



California Youth Justice Initiative – Santa Clara County

INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) is an Oakland-based non-profit that advances justice by defending the rights of children and improving the systems impacting their lives. We focus on complex challenges that disproportionately affect low-income children and youth of color, and on solutions that require multiple public systems to change their policies, practices, and culture.

NCYL's California Youth Justice Initiative (CYJI) engages in both statewide and local policy efforts to improve youth outcomes and increase public safety. With generous support from Google.org and the San Francisco 49ers Foundations, CYJI is building a countywide collective impact campaign to transform Santa Clara County's youth justice system through coalition building and deep partnerships in local communities that shape our policy advocacy, working directly with impacted communities, nonprofit organizations, civil legal aid agencies, and system stakeholders to build the community's capacity, provide technical assistance, and collaborate on local priorities and policies.

VISION AND OBJECTIVES

CYJI launched our site in Santa Clara County in 2017 and is leading a collective impact campaign to create a juvenile justice system in which:

- Youth are only involved in the system when necessary;
- Youth are placed in developmentally appropriate settings and provided services and supports consistent with the principles of positive youth development;
- Youth on probation are provided the supports needed to achieve their potential;
- Public agencies and community-based organizations collaborate more effectively; and
- Youth of color are not overrepresented in any part of the system.

To achieve our vision in Santa Clara County, we are working to:

- Reduce youth incarceration rates through the elimination of incarceration as a response to youth who commit lower-level offenses;
- Ensure all youth in conflict with the law are treated appropriately for their age and level of development;
- Expand access to trauma-informed, evidence-based rehabilitative supports and mentoring services for youth in confinement and in their home communities;
- Increase inter-agency data-sharing, data transparency, and data-driven decision-making by public systems and community organizations that serve youth.

CYJI is committed to involving as many stakeholders as possible to successfully advance our efforts and achieve these goals. Our local partners include the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors, Office of the District Attorney, Court, Public Defender's Office, Probation Department, Public Health and dozens of community-based organizations serving youth, such as ConXion, Fresh Lifelines for Youth, Silicon Valley De-Bug, and Youth Alliance.

PROGRESS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

As the backbone organization of this effort, we conducted a landscape analysis of Santa Clara County to identify existing agencies and service providers, available services and service gaps, and policy issue areas in need of advocacy and reform. Our expertise and desire to work with all system stakeholders has established us a trusted resource in the county's juvenile justice reform efforts. We collaborate and meet regularly with systems leadership and provide guidance to support inter-agency coordination as well as engage in the difficult conversations necessary to generate the political will to sustain and deepen this work. We also lead a community partnership team responsible for ensuring that community members, impacted youth, and grassroots organizations are able to shape and participate in this work to meet the needs of the communities most impacted by existing juvenile justice policies and practices.

CYJI works with our public and private partners to guide the implementation of NCYL-led state legislation and local NCYL-led initiatives:

- Lead the county in changing policies, establishing protocols, and expanding services to support children 11 years of age and younger who can no longer be arrested or processed through the juvenile justice system.
- Develop new judicial protocols and practices that limit the practice of prosecuting youth as adults, where they receive no rehabilitative services.
- Provide assistance to public agencies and community-based organizations to secure \$3 million in new state dollars for local community-based alternative programs and services for youth at-risk of incarceration and system involvement.
- Provide assistance to develop model rehabilitative programs for high-needs/high-risk youth utilizing evidence-based treatment models in local probation facilities and secure an additional \$3 million in new state dollars to revamp the local probation ranch program.
- Establish a network of system impacted youth organized around the goals of reducing system involvement of youth and getting the incarceration of girls to zero through increasing community-based supports.
- Work with county and community stakeholders to establish an Office of Youth Development and Diversion to oversee youth services countywide.

THE YJI TEAM

CYJI staff are passionate attorneys, policy experts, community organizers, advocates, and allies who are grounded in the lived experience of people in the communities in which we work. We have decades of experience working with youth, families, service providers, policymakers, and system leaders across California. Four of the seven team members have direct, lived experience in the juvenile and/or criminal justice system, with three working as attorneys and one as a Community Policy Associate. From this experience, we bring a deeper level of dedication, urgency, credibility, and understanding as we work to transform the juvenile justice system.

To learn more about NCYL's California Youth Justice Initiative, including information on how to become involved, please contact Frankie Guzman, Director of NCYL's California Youth Justice Initiative at fguzman@youthlaw.org and Darya Larizadeh, Policy Attorney, at dlarizadeh@youthlaw.org.