisenberg, then the Medical Director of TAY population at the Department of Public Health, who provided a training to all YAC partners on young adult brain development and trauma. This training—entitled “TAY and Complex Trauma: Neurobiology and Psychosocial Approaches”¹⁷—informs all aspects of the YAC design, including core program elements and the specific language used with and about young adults. Another, facilitated by the Chief of Alternative Programs and Initiatives, District Attorney’s Office, centers on eligibility guidelines and an initial pool of clients.
 - With partner and expert input, the Director of Collaborative Courts and Superior Court leads efforts on key aspects of program design, including drafting documents

¹⁵ The Young Adult Court Workgroup, comprised of the partners who designed the YAC model, reports back to the Sentencing Commission on implementation progress.

¹⁶ The 2014 Annual Report of the Sentencing Commission specifically recommended the creation of a young adult court.

¹⁷ Key training topics included neurobiology, the TAY brain and trauma, psychosocial stages of development, and complex trauma.

on the YAC phases of participation and on sanctions and incentives (rewards and responses), as well as the YAC Participant Handbook.

- The District Attorney’s Office leads efforts to draft YAC eligibility guidelines.
- Felton Institute/Family Service Agency (FSA) leads the design of the Life Skills and dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) components. DBT in particular reflects the effort to ensure that the YAC model is developmentally aligned with its target population. As one respondent noted, “DBT is a format of [cognitive behavioral therapy] CBT that is developmentally appropriate for a population with little insight into emotional regulation.”

Critical Decision Points

The planning process required that partners grapple with several critical questions and issues, including what program advancement and completion would look like, and the specific language and approach used to engage young adult participants.¹⁸ However, **interview respondents particularly highlighted program eligibility and a system of rewards and responses as the issues requiring extensive negotiation and discussion during the planning process.**

The critical issues that required extensive negotiation and discussion during the planning process were (1) program eligibility and (2) a system of sanctions and incentives. These are discussed below.

Eligibility. The YAC program planners wanted to “start fresh” on eligibility for the YAC program, rather than modify eligibility criteria used in other collaborative courts in San Francisco. For this and other reasons, determining the program eligibility criteria was perhaps the most challenging element for program planners due, in part, to differences in perspectives between the District Attorney’s and Public Defender’s offices about who should be allowed in the program. The challenge for partners was to agree on not only *who* was eligible, but also the terms of eligibility (i.e., what charges were acceptable and not acceptable, when participants would be required to enter a plea or be sentenced, and what the legal benefits would be for different types of offenses). After months of planning, the partners agreed on preliminary eligibility criteria, with the expectation that the YAC program would be a pilot project and that eligibility would be reviewed as the program evolved over time. As one respondent said, “We called it a pilot in case we needed to abandon this idea if people were [committing] more, serious crimes and this became a public safety disaster.” Other questions that came up during these discussions included: “What were we willing to be more open minded about?” “Do we keep them [young adults], do we let them go to traditional court? We just can’t hold them if they’re committing new crimes.” The multiple planning meetings and back and forth negotiations between the District Attorney’s and Public Defender’s offices resulted in the

¹⁸ For example, partners deliberately settled on the word “engagement” instead of “compliance,” as the former connotes a level of agency on the young adult participant’s part.

program’s most significant milestone—program eligibility that were acceptable to diverse partners, and were ultimately used across multiple collaborative courts in San Francisco.¹⁹

Rewards and Responses (sanctions and incentives). Included in the discussion about program eligibility was a system of sanctions and incentives, otherwise referred to as responses and rewards – a key component of collaborative court models. During the planning phase, partners noted that the system of sanctions was not clearly defined. Key decisions about when participants would be terminated and on what grounds required ongoing discussions among the partners and—as will be seen in the next chapter—continued to be a point of tension during early implementation.

¹⁹ Please see Appendix B for YAC eligibility guidelines.

III. Early Implementation of YAC Services

The Young Adult Court began accepting participants on August 7, 2015, with a plan to serve approximately 80 young adults per year, depending on the duration of services provided to participants. The average timeframe of service provision was expected to be one year, but with a range of anywhere between 10-18 months. By the end of 2015, 63 young adults had been accepted. **By March 1, 2017, the Young Adult Court had accepted a total of 123 individuals, which represented almost 85% of the total number referred since inception (146).**²⁰

Who is Being Served?

Of the 123 YAC participants served by March 1, 2017, **64% are African American, and males comprise the large majority (75%). One-third of participants (41) are residents of San Francisco**, while just over half (55%) have residences that are “not listed.” In terms of education and living status at the time of entry into the YAC program, 35% of participants were high school graduates and 37% were living in a home with family member(s). The full YAC participant characteristics are shown in Exhibit III-1.

“When you know a person’s story, it changes how you think about their crime.”

– YAC Partner

For the most part, the characteristics of YAC participants so far have not surprised YAC partners, particularly in terms of racial breakdown. A number of

interview respondents noted that while the racial disparity is troubling, YAC participants reflect the larger jail population and criminal justice system of San Francisco. As one YAC partner observed, “I’m not surprised because that’s the system I work in, but I’m disappointed and reminded of how important this court is to the address the underlying problems...and the systemic injustice we have.”

“For low-income, justice-involved youth, the hallmark of life is a lack of stable, healthy relationships.”

– YAC Partner

“These kids...are taking the biggest risk of their lives. They’re learning to learn, and bringing their bags of trauma and poverty to the table.”

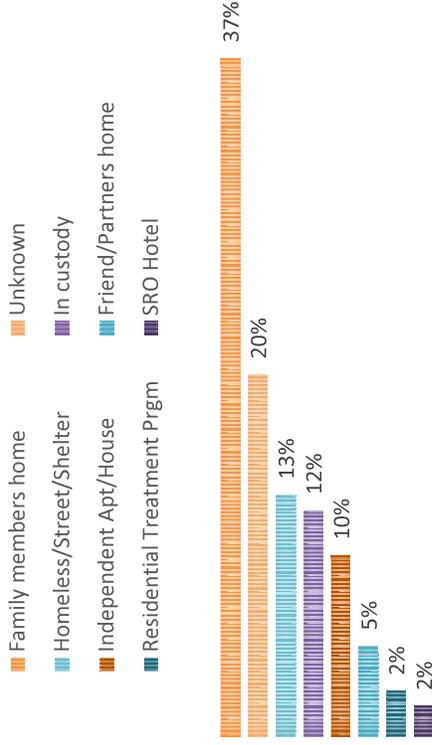
– YAC Partner

Similarly, while also not surprising, many YAC partners remarked on the level and common sources of personal trauma that characterize YAC participants’ lives. As one interviewee noted, “The youth are exactly what I expected. A lot have trauma and housing issues, little to no family support, pushed along in the system.

²⁰ Young adults who are referred to YAC may not be eligible to participate following 1) the District Attorney’s Office review of the case or 2) the assessment conducted by FSA. For more information on the referral process, see a broad description on page 4 or Appendix B for YAC eligibility criteria.

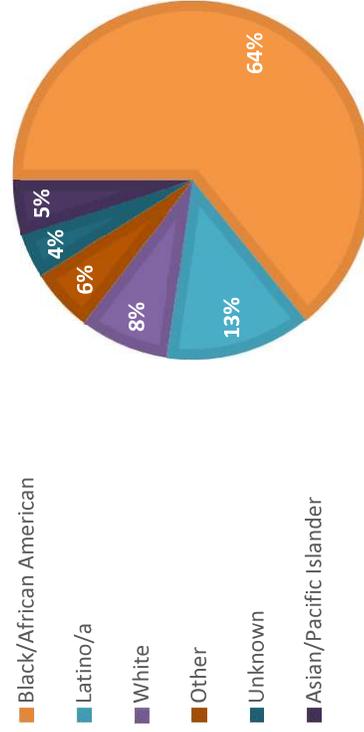
**Exhibit III-1: YAC Participant Characteristics
N=123²¹**

LIVING SITUATION

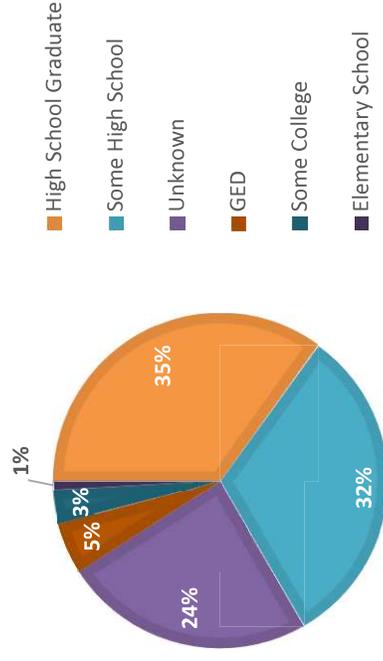


YAC Participant City of Residence	Count
San Francisco	59
Oakland	11
Daly City	5
Vallejo	3
Antioch	1
Emeryville	1
Fremont	1
Kingston	1
Richmond	1
San Leandro	1
Not Listed	39

YAC PARTICIPANT RACE/ETHNICITY



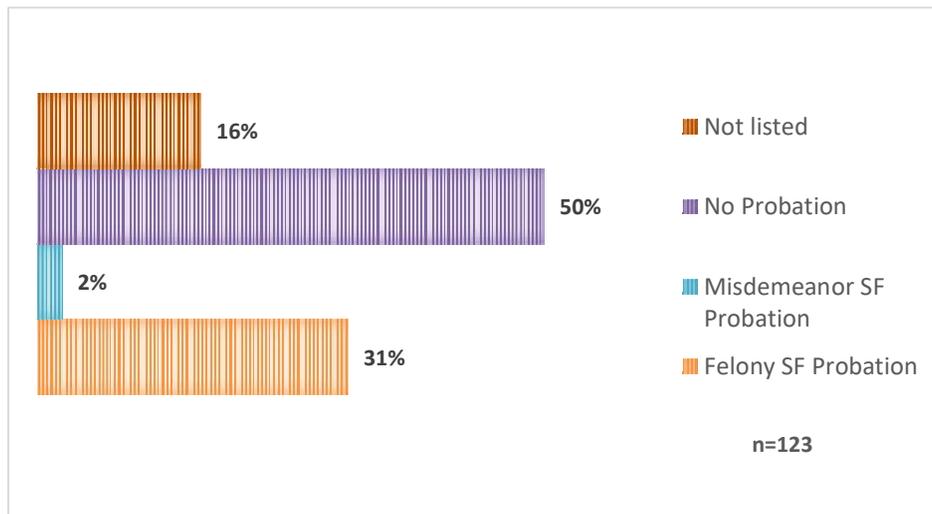
YAC PARTICIPANT EDUCATION



²¹ YAC participant data is through March 1, 2017.

The YAC participant characteristics that have stood out to multiple partners have been the number of homeless young adults, young adults from outside San Francisco County, and non-probation versus probation young adults. With regard to homelessness, while 16 YAC participants (13%) were homeless at time of program entry, 39 (32%) at the time of assessment indicated that they had experienced homelessness at some point. The number of YAC participants who reside outside San Francisco County (see table above) has been noted as a challenge to consistent program engagement. Finally, a couple of respondents remarked on their expectations of seeing more probation clients in the YAC program. As can be seen in Exhibit III-2, at least 34 YAC participants (28%) are on probation, though 26 (21%) are not listed.

Exhibit III-2: Probation at Entry



Early YAC Implementation Successes

As discussed earlier in the report, the planning phase of the Young Adult Court drew on a political climate highly receptive to addressing the unique challenges and needs of transitional age youth (TAY) in San Francisco, and critical previous experience and expertise with collaborative court models.

Against this backdrop, YAC was able to hit the ground running, and began early implementation with Back on Track²² participants. A number of interviewees described YAC starting and developing simultaneously, without some YAC policies and

“What is going well is that we have set up a functioning alternative collaborative court for the hardest-to- reach population in a city where this population directly needs it. It is so hard to push against the traditional criminal justice system...the fact that this exists and is an opportunity for young people to get their lives together is amazing.” – YAC Partner

²² The Back on Track program is discussed in Ch. II, page 11 of this report.

procedures in place. For example, a few YAC respondents observed that YAC implementation began without the benefit of the Participant Handbook (which outlines expectations and phases of program participation), or established policies on topics such as marijuana use and drug testing. (The Director of Collaborative Courts, Superior Court is currently leading the finalization of a YAC policies and procedures document.)

While some respondents noted the lack of pre-set policies as a challenge, and perhaps something that would have benefited the early implementation phase, a larger perspective expressed was that **YAC is a young court, still “on a learning curve,” and experiencing some amount of “growing pains” that are to be expected with any collaborative court getting up and running and realizing its originally anticipated vision.** A couple of respondents also expressed that the ability to rapidly launch—without all policies in place—was a testament to past experience with collaborative courts, and reflective of an intended pilot and learning phase of YAC.

Part of YAC’s learning and adjustment process has been what a few interviewees described as the blending of criminal justice and clinical worlds, with “social workers learning to be a little more like probation officers, and probation officers learning to be a little bit more like social workers.” Likewise, another YAC partner reflected that, “It has been important for the Public Defender to be more firm with clients and the District Attorney to be more empathetic.”

Overall, the very fact that YAC has been established and is providing a critical opportunity for the TAY population, is seen as a significant accomplishment in and of itself. That said, YAC partners highlighted specific successes and challenges of the Young Adult Court implementation so far. **A few respondents pointed to the popularity of YAC—the demand and sheer number of young adults being served—as a key success of early implementation. However, partners cited two other factors most frequently as indicators of success: the quality of the people and partner organizations at the table; and the Judge presiding over the Young Adult Court.**

Partner Perspectives on YAC Partnerships

“The biggest success is how well everyone works together in getting to the goal. All the partners have been very accommodating in changing the old ways they’ve done things in the past to make things easier for this population. The way the different parties came together, that was a real highlight.”

“The successes have been the strength of the partners. Their amazing knowledge and values that they each individually bring to the table. I think their commitment to the success of the model has also been a huge success.”

“I think it’s really tremendous and amazing, the coordination...I’ve never seen it. People are on it, they’re responsive, individual people talk in person if needed. Everyone rallies and comes to the table.”

“Communication between collaborative members has improved to cover as many gap areas as have been discovered. Wherever there is an issue that arises, the team effort in remedying the issue is amazing.”

As described earlier in the report, the partners involved in YAC are drawing on strong pre-existing relationships and past collaborative efforts, and the buy-in of critical criminal justice stakeholders for this alternative court model. Interviewed partners praised the strength of individual partner expertise brought to the table, their working relationships with one another, and the level of dedication and ongoing coordination for YAC. As one respondent observed, the strength of the YAC model is very much tied to the individuals “occupying the model.” This includes a District Attorney and Public Defender with “a great working relationship,” and case managers “that go above and beyond.”

YAC partners also largely praised the vehicles for ongoing coordination—including the monthly policy meetings, the strategic planning meetings (once or twice per year), and particularly the case conferencing that occurs before each YAC court session. The case conferencing meetings have allowed partners to get to know each other better, as well as the YAC participants, and to craft appropriate responses for each young adult from a shared “place of care.” However, a few respondents feel that the case conferences require more time to discuss clients more thoroughly given the number of participants on the agenda, as well as perhaps a different, additional type of case conferencing meeting altogether—focused less on individual participant updates, and more on brainstorming potential strategies, implementation plans, and sharing lessons and best practices from clients who have been successful. On the other hand, a couple of respondents also described what they see as a tradeoff between spending more time providing services than attending meetings.

Interview respondents offered unanimous praise for the YAC Judge in recognition of his leadership as a key factor of implementation success so far. Partners specifically highlighted his personal interest, caring, and dedication to the young adult participants—shown by gestures such as attending graduations, organizing donated books for participants’ children, and expressing deep interest in a participant’s music video online. Respondents also praised his willingness to learn, and his serious consideration and respect of partner perspectives and recommendations. One partner reflected, “You couldn’t ask for a more dedicated, open-minded Judge to take this on, a Judge who is so vested in the individual participants.” Two interviewees also highlighted the fact that many of the young adult participants see him as a parental figure—one they do not want to disappoint.

Young Adult Perspectives on the YAC Judge

“The Judge is a nice man. He’s more caring than I thought he would be. He’s strict too. If you’re not doing what you’re supposed to, [he] isn’t taking your mess.”

“He always gives you a chance.”

“He’s more like a mentor. He’s somebody for guidance more than a judge.”

“In order to be in this program, he has to have some kind of heart.”

Early YAC Implementation Challenges

The perceived challenges of YAC implementation so far can be clustered into five categories: (1) suitability; (2) engagement; (3) knowing when to “let go”; (4) differing case management models; and (5) and inter-phase progression.

Suitability

As discussed in the previous chapter, identifying eligibility guidelines was one of the most intensive, time-consuming tasks of the YAC design phase, though approached with a “collaborative spirit.” **During early implementation, partners continued to grapple some with eligibility issues (e.g., consistently vetting potential new participants, what charges should or should not be accepted) but also with questions of fit.** As four partners reflected, in the beginning, nearly all young adults who were assessed were recommended for YAC, without sufficient consideration of readiness or suitability. As one stated, “So far we’re accepting people that are not ready. We’re either missing the signs they demonstrate to show they’re not ready, or we’re ignoring the signs.” In some cases, this has resulted in terminations due to serious new crimes being committed, which demonstrated that the young adults—in the words of another partner— “weren’t ready to engage in the really intensive support and growth that’s required by the program.” Two interviewees described clear warning signs that could have been better heeded, such as clients with a history of not engaging and thus not being appropriate. Another interviewee emphasized the need for cultural competency in assessing young adult suitability—specifically, being grounded in, and able to understand the young adult (e.g., where they are coming from and what they are dealing with) or otherwise risk being “snowed” by young adults not well- suited for YAC.

Engagement

Several YAC partners commented on the interrelated challenges of: (1) engagement (sometimes using the word “accountability”), and (2) consistency in terms of rewards and responses for YAC participants. Partners recognized the inherent challenge of engaging and requiring accountability among young adults in general, let alone among young adults with significant barriers and setbacks. It can be a long-term endeavor; as one YAC partner reflected, “It takes many months to engage. This is not a failure but a process.”

“We need to do a better job at institutionalizing rewards and responses; [there is] no regularity and consistency in the application of these things.”
– YAC Partner

At the same time, partners recognized the need for effective, timely, and consistent responses to participants meeting, and especially not meeting, program expectations. As one partner noted, “Sometimes the rules are too loose for some clients and the court may be sending the wrong message.... We need to develop sanctions and rewards. I understand that each client is unique but we need to send the same message.”

“Letting Go”

Partners continue to grapple with when to “let go” of participants who are ready to graduate, as well as participants who are not meeting the expectations of the Young Adult Court.

In the first case, the question remains as to how many, and which program milestones a participant should reach before proving they are on the right path and are ready for YAC graduation. For YAC specifically, and for other young adult justice system interventions generally, answering this question has been challenging with the realization that “not all boxes will be checked” and that a young adult’s path will inevitably be marked by both progress and setbacks.

“The biggest surprise has been how difficult it is to get rid of people who need to go. I thought there was going to be a lot of accountability and I think we’re struggling with that.”

– YAC Partner

In the second case, several respondents felt that early implementation had raised the need to determine when, exactly, struggling young adults can be kept in the YAC and for how long, and when they should be terminated. For the most part, this has been determined on a case by case basis. YAC partners are also still deciding when young adults might be better served with transfers to drug or behavioral health courts.

Different Case Management Models

One revision made to the YAC model during early implementation was the delineation of FSA’s assessment, therapy, and case management duties. Given the caseload involved, FSA now handles case management only for non-probation clients, while case management for clients on probation is provided by the dedicated TAY case manager at the CASC. However, FSA is responsible for all client assessments regardless of probation status, and provides therapy (DBT) and Life Skills to all.

The early implementation of YAC is essentially piloting two models of case management provision to YAC participants. The first model, provided by FSA to non-probation clients, is characterized by staff who serve as both therapists and case managers (the clinical-case management model). The second model has probation clients receiving case management, probation, and therapeutic services from distinct staff members (case managers at CASC, probation officers, and potentially FSA or other therapists, if needed).

Interviewees pointed out some advantages, particularly of the second model, in that young adults have a clear separation of roles between a therapist and “an enforcement/supervision person,” and also have access to more, and different types of caring, invested adult figures.

In addition to determining the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches, YAC partners described the challenge of ensuring consistency of expectations and experiences between probation and non-probation clients. A

A couple of respondents questioned whether non-probation young adults interacting only with FSA, which is primarily a therapy organization, might have less stringent expectations and responses to their negative behavior than young adult participants on probation. There may also need to be more consistency in program elements, such as the content of case plans of probation versus non-probation clients, the frequency of contacts between case managers and probation/non-probation young adults, and standardization of monitoring and reporting on clients. To some extent, the YAC database is expected to help identify and address areas of inconsistency in the YAC experience between young adults on probation and those not on probation.²³

“Figuring out how to hold kids accountable in the same way, so that one kid isn’t getting more of a break or less of a break, because of who they’re interacting with, that’s definitely been difficult.”

– YAC Partner

Inter-Phase Progression

Though cited much less often, clarity on inter-phase progression was described as an area for improvement by both YAC partner interviewees and young adult focus group participants.

More specifically, though young adult respondents clearly knew which phase they were currently in, they wished to know more about how they move from one phase to the next. One young adult also recommended, “They could be more specific with the graduation process.”

While YAC partners pointed to the YAC Participant Handbook that lays out Phase 1 to 4, a couple felt that triggers for progression, and the implications of “stepping back,” could be made clearer. Specifically, partners initially mentioned that it would be useful to have clarity on what happens when participants regress and whether that means moving back to the previous phase. As the program matured, partners agreed that participants would stay in their current phase longer, rather than go back to a previous phase.

Priority Needs

Early implementation has allowed partners to see where there are heightened areas of need among young adults participating in the YAC. Housing is undoubtedly the most critical of these, a need that must be addressed immediately before all others, and a challenge that is particularly acute in the city of San Francisco. Young adult participants in SPR’s focus groups confirmed housing as their top priority need. In response, FSA has already increased its capacity by “getting really good, really fast at finding housing options” and identifying opportunities to contract with an organization for beds. (A couple of partner interviewees also identified

²³ These differences may also be due to participants on probation likely being in the program for more serious criminal behavior.

residential, developmentally-appropriate substance abuse treatment centers as an important service gap.)

In addition to housing, the priority need identified most often by YAC partners was mentoring. In addition to expanding participants' menu of adults that they can reach out to, mentors serve as important role models that many young adult participants simply do not have in their lives. As one YAC partner reflected, "One of the things we're seeing is young people really need mentors. They need someone that looks like them that has been successful." Two partner interviewees specifically emphasized the need for peer mentors, particularly YAC alumni or those who have successfully reached Phase IV. In place of formal peer mentors, successful YAC participants model positive behavior and outcomes in court when receiving recognition for accomplishments. In contrast to partner interviewees, YAC participants did not mention mentoring as a priority need.

"Housing is a primary need. It's hard...to expect the client to show up, do what they need to do, get a job and all those things, when they're constantly worried about their safety."

– YAC Partner

"The home situations are unhealthy, harmful, or don't exist... so much stems from not having a place to stay."

– YAC Partner

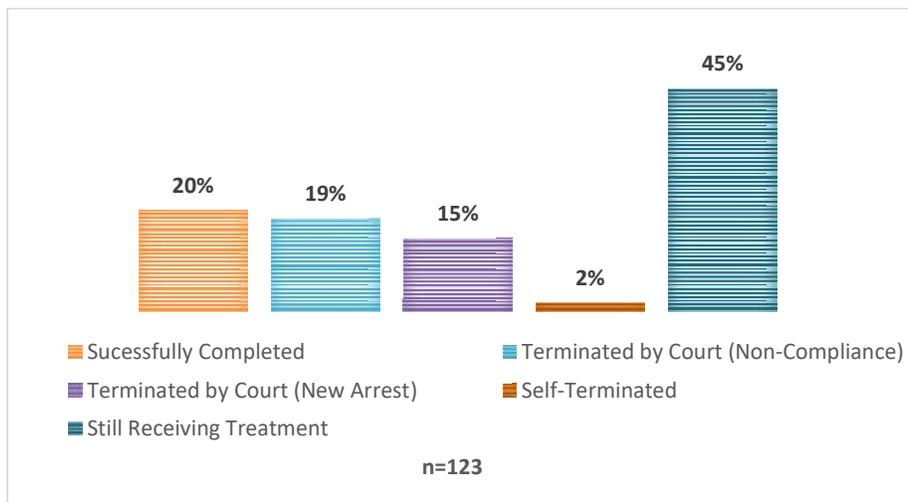
"People our age need jobs and housing first."

– Young Adult

IV. Initial YAC Outcomes and Data

As discussed earlier, this implementation study report focuses squarely on YAC planning and early implementation. YAC outcomes will be the explicit focus of the final evaluation report in December 2017. **However, on a program participation level, young adult outcomes from YAC inception (August 7, 2015) until March 1, 2017, can be seen below in Exhibit IV-1.** The completion rate is 20% (25 young adults), while 45% (55 young adults) are still actively participating in the program—which translates to an overall retention rate of 65%. 15% of young adults (18 young adults) have been terminated by the court for new arrests, and 19% (23 young adults) have been terminated for not complying with YAC rules or expectations. Only two young adults (2%) have self-terminated.

Exhibit IV-1: YAC Participant Outcomes



While these numbers provide important insight into YAC program outcomes, as described in the introduction, YAC has a number of expected partner- and program-level outcomes that go beyond participation and service receipt (see Appendix D).

Although some of these expected outcomes can be addressed by the evaluation’s qualitative data collection (particularly the larger program-level outcomes²⁴), SPR will need to access the YAC database,²⁵ as well as obtain arrest and incarceration data from the Sheriff’s Department in

²⁴ In particular, this chapter has discussed the perceived level of coordination among YAC partners and the use of collaborative case conferences.

²⁵ SPR reviewed the draft architecture/layout of the YAC Database in-person at the Superior Court in fall 2016, but has not accessed the (finalized) database since this time. The YAC database was fully populated in early 2017.

SPR is still working to finalize a data-use agreement with the Superior Court for access to the YAC database, as well as with the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department to obtain arrest and incarceration data for YAC participants.

order to: (1) determine whether all YAC’s expected outcomes are currently being measured, and (2) report on these outcomes in the final evaluation report. Additional items of interest include average length of service receipt, and characteristics of graduates versus non-graduates in terms of criminal history, education, and types of services received.

Reflecting on the implementation of YAC thus far, some partners discussed how what they have observed has informed their understanding of expected outcomes or definitions of success, particularly at the young adult level.

One partner wondered whether the expected outcomes are realistic and whether they “reflect the population we’re working with?” If they are indeed the developmentally and situationally appropriate expected outcomes, to what extent should these be more explicitly informing the assessment process so young adults can be screened for their capabilities in these outcome areas?

Two respondents described how early implementation has affected how YAC is defining success. While both agreed that desired outcomes, at minimum, are achieving a level of personal stability (e.g., in terms of housing and employment) and having no additional involvement with the criminal justice system, the remaining **definition of success is “becoming significantly more individualized based on case plans” and goals that young adults have identified for themselves** – an intentional approach consistent with young adult development. Young adults in the YAC participant focus groups stressed employment, housing, and clearing their criminal records as their top goals and priorities.

Finally, three additional respondents reflected on the challenges of moving beyond counting units of service provided and being able to discern whether the court is truly making a difference with the young adult participants. Here they underscored the importance of non-quantifiable young adult outcomes that may not be realized within the timeframe of YAC involvement, but have clearly been facilitated by it. As one YAC partner questioned, “How do you know that something you’ve done today doesn’t take root six months from now? How have you been successful in giving that person some technique or strategy?”

“Who’s successful? Those that are able to trust—that are able to identify at least one person they can trust.” – YAC Partner

“Find somebody some housing, you have a shot at helping them become successful. Find somebody employment in addition to that, and their probability shoots up by 50% or more. Let those two things not happen, and we’re going to have a problem.” – YAC Partner

“When I think of the change behavior that everybody wants to see, it might not be part of this court. Maybe it’s down the road [but] the seeds have been planted in Young Adult Court.” – YAC Partner

Factors of Young Adult Success

Clearly a question of interest is whether early YAC implementation has revealed anything preliminarily about commonalities among successful young adults, and whether such

characteristics can be identified from the onset. Respondents were diverse in their perspectives on this topic, with relatively more successful young adults anecdotally being identified as older and/or more mature TAY, Latino young adults who have been charged with drug dealing, and young adults on probation. The following perspectives on participants' success are anecdotal, reflecting the opinions of interview respondents during early implementation. The Final Report will use outcome data to further explore the factors that predict and support participants' success.

A number of interviewees could not discern a common characteristic of successful young adults, and observed that it was often a "surprise" (and sometimes a matter of "luck") who has ended up succeeding and who has not, though case managers were sometimes seen as being in the best position to predict success. Young adults in the participant focus groups clearly saw success as dependent on level of individual initiative, with a number of young adults indicating that "it's all on you," or "they're [staff are] not here to give you a jail-free card, they give you the opportunity."

The level of a young adult's outside support, as well as level of personal readiness, were both described as important ingredients for young adult success and avoiding recidivism. While YAC provides young adult participants with caring, invested adult figures, several respondents underscored the importance of additional outside support—whether that be family members or at least one adult they can trust—to boosting chances of young adult success.

Describing individual readiness (as a factor of success) was less straightforward, except in the most extreme cases. According to some interviewees, the young adult participants who are *least* ready—and struggle the most—often have severe chemical addiction and/or mental health issues. (YAC continues to grapple with how best to manage these clients, in some cases transferring them to drug or behavioral health court.) Aside from this group, there exists a wide range of readiness/engagement levels and appropriate approaches or responses from YAC partners.

Respondents described readiness as a function of different dimensions, including: maturity (not necessarily age); past experience (particularly any prior involvement with the criminal justice system and related ability to fully appreciate the impact of charges on their lives); willingness to embrace the YAC model and support; a strong intention to change a way of life and be successful; and stage of change²⁶ an individual currently occupies (e.g., pre-contemplative, contemplative, etc.). It is this last dimension of readiness in particular that

"Sometimes participants get it right away and sometimes it takes them a little while. You have to meet them where they're at. You have to push and motivate them accordingly. Even though there's a difference in their readiness, that's the point of the program...this program gives us the flexibility to be more engaged and try new things." – YAC Partner

²⁶ The stages of change model (also known as the Transtheoretical Model) includes six phases for changing behavior: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination. This model is used to explain the phases of changing addictive behaviors (Prochaska, J.O., DiClemente, C.C., and Norcross, J.C., 1992).

makes it important to use a flexible, tailored approach to working with individual young adults. As one YAC partner described, “Sometimes it takes kids a while to get ready—a little extra support and oversight. Some kids are ready from day one. It depends on their stage as an individual and readiness to embrace the YAC model.” Another partner echoed this perspective by recognizing the extremes of young adults who are either “closed” or “completely open,” but underlining the need in all cases for “time and consistency to motivate toward positive change, as building trust takes time.”

Structure for Success

Ultimately YAC partners agreed that the Young Adult Court is “a good model,” “on the right track,” “off to a healthy start,” and in general set up to support participants’ success—though recognizing that ultimately a one-year program is limited in its ability to address “18 years of trauma.” Following are some of the core characteristics that respondents highlighted as strengths of the overall YAC structure in facilitating young adult success:

- **A compassionate, diverse court.** The Young Adult Court conveys compassion and caring to its young adult participants. As one respondent described, “There’s a real message around the table that we want the young people to succeed.” For some of the young adult participants, YAC is the first time they’ve had a sense of support and received praise for their accomplishments. One partner observed, “They went from having no one in their corner to have many [in their corner],” including parties traditionally not trusted by young adults (i.e., representatives of the criminal justice system). Two respondents described the role that YAC partners play as surrogate parents. YAC is represented by highly diverse and dedicated individuals, including African American lawyers and an Asian American Judge. Respondents described this as important for personal relatability, potential role models, and an effective YAC.

“It didn’t feel like court, it felt like a support system. They were asking where you were at, making sure you’re going where you want to go.”
– Young Adult
- **A court grounded in research on TAY brain development.** The very establishment of the court is based on neuroscience that indicates the brains of young adults are fundamentally different from those of adults in terms of processing information and making decisions—thus requiring different strategies for avoiding recidivism, promoting engagement, and facilitating positive outcomes. The court is using strategies and even language to reflect this premise. For example, one respondent

“There’s a lot of interest in this...it shows that the criminal justice system is really paying attention to the brain development of transitional age youth and impulsive behaviors.”
– YAC Partner

“Having brain development as a touchstone is really important.”
– YAC Partner

described the conscious decision to revise the language of sanctions to responses: “How do we use words and language to affect behavior changes? Science tells us this is the way.”

- **An opportunity for young adult voice and self-advocacy.** The Young Adult Court affords young adult participants a primary voice in their own Wellness Care Plan, as well as in the court setting (in their interactions with the YAC Judge). One respondent noted that the court is a “platform to seek and advocate for their own case, they’ve never had that empowerment before.” One of the young adult participants concurred, noting that “in regular court, you have to tell your lawyer if you want to talk for yourself.”

“The platform they’re provided with to speak and advocate for their own case, they’ve never had that empowerment before...a lot of the clients love that about Young Adult Court.”
– YAC Partner

- **Effective service-flow components and opportunities.** Respondents were positive about core components and opportunities of the YAC service flow, including the YAC Handbook’s phases of young adult participation, court appearances as an element of young adult accountability, engagement with clinical case managers, using degree of engagement to help determine frequency of court appearances, and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)²⁷ groups. YAC participation also affords young adults a number of support opportunities through their interaction with FSA or CASC, including transportation and assistance with identifying housing. One partner said, “We have more resources in this program to help a young person struggling and get their life together than any other program I know, if a young person is ready.”

“My case manager is genuine. I could see the care. I can feel when she wants me to do better.”
– Young Adult

“I think the assessment process is a good part of the program. It assesses what the person is going through. It prevents you from going back down the wrong road.”
– Young Adult

²⁷ Dialectical behavioral therapy “combines standard cognitive behavioral methodology to help regulate emotions and reality-testing with concepts of distress tolerance, acceptance, and mindfulness awareness practices which are derived from Buddhist meditation disciplines” (Felton Institute, 2017).

V. Summary and Implications

The Young Adult Court established in San Francisco has realized tremendous progress in its planning and early implementation phases.

During the critical planning period, program planners: (1) acted on local data indicating the overrepresentation of TAY in the justice system and emerging brain research focused on young adults; (2) capitalized on exceptional experience with collaborative court models and a local commitment to funding TAY services; (3) mobilized the commitment of diverse stakeholders from the criminal justice system and beyond; (4) defined eligibility criteria; and (5) designed the core elements that would allow for rapid rollout of the YAC program.

The early implementation phase has been successful in terms of a full launch of a collaborative court model for young adults, a healthy demand for its services, and what is unanimously described as an ideal set of individuals “occupying” the model and serving young adults with dedication and care.

As was expected, YAC has also confronted a number of challenges that emerged during early implementation—particularly those related to young adult suitability and engagement—and ongoing learning on topics such as differing case management models, priority needs for young adults, and knowing when to “let go” of both successful and struggling young adults.

Moving forward, the most prominent areas of ongoing development for YAC are:

- **Continuing to address the balance and implications of clinical and criminal justice worlds being brought together in YAC.** This touches on various dimensions of implementation, including: continuing to negotiate eligibility exceptions; agreeing on appropriate responses to disengaged young adults not meeting YAC expectations; and even taking steps to make young adults more comfortable in their interactions with criminal justice system representatives who—in the YAC context—are more focused on ensuring young adult success. YAC has taken steps in this regard—for instance, with social gatherings for YAC participants and partners. (One young adult described the YAC orientation and dinner, and their interaction with a criminal justice system representative who, in another court setting, might not be as attentive to building a relationship with young adults: “I’m sitting here and he wants me in jail... it did some [*profanity*] to my mind.”)
- **Assessing the strength of the blended clinical-case manager model.** The YAC model will provide important data on the relative strength of two different case management models for young adults on probation and not on probation. In particular, a continued area of focus should be on whether the same staff can effectively provide both clinical and case management services, or whether young adults are better served by a separation of function. To this end, a comparison of experiences of probation and non-probation young adults will be of interest—though differences in the severity of the offense that *brought* them to YAC must be considered in the effect on both YAC experience and outcomes.

- **Screening for suitability and motivation.** How is FSA applying partner lessons and insights from early YAC implementation to its assessment procedures? In particular, how are any common characteristics (e.g., signs of readiness) of successful YAC participants being used to inform whether potential participants are indeed suitable and likely to succeed in YAC? Likewise, how are any common characteristics or experiences of terminated YAC participants being used to inform the assessment process for potential YAC participants?
- **Emphasizing consistency in rewards and responses.** YAC partners provided strong feedback on the need for more consistency in rewards and responses to YAC participant behavior, whether positive or negative. To what extent have YAC partners—perhaps through a strategic planning meeting—devoted time to detailing rewards and responses (and their associated behaviors) and documenting them in a revised YAC Participant Handbook? Similarly, YAC partners identified the need for specific and consistent guidelines on when it is time to let go of both successful and struggling YAC participants—including when cases would be better served by other collaborative courts (e.g., mental health, adult drug court) and when young people are ready to graduate or move beyond the justice system.
- **Addressing key service gaps.** Clearly housing and mentoring emerged as the most frequently mentioned service gaps for YAC participants, with residential and developmentally-appropriate substance abuse also being cited. YAC partners, particularly FSA, have already taken steps to address the former. However, adding critical components such as mentoring will require not only the consideration of funding constraints, but also of whether the basic operating structure of YAC is strong enough to “add on.” Peer mentoring opportunities, in particular, could hold particular potential as YAC participants see examples of success among those from similar circumstances who have graduated from YAC or reached the last phase of program participation. Peer mentors could also be rewarded for their mentorship of other YAC participants.

While the above points represent the strongest areas of feedback, other areas of potential focus emerged from our discussion with YAC respondents and SPR’s own viewpoint:

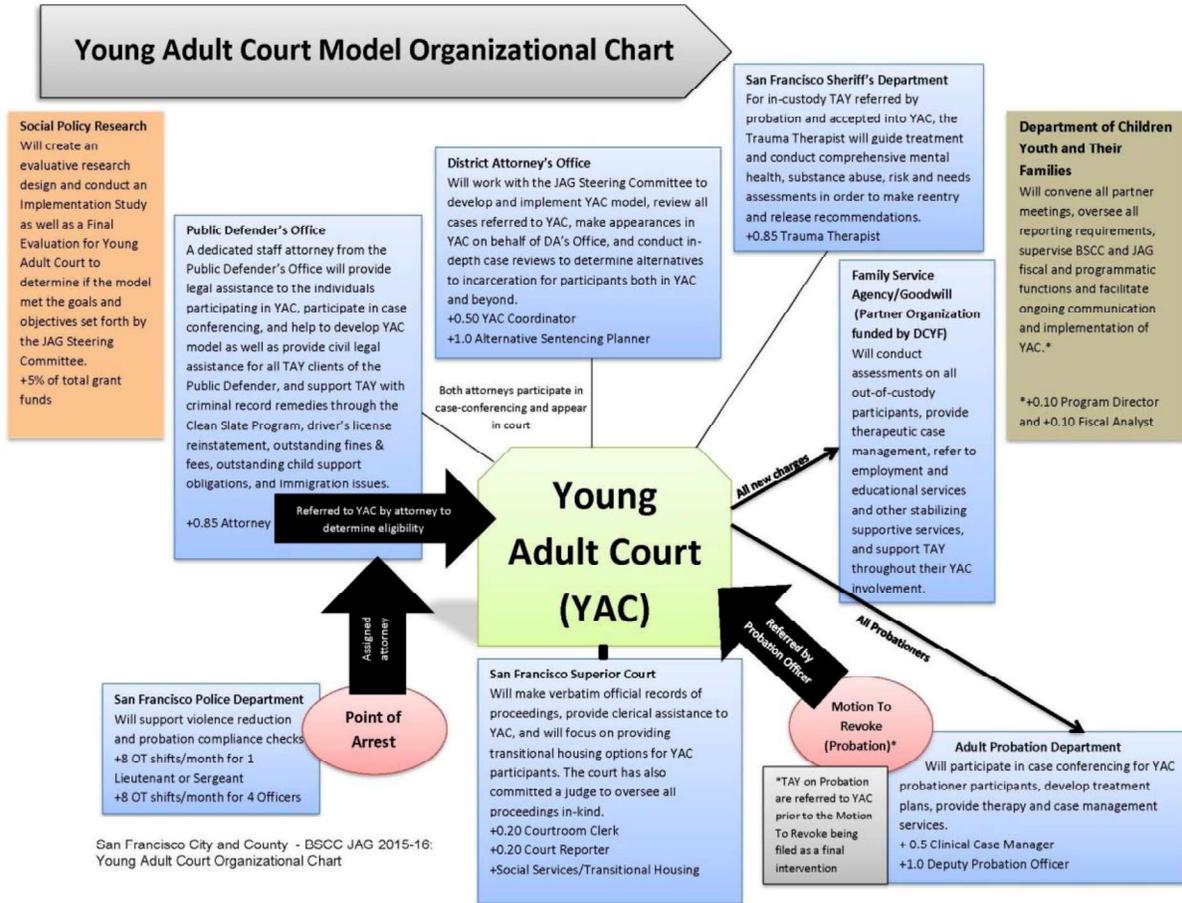
- **Coordinating larger community resources for young adults.** While community-based organizations have the opportunity to make presentations about their services at regular YAC partner meetings, it is unclear how these larger community resources (beyond YAC partners) are being fully leveraged and coordinated on behalf of YAC participants. As one respondent observed, “It continues to be difficult to figure out who to work with outside our small group of people sitting at the table.... there are all these really amazing programs all over the city. How do you determine where to send [young adults]?”
- **Addressing overlap among YAC- and system-level partners.** A couple of respondents noted that some degree of potential or actual overlap and duplication still exists between YAC partners (e.g., in terms of case management and employment services between FSA, CASC, and Goodwill). Documenting partner-specific job descriptions and

expectations—perhaps through an updated, shared memorandum of understanding (MOU) based on early implementation experiences—could help address this issue. Furthermore, a couple of respondents described the overlap between YAC and non-YAC partners, and the difficulty of expecting YAC participants to navigate and meet the appointments and expectations of multiple, system-level partners—for example, case managers in the foster care and criminal justice systems.

- **Addressing confidentiality issues.** A couple of YAC partner interviewees raised the issue of client confidentiality, particularly between YAC participants and their case managers—which points to the need for striking a balance between preserving trust and confidential information, while simultaneously providing the larger YAC team with consistent data on young adults’ level of engagement in YAC.
- **Realizing additional potential with some YAC partners.** To some extent, there have been unanticipated partners, as well as partners that could possibly play a larger role in YAC. For example, private defense attorneys were one group of YAC stakeholders that were not strongly considered during YAC planning. As one respondent described, “They [private counsel] don’t necessarily understand what Young Adult Court is or how, as the attorney, you start to become a part of team around your client’s plan of care.” However, steps have been taken to orient private counsel to YAC. Other partners, including the San Francisco Police Department, are willing but potentially underutilized YAC partners. Some of this may be attributable to lack of clarity on specific partner expectations and limited capacity to engage, rather than to lack of interest in YAC. However, given the lessons of YAC implementation thus far, YAC partners might revisit how best to harness the potential of law enforcement partners, and to build in more opportunities for YAC participants to reconsider their preconceptions of law enforcement representatives.

SPR looks forward to discussing this initial set of implications with YAC partners, particularly in light of more recent developments and adjustments made to the implementation of San Francisco’s Young Adult Court.

Appendix A: YAC Organizational Chart



Appendix B: YAC Eligibility Criteria

I. Residence Eligibility

No residence restriction; however, given YAC'S limited capacity, priority will be given to individuals with connections to San Francisco, including family and other supports.

II. Age Requirement

18-25 years

III. Referral Process

The SFDA will require its ADAs to obtain approval from their Managing Attorneys to refer cases in the following situations:

- Any case that cannot be referred as an open matter (e.g. not eligible on a pre-plea or DEJ basis) per YAC eligibility guidelines;
- Any case with disqualifying conditions per YAC eligibility guidelines;
- Any case referred post-preliminary hearing involving a charge with an identifiable named victim.

IV. Legal Eligibility

Given YAC's limited capacity, felony cases will be prioritized over misdemeanor cases.

A. Misdemeanor Offenses

1. All misdemeanors are eligible on a pre-plea basis, except the following:
(1) drunk driving or other driving offenses, (2) gang allegations, (3) hate crimes, (4) domestic violence, (5) demonstration cases, (6) elder abuse, (7) crimes involving children, and (8) gun cases, (9) offenses with potential sex offender registration requirements, including PC 243.4, 290, 314.1 and 647.6, (10) cases that have been reduced to a misdemeanor pursuant to 17(b).
2. The above-enumerated misdemeanor offenses are eligible following a grant of probation only. The District Attorney may offer a deferred entry of judgment (DEJ) disposition on a case-by-case basis.
3. An individual charged with 3 or more pre-plea cases will be eligible for Young Adult Court following a grant of probation only.

B. Felony Offenses

1. The following felony charges are eligible on a pre-plea basis, providing that the individual does not have any disqualifications listed below:

- i. Sale or Possession for Sale Offenses, including Health & Safety Code sections 11351, 11351.5, 11352, 11359, 11378, 11378.5, or 11379 involving less than 5 grams of controlled substances (or less than 2 ounces of marijuana).
 - ii. Felony Theft Offenses, including Penal Code sections 459 2nd, 475, 487(a)&(c), 496, or 666, where the restitution amount is under \$2000.
 - iii. Felony Auto Offenses, including Penal Code section 459 2nd and Vehicle Code section 10851 where the restitution amount is under \$2000.
 - iv. Vandalism Offenses, including Penal Code section 594, where the restitution amount is under \$2000.
2. The following felony charges are eligible on a DEJ basis, providing that the individual does not have any disqualifications listed below:
 - i. Sale or Possession for Sale, including Health & Safety Code sections 11351, 11351.5, 11352, 11359, 11378, 11378.5, or 11379 involving between 5 and 20 grams of controlled substances (or between 2 and 5 ounces of marijuana).
 - ii. Felony Theft, including Penal Code sections 459 2nd, 475, 487(a)&(c), 496, or 666, where the restitution amount is between \$2000 and \$4000.
 - iii. Felony Auto Offenses, including Penal Code section 459 2nd and Vehicle Code section 10851 where the restitution amount is between \$2000 and \$4000.
 - iv. Vandalism offenses, including Penal Code section 594, where the restitution amount is between \$2000 and \$4000.
 - v. Assault (245)(a)(4).
 - vi. Robbery (211 2nd) with no weapon or injury.
3. All other felonies with a probationary disposition are eligible for referral to YAC following the grant of probation. The District Attorney may offer a DEJ disposition on a case-by-case basis.
4. Individuals with two or more open eligible cases * may be referred to YAC court only following a grant of probation. The District Attorney may offer a DEJ disposition on a case-by-case basis.

* Cases involving multiple events will be considered as separate cases.
5. Unless waived by the District Attorney, all co-defendant cases, regardless of the charge, require guilty pleas with a DEJ prior to the admission into YAC for all "eligible" case-types. For situations in which one defendant is YAC eligible and the other is not, the qualifying co-defendant will not be admitted into YAC unless the District Attorney handling the matter agrees to the severance that would result from the co-defendant's admission into YAC.
6. Motions to Revoke Probation, Mandatory Supervision, and PRCS:

- i. If a defendant is on probation for an offense that is ineligible for YAC, the individual is presumptively not eligible to participate in YAC
- ii. For all supervision cases, the defendant shall make an admission to the violation upon entry to YAC. If the defendant does not complete the YAC program, the defendant will be subject to all potential consequences of revocation.

C. Disqualifying Conditions.

If a disqualifying condition exists, the District Attorney may agree to waive the limitation on a case-by-case basis. Disqualifying conditions include the following:

1. Current offenses involving the use of a firearm.
2. Individuals with more than two open felony cases*.
3. Prior successful completion of Young Adult Court.
4. Prior conviction of or sustained petition for a "strike" (serious or violent felony pursuant to Penal Code section 667.S(c) and 1192.7(c) offense) within eight years of the current offense.
5. Active membership in an organized street gang, as determined by the District Attorney with input from defense counsel.
6. Current offenses in which great or serious bodily injury is alleged (with the exception of 245(a)(4)).

D. Plea/Probation Reductions

Negotiated benefits of successful completion of Young Adult Court may include the following:

1. For pre-plea cases:
 - Dismissal of a case pursuant to PC 1001.7 and sealing of arrest pursuant 851.90 shall occur unless there is a negotiated disposition to the contrary;
2. For post-plea cases:
 - The reduction of a felony plea to a misdemeanor conviction;
 - The withdrawal of a plea to a strike offense in lieu of additional terms agreed to by the parties;
 - The withdrawal of a plea and dismissal pursuant to PC 1001.7 and sealing of arrest pursuant to PC 851.90; and
3. For probation cases:
 - Reduction of length of probation term and dismissal of fines, fees and conviction pursuant to PC 1203.4;
 - The reduction of a felony plea to a misdemeanor conviction.

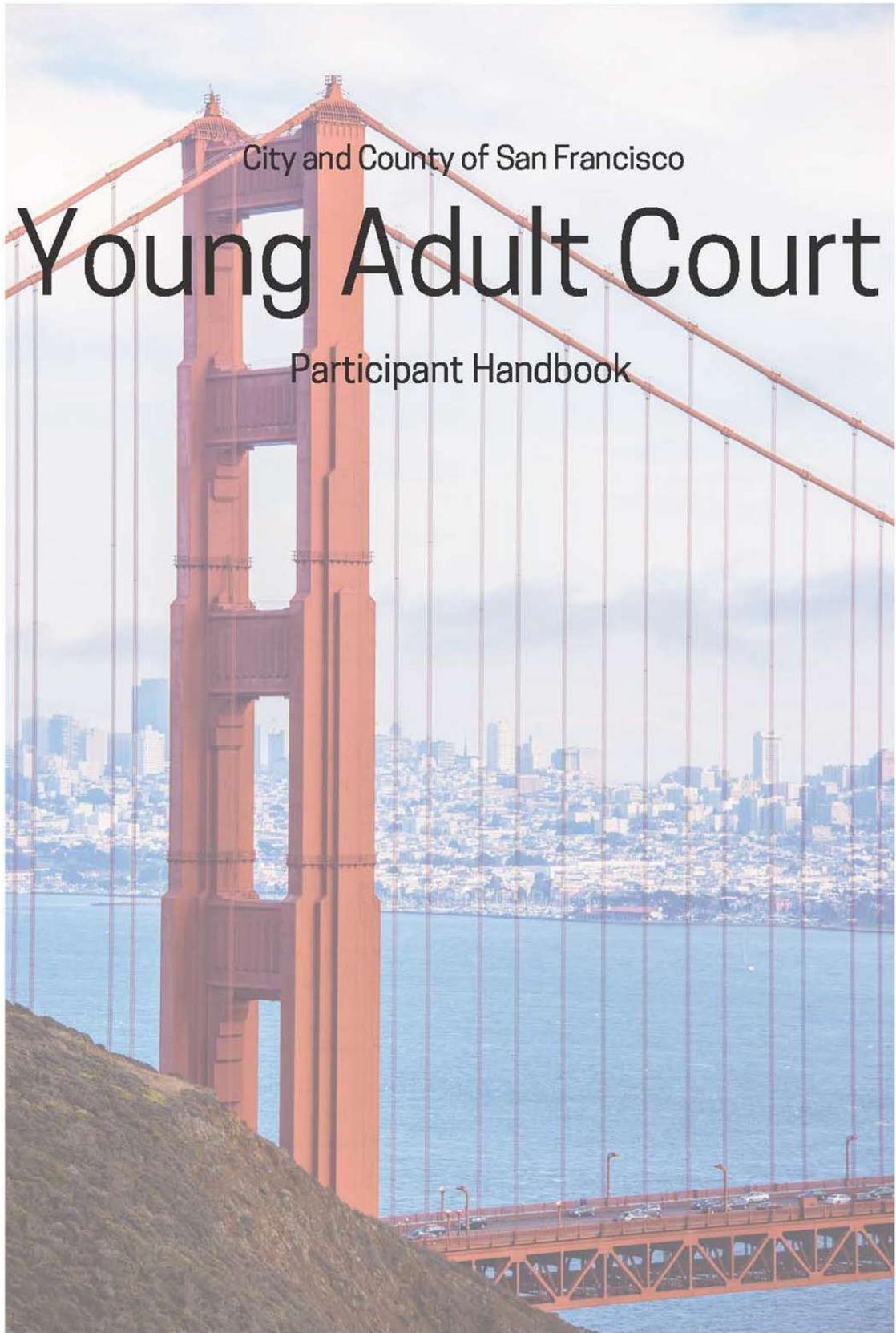
E. Restitution Requirement

For any case involving loss of or damage to property, restitution will be ordered.

V. Confidentiality

A statement or any information procured from statements made by the defendant to any Probation Officer, Young Adult Court staff, program case manager, or any member of the YAC team, that is made during the course of referral to or participation in YAC, shall not be admissible in any subsequent action or criminal proceeding.

Appendix C: YAC Participant Handbook



City and County of San Francisco

Young Adult Court

Participant Handbook

Welcome to San Francisco Superior Court's Young Adult Court

This handbook is intended to:

Answer questions

Address concerns

Give you information about Young Adult Court (YAC)

As a participant in this program, you are expected to follow the instructions given in court by the Judge and follow the Wellness Care Plan that you develop with your YAC case manager. This handbook explains what is expected of you and what you can expect from YAC.

Entering and successfully completing YAC may result in important legal benefits in your case, which will be explained by your attorney. If you are successful in this program, your case will be 'expunged' or removed from your record. This program can support you in your personal and professional goals and should be considered when you decide to enter into YAC.

If you have any questions about this handbook or about Young Adult Court, ask your case manager, probation officer (if you have one) or your attorney.

What is Young Adult Court?

YAC is for adults ages 18 to 25 arrested in San Francisco, who have legal and social service needs, and are given the opportunity to participate in YAC instead of the regular criminal court process.

YAC is a collaborative court of the San Francisco Superior Court. Collaborative courts use a team approach to connect participants to community services and other opportunities. The goal is to support participants so they do not commit new crimes. The YAC team includes a Judge, Treatment Providers, Assistant District Attorney, Deputy Public Defender, Defense Attorney, Probation Officer – and you.

What do I have to do?

YAC Treatment Team members will work with you to create a Wellness Care Plan based on your individual needs and goals which may include housing, education, employment, financial benefits, mental and physical wellness, parenting and life skills support.

To participate in YAC, you must agree to follow your Wellness Care Plan, which is a shared commitment between you and the other members of the YAC team. Before you sign the last page of this handbook, you will have an opportunity to review it with your attorney and have your questions answered.

You will appear before the YAC Judge on a regular basis. For the first several months, you will likely come to court every week. As you start to meet your goals, court hearings will take place less often.

How you behave in court can affect the order in which your case is called. Be on time for your court hearing. Be courteous and

respectful of all people in the courtroom. Dress appropriately (no hats, no hoods, pants up, no midriff tops, no shorts).

How long is court?

Court is in session on Tuesday afternoons starting at 2:30pm. Court usually lasts about 2 hours. Depending on how well you are doing with your Wellness Care Plan, your hearing may be called earlier or later in the calendar.

What if I am on probation while in YAC?

Some participants in YAC are also on probation. If you are, it is mandatory that you report to your probation officer as scheduled. Your YAC Wellness Care Plan will help you to meet your probation obligations. It is important that you know who your assigned officer is and that he or she has your updated contact information. If you do well in YAC, you may have your probation reduced.

How long will I be involved in YAC?

The length of time you participate in YAC depends upon your criminal charges and individual progress with your Wellness Care Plan. There is no fixed period of time but participants can expect to be in the program for at least one year. While you are participating in YAC, the Judge, your case manager and your probation officer (if you have one) will keep track of your participation and progress through the phases, and will work with you to determine when you are ready to graduate.

Your case will return to the regular criminal court process if you are terminated by the Court for not following your plan, or, if you voluntarily withdraw from YAC.

How YAC can work for me?

Services and Resources: Once accepted into YAC, you will be linked to some or all of the following services: case management, housing, job training and placement, education, group and/or individual therapy, parenting resources, health care, and benefits. We recognize that housing is very difficult. However, the YAC team will work with you to find shelter or a more secure environment for you.

Recognition of Progress: As you progress through your Wellness Care Plan and the phases, your achievements will be publicly recognized by the Judge and the team. You may benefit from rewards such as reduced court appearances and gift cards.

Legal Benefits: If you successfully complete your Wellness Care Plan and graduate, you will leave the criminal justice system in a better position than the more traditional criminal court process. For example, your probation may be terminated early, your charges may be reduced, your charges may be dismissed, or you may be able to expunge your record. Every case is different. Your attorney will discuss the specifics of your case and explain the benefits for your case/s if you successfully complete YAC.

Opportunity: YAC offers you a chance to connect and receive services and support, practice and develop skills that lead to success in adulthood, and receive a better legal outcome than if you had remained in criminal court.

Graduation: Once you are consistently engaged with your Wellness Care Plan, following the Judge's orders, and remaining arrest-free, you may be eligible for graduation from YAC. There are four phases in the program. Graduation is determined by your achievements in each program phase.

Remember that there are many people who make up your YAC team - including you. Your whole team wants you to succeed. If you take advantage of the assistance offered, you can discover many ways to make a better life for yourself.

PROGRAM PHASES

The Young Adult Court program is a four-phased highly structured program lasting from 10-18 months. The length of time varies depending upon your progress.

Each phase includes activities and accomplishments and consists of achievements to move into the next phase. You and your case manager or probation officer, as well as your YAC team, will determine your readiness for phase advancement based on your goals.

The more engaged you are with your Wellness Care Plan, the better your progress and outcome. It is not just about showing up.

As you move from one phase to another, your family and/or other important persons in your life are invited to join you in court to celebrate your success.

PHASE ONE – Engagement and Assessment	
Objectives	Intake, assessment and orientation; meet with your case manager; develop your Wellness Care Plan; attend group and/or individual therapy sessions; meet immediate needs
Expected Length of Phase	2-3 months
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Weekly court hearings ➤ Create Wellness Care Plan goals (housing and employment for example) and begin working on them ➤ Attend support groups as directed ➤ Comply with the terms and conditions of probation (if applicable) ➤ Initial baseline drug testing will be required ➤ Drug testing based on identified needs
Advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No Motions to Revoke probation or probation sanctions ➤ Satisfactory treatment progress or completion ➤ Satisfactory compliance with all program requirements ➤ Agreement of YAC Team

PHASE TWO – Stability and Accountability	
Objectives	Continue Wellness Care Plan
Expected Length of Phase	2-5 months
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Attend required court hearings ➤ Ongoing review and updating of Wellness Care Plan with goals accomplished (including housing, employment or educational goals) ➤ Comply with the terms and conditions of probation ➤ Group, individual and/or family therapy, if required ➤ Attendance of support groups as directed ➤ Random drug testing as directed
Advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No Motions to Revoke probation or probation sanctions ➤ Satisfactory treatment progress or completion ➤ Satisfactory compliance with all program requirements ➤ Agreement of YAC Team

PHASE THREE – Wellness and Community Connection	
Objectives	Wellness, pursuit of education and/or vocational goals, connect with the community at large
Expected Length of Phase	4-6 months
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Attend required court hearings ➤ Ongoing review and updating of Wellness care Plan with goals accomplished (including housing, employment or educational goals) ➤ Group, individual and/or family therapy, if required ➤ Attendance of support groups as directed ➤ Stable housing arrangements ➤ Begin mentor relationship ➤ Comply with terms and conditions of probation ➤ Random drug testing as directed
Advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No Motions to Revoke probation or probation sanctions ➤ Satisfactory treatment progress or completion ➤ Satisfactory compliance with all program requirements ➤ Agreement of YAC Team

PHASE FOUR –Program Transition	
Objectives	Transition from YAC while maintaining wellness and positive community connections
Expected Length of Phase	Minimum of 2-4 months
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Attend required court hearings ➤ Completion of all Wellness Care Plan goals ➤ Develop a Pre-Graduation Life Plan with your case manager ➤ Group, individual and/or family treatment, if required ➤ Attendance of support groups as directed ➤ Maintain employment or participation in an educational/vocational program ➤ Stable housing arrangements ➤ Continue with mentor relationship ➤ Comply with terms and conditions of probation ➤ Random drug testing if applicable
(Advancement) GRADUATION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Completion of Pre-Graduation Life Plan ➤ No Motion to Revoke probation or probation sanctions ➤ Successful completion of all program requirements ➤ Agreement of YAC Team

On your graduation day, you will be invited to share with the YAC Judge how life has changed for you since you started the program. The Judge will present you with a certificate of completion and will recognize your accomplishments. Family and friends are invited to join you to celebrate your success.

What are the expectations of YAC? (more detail)

You must meet the following commitments to participate in YAC.

Appear in Court as Scheduled

You must appear in front of the YAC Judge on a regular basis. The Judge will be given progress reports about your engagement in your Wellness Care Plan and with probation (if you are on probation). The Judge will ask you about your progress and discuss any challenges you may be experiencing. Depending on your progress, you may have to come to court several times a month. As you make progress, you will have less frequent court appearances.

Follow your Wellness Care Plan

Your plan will include some of the following components:

- Case management and therapeutic services
- Group, individual and/or family therapy
- Meeting with your probation officer (if you have one)
- Meeting with a mentor
- Substance abuse counseling (as applicable)
- Housing, education, employment and parenting support

What's in Your Wellness Care Plan?

Case Management Services

Your case manager will connect you to services in the community to achieve your goals and will inform the Court on your progress on completing your Wellness Care Plan. You are expected to attend all scheduled appointments, both with your case manager and with agencies that you are referred to by your case manager.

Substance Abuse or Alcohol Treatment

YAC takes a harm reduction approach to substance use among participants who are abusing drugs and/or alcohol. YAC recognizes that substance abuse often compromises the safety, wellbeing, and

mental health of our participants, and we work with you to move towards abstaining from problematic drug and alcohol use.

Drug Testing

Initial base line drug testing will take place during phase one. The YAC Team hears about all drug test results including any failure to test. The Judge may order a drug test at any time. Tampering with the drug test or refusal to be tested is considered a positive test and may result in a remand or termination from the program (if a urine test is used, this includes flushes, diluting, using someone else's urine) or other negative consequences. A positive or "dirty" test will also result in a negative response from the court.

Additional Services and Activities

Your Wellness Care Plan will likely include a number of activities including therapy, employment and education programs, and other services. Completing these activities is your road map to successful completion of the YAC program. Your plan may change over time, as you complete activities and/or adjust your goals. Your case manager will provide YAC with a report about your attendance and progress, and will contact staff at various community agencies to confirm that you are attending and engaged and that the services are meeting your needs.

Rewards and Responses

There are rewards for your conduct while you are a participant in YAC – both good and bad.

Rewards are received for doing well in YAC and are awarded on a case by case basis, as determined by the YAC Team. “Doing well” means:

- Arriving on time for court hearings and scheduled appointments
- Following the Judge's recommendations
- Following your Wellness Care Plan
- Being actively engaged in court and your plan
- Practicing and developing accountable behaviors

Responses are consequences for not meeting your commitments to YAC. Responses are intended to keep you on track, encourage you to make good choices, and help you to succeed in the program. Responses are given in order of increasing seriousness.

The following behaviors may result in the Judge ordering one or more responses.

- Missed court appearances
- Missed appointments with your case manager or other service providers
- Infractions of rules of treatment including verbal threat of violence
- Other failures to follow your Wellness Care Plan
- Continued substance abuse
- Refusing to drug test
- Failure to follow conditions of probation.
- Missed appointments with probation.
- Leaving your treatment program or supervised housing
- New criminal offenses

Termination from YAC

New arrests could result in being terminated from YAC. Other violations which may result in termination or a judicial response include: failing to meet program commitments; failing to follow instructions of the probation officer; violence or threats of violence directed at the YAC Team or other participants. The YAC Judge will make the final decisions about termination from YAC. If you are terminated from YAC, your case may be returned to the regular criminal court process.

Commitment to Participate in Young Adult Court

Young Adult Court is a program that will help you to change your life. It is an opportunity that requires your full participation. Please read each expectation carefully, then initial. By initialing, you are stating that you fully understand and commit to meeting each expectation.

The YAC team is committed to supporting you in meeting your Wellness Care Plan goals.

Case Manager Signature

_____ **Date** _____

_____ I will appear in Court for my scheduled progress hearings.

_____ I will contact my case manager and/or probation officer as scheduled.

_____ I will work to meet the goals of my Wellness Care Plan.

_____ I understand my progress will be monitored and that rewards and responses will be applied as appropriate.

_____ I will meet the terms and conditions of my probation.

_____ I will comply with drug testing requirements if applicable. If I miss a test, I understand that I am subject to a response from the court.

_____ I understand this is a phased- based program and that I progress through four different phases.

_____ I understand that my progress and engagement will be discussed at pre-court team meetings at which I will not be present.

_____ I am accountable to all YAC expectations.

Participant Signature

_____ **Date** _____

Important Names and Numbers

My attorney:

Name: _____

Telephone #: _____

My case manager:

Name: _____

Telephone #: _____

My housing program:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____

My probation officer : (if on probation)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____

Other Contact:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____

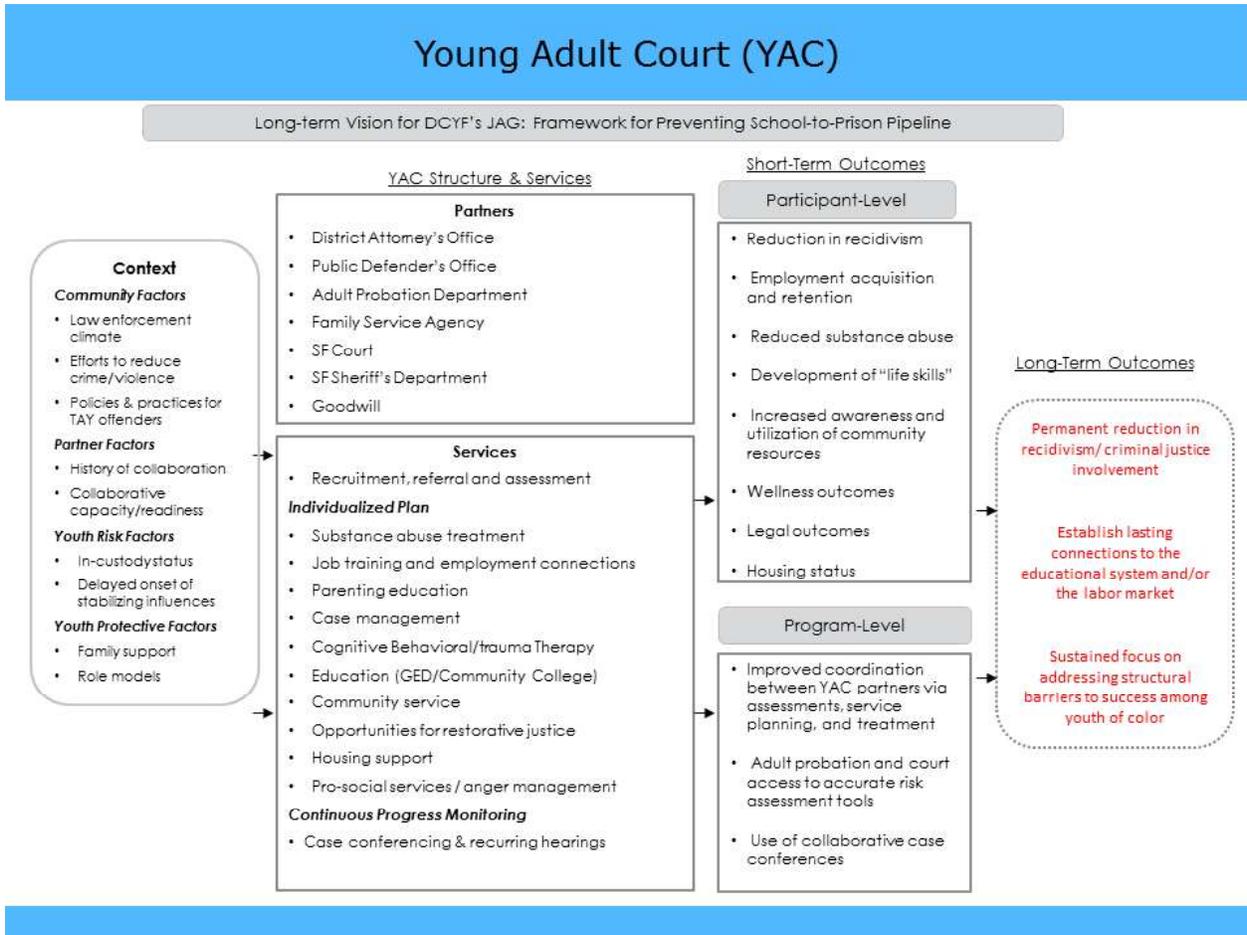
Other Contact:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____

Appendix D: YAC Logic Model



Appendix E: Other Young Adult Court Models

To provide context for our findings from the YAC evaluation, SPR staff conducted a literature review of existing models of young adult court. Through this review, we identified five programs that offer similar services for young adults/transitional aged youth. In the fall of 2016, we reached out to all five programs to conduct telephone interviews with program leaders to learn more about their program models. Two programs responded to our request for one-hour telephone interviews; we interviewed one program and another program provided written responses from two staff members. Using interview data and a review of program documents, we summarize these programs below.

Douglas County Young Adult Court

The Douglas County Young Adult Court (YAC) in Omaha, Nebraska has been working with young adults since 2004. This court serves young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 in Douglas County. In 2016, the YAC served 30 participants; program staff reported that their capacity is 45 participants. The Douglas County Young Adult Court is a probation-based program that collaborates with partners from the justice system and other community agencies such as the Douglas County Department of Corrections, Douglas County district attorney, public defender, judge, and local service providers. YAC staff describe the relationship between the YAC and the Department of Corrections as a “tremendous collaboration,” with the Department of Corrections providing the bulk of the program services during the first phase, including both GED and mental health services.

The YAC uses a three-phase program through which participants progress for the duration of approximately 18 to 24 months. Upon entry into the program, participants enter Phase 1, when they are placed in community corrections for 60-90 days to participate in assessments, behavior and reasoning classes, and GED classes (if needed). During this phase, participants may be transitioned from jail to house arrest and begin to work on their education and employment plans. After 120 to 180 days, participants move into Phase 2 and continue their treatment plans, participate in cognitive classes, and may withdraw their guilty plea in front of the YAC judge. Following this stage, participants enter Phase 3 and a full year of probation. Successful graduation from the program results in the reduction of felony to misdemeanor charges.

The Douglas County Young Adult Court meets once a month. In Fall 2016, the YAC was assigned a new judge who has expressed interest in increasing the frequency of court meetings to twice a month. The new judge, in addition to the YAC partners, believe more frequent sessions will allow the judge to build stronger relationships with clients, as well as provide more frequent opportunities to reward the positive changes made by participants.

At the program-level, the Douglas County Young Adult Court stands out for its strong judge-client relationships and the program’s commitment to connecting young adults with substance abuse treatment services and education options. Additionally, YAC staff highlighted the programmatic lesson of being flexible in how and when program services are delivered. For example, after receiving participant feedback, the YAC restructured its mentoring component from a one-on-one model to a group session centered around relevant topics. As YAC staff said about this adjustment and the program as whole, “You try things. You try and learn from other people, and see where it takes you.”

Kalamazoo County Young Adult Diversion Court

The Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) in Kalamazoo County, Michigan began serving young adults in 2013. The YADC was created to support young adults between the ages of 17 and 20 successfully meet the terms of their probation and, ultimately, remove criminal charges from their record. YADC services include case management, life skills and leadership classes, community service, and connections to therapy, education, and transportation support. Staff describe the YADC as a “living model” from its inception, designed to adapt to changes over time and incorporate participant feedback.

The court serves a maximum 20 individuals at any given time and meets every other week. Court sessions focus on participants’ strengths and positive life changes. During each court session, participants share lessons learned from the life skills class and the ways in which these lessons are being incorporated in their own lives. The Court uses incentives and sanctions to respond to participants’ progress. Staff noted that they only administer sanctions as a last resort, as the court and its partners have adopted the Therapeutic Jurisprudence model, utilize Restorative Justice principles, and operate under a positive reinforcement framework. Staff noted that sanctions are only used in extreme cases such as extensive lack of follow-through or chronic substance abuse while in treatment.

Participants enter YADC with eight months of expected program participation; however, some individuals have completed the program in six months while others have needed the full 24 months allowed. Staff noted that participants think the YADC meets too frequently. However, as participants progress through the program, they show less resistance coming to court. In fact, staff reported that many participants return after graduation for job search assistance, guidance, and support. Lastly, partnerships are crucial to the operations and success of the Kalamazoo County YADC, which is why staff are always exploring ways to expand their community partnerships.

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