

# Valuing Individuality while Building Community

Final Evaluation Report:  
San Francisco Department of  
Children, Youth, and Their  
Families' Grants for  
Disconnected Transitional Age  
Youth

March 2018





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# Introduction

## Grant Background

In San Francisco, and across the nation, many young people age 18 to 24 are disconnected from the supports and services they need to ensure a successful transition into stable and self-sufficient adulthood. Most of these disconnected Transitional Age Youth (TAY) have to overcome challenging backgrounds, often including significant trauma, and are at an elevated risk for unemployment, poverty, involvement with the criminal justice system, and homelessness.<sup>1</sup> San Francisco's Children and Families First Legislation defines "disconnected TAY" as young people age 18-24 who:<sup>2</sup>

- are homeless or in danger of homelessness;
- have dropped out of high school;
- have a disability or other special needs, including substance abuse;
- are low-income parents;
- are undocumented;
- are new immigrants and/or English learners;
- are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning ("LGBTQQ"); and/or
- are transitioning from the foster care, juvenile justice, criminal justice or special education system.

In 2014, the City and County of San Francisco renamed the Children's Fund to the Children and Youth Fund, expanding its use to include services for TAY. As part of this expansion, the Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families (DCYF) began administering funds for TAY services. In 2016, DCYF awarded its first rounds of pilot grants designated for TAY-serving organizations throughout San Francisco. The first round of pilot grants began in February 2016 and included a five-month planning period; the second round of grants began in July 2016. Both sets of grants are active through June 2018.

DCYF's TAY grants fund two distinct models for serving TAY. **Innovation** grants fund individual organizations to address gaps or barriers in existing TAY services. **Collaborative model** grants fund multi-agency efforts to improve educational and employment outcomes for disconnected TAY, building on existing resources and coordinated by a lead agency.

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**"Pilot programs are great.  
It's a time to be innovative  
and to be forward thinkers"**

**-Grantee**

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<sup>1</sup> Disconnected Transitional Youth In San Francisco; Mayor's Transitional Youth Task Force, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Charter Section 16.108 of the Children and Families First Legislation

## This Report

DCYF engaged Harder+Company Community Research to conduct a process and implementation evaluation of this pilot round of TAY grants. The goal of this evaluation was to help DCYF, service providers, and other stakeholders learn more about what high-quality TAY services look like and—in light of DCYF’s long-term funding commitment to TAY—to inform DCYF’s ongoing support for this population. This report addresses the following evaluation questions:

- What are the characteristics and needs of San Francisco’s diverse population of disconnected TAY?
- What are the qualities or components of the most effective services for TAY?
- How are grantees strengthening their capacity to serve TAY?
- How can DCYF and other funders help strengthen the network of TAY services?

This document presents findings that draw on the following data sources:

- A TAY survey completed by 144 program participants, administered by grantees throughout the fiscal year 2016-17;<sup>3</sup>
- A survey of all DCYF-funded TAY grantees (23 respondents total), administered in October 2017;
- Three focus groups conducted with a total of 17 participants representing 15 funded organizations in November 2017; and
- Year-end reports and associated data for 13 TAY grants (10 innovation and 3 collaboratives) submitted to DCYF through its Contract Management System (CMS), capturing data for fiscal year 2016-17.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the report, the number of respondents for specific items within a single survey question may vary, and in these cases we have indicated the range of response counts for each item.

The remainder of the report is organized as follows:

- The rest of the **Introduction** includes additional information about funded programs and TAY participants.
- **San Francisco’s TAY** provides a discussion of the unique characteristics of TAY sub-populations in San Francisco, underscoring the intersectional nature of young people’s identities and the complexities of their needs.
- **Serving TAY** examines the centrality of trusting relationships when serving disconnected TAY, highlighting key characteristics of quality programming and promising practices for addressing young people’s needs.
- **Provider Capacity** explores strategies for building and strengthening providers’ ability to serve this population, with a focus on how funders like DCYF can continue to be responsive to the needs of grantees and program participants.
- The final section offers **Recommendations** for DCYF and other funders that wish to support TAY-serving organizations.

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Data from the TAY survey are available at <http://dcyf.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=5171>

<sup>4</sup> Note: Contract Management System data available at <http://dcyf.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=5171>

**About the Grantees**

DCYF-funded programs offer a range of supports and referrals, from short-term interventions for acute and immediate needs to longer-term services such as education and workforce development. With this comprehensive mix of programs, DCYF's grantees have the collective potential to support TAY with their various service-related needs. Although each program delivers unique programming that supports young people in different ways, all grantees are united in their goal to increase participants' sense of community and connection as well as their readiness to achieve stability and self-sufficiency. Exhibits 1 and 2 below display detailed information about all of the funded programs, including grantee organization(s), a brief program description, and the number of participants served as of June 30, 2017.

**Exhibit 1. Innovation Grants**

Innovation Grant	Agency	Program Description	Number of Participants*
<b>Code Ramp</b>	Success Center San Francisco	Four-week "boot camp" training program to get TAY informed and geared up about opportunities in the tech industry and prepare TAY for more advanced courses, in partnership with Hack Reactor	<b>31</b>
<b>College Success Program</b>	Larkin Street Youth Services	Ten-week Bridge Academy and a continuum of supports once a young person is enrolled in school	<b>175</b>
<b>Flour &amp; Opportunity Baking Program</b>	Mission Language & Vocational School	18-week occupational training in basic culinary arts and baking, with vocational English as a Second Language; includes additional 3-6 month apprenticeship	participant data not available
<b>HealthCore</b>	3rd Street Youth Center & Clinic	Innovative health sector workforce development program preparing disconnected TAY in Bayview Hunters Point for skilled healthcare careers	<b>52</b>
<b>Healthy Bayview Environmental Training Program</b>	Hunters Point Family	Educate, train, and employ disconnected TAY in environmental education, gardening, aquaponics, food services, landscaping, environmental remediation, and other "green" jobs	<b>35</b>
<b>Jovenes</b>	Legal Services for Children Innovation	Legal and social work services for TAY immigrants in need of assistance establishing legal immigration status	<b>14</b>
<b>Record, Reconnect, and Restore</b>	Sunset Youth Services	Program that uses the power of music, skill building, employment, and community-based relationships to provide incarcerated youth with opportunities to reintegrate into their communities and successfully join the workforce	<b>150</b>
<b>TAY Services</b>	San Francisco LGBT Community Center	Cultivates opportunities for independence, self-efficacy and community building for disconnected LGBTQ youth	<b>236</b>

Innovation Grant	Agency	Program Description	Number of Participants*
<b>Service Corps</b>	Community Housing Partnership	Harness volunteers to respond to community needs and equip participants with skills, peer relationships, work experience, and career pathways	43
<b>Two Generation Transitional-Aged Parent Support Model</b>	Safe and Sound (formerly San Francisco Child Abuse Prevention Center)	Two-generation interventions that support a family's "protective factors," employment collaboration, youth training, and job placement; in partnership with Jewish Vocational Services	participant data not available

\* Based on data submitted to DCYF's Contract Management System (CMS), 7/1/16 through 6/30/17

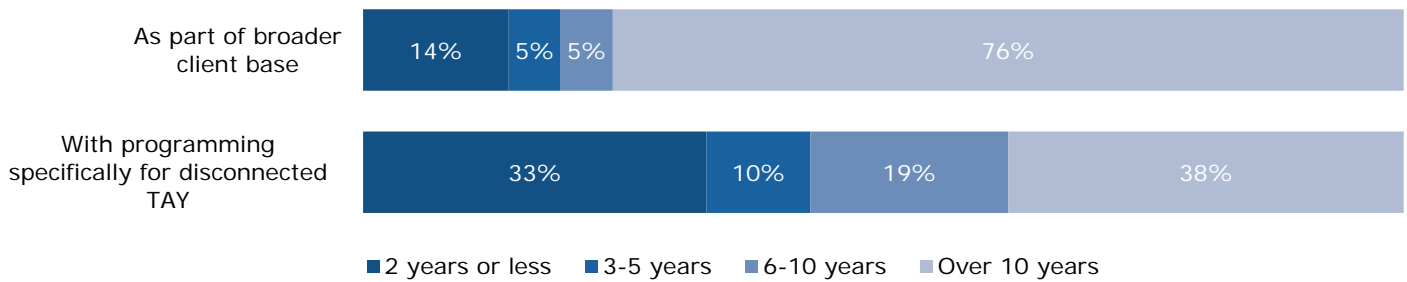
## Exhibit 2. Collaborative Model Grants

Collaborative Model Grant	Agency	Program Description	Number of Participants*
<b>Early Childhood Education Transition Pathway</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jewish Vocational Services</li> <li>City College of San Francisco</li> <li>Wu Yee Children's Services</li> </ul>	Early childhood education career pathway training program with a range of academic supports, supported work experience, support enrolling in education and training and/or immediate employment	17
<b>Homeless and LGBTQ TAY Collaborative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Larkin Street Youth Services</li> <li>Asian Neighborhood Design</li> <li>Outward Bound California</li> <li>San Francisco LBGT Center</li> <li>UCSF Osher Center for Integrated Medicine <i>(funded partners only)</i></li> </ul>	Strengthen outreach and engagement and stabilization components to build a foundation for education and workforce enrollment, with a focus on referral and utilizing the services that already exist in San Francisco	109
<b>TAY Connect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Success Center San Francisco</li> <li>Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC)</li> <li>Huckleberry Youth Program</li> <li>LYRIC (Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center)</li> <li>New Door Ventures</li> <li>United Way of the Bay Area/ MatchBridge</li> </ul>	Create a linkage of services among six providers to provide full continuum of support: engage and stabilize, provide them with education, job placement, career training, and industry certifications	participant data not available

\* Based on data submitted to DCYF's Contract Management System (CMS), 7/1/16 through 6/30/17

Each grantee also brings its unique experience working with disconnected TAY, as displayed in Exhibit 3:

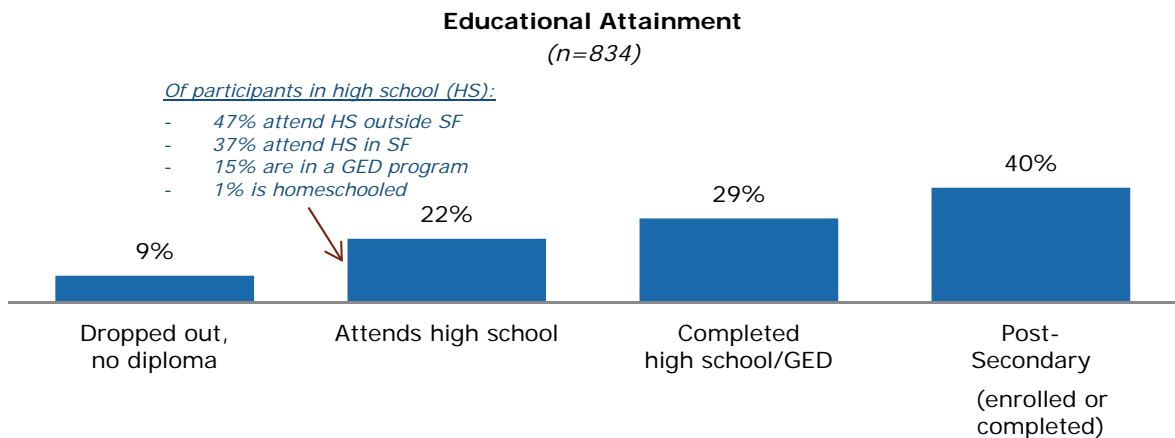
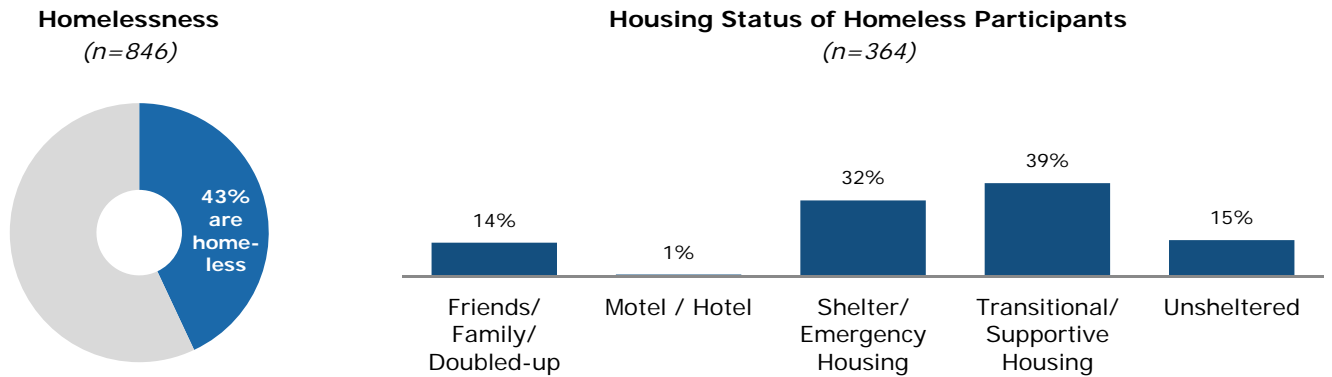
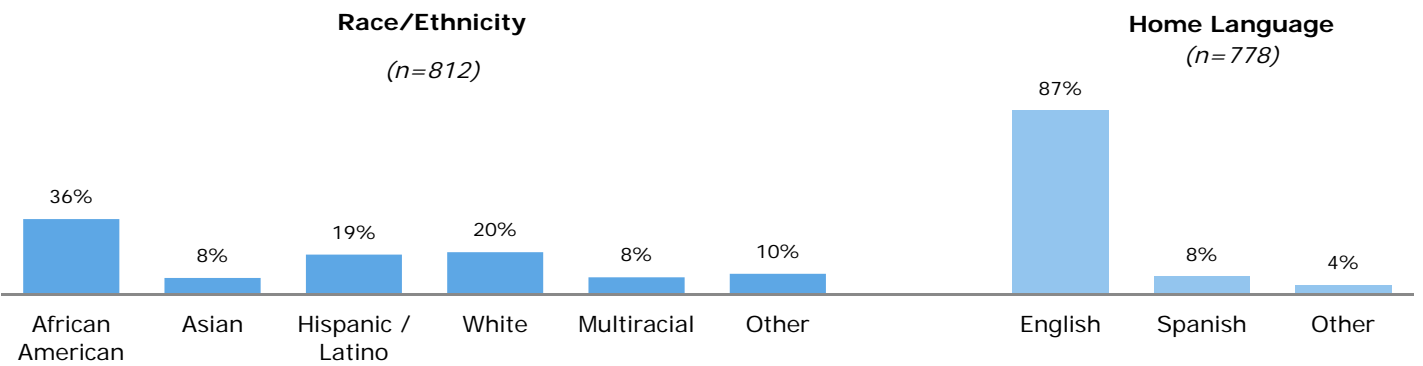
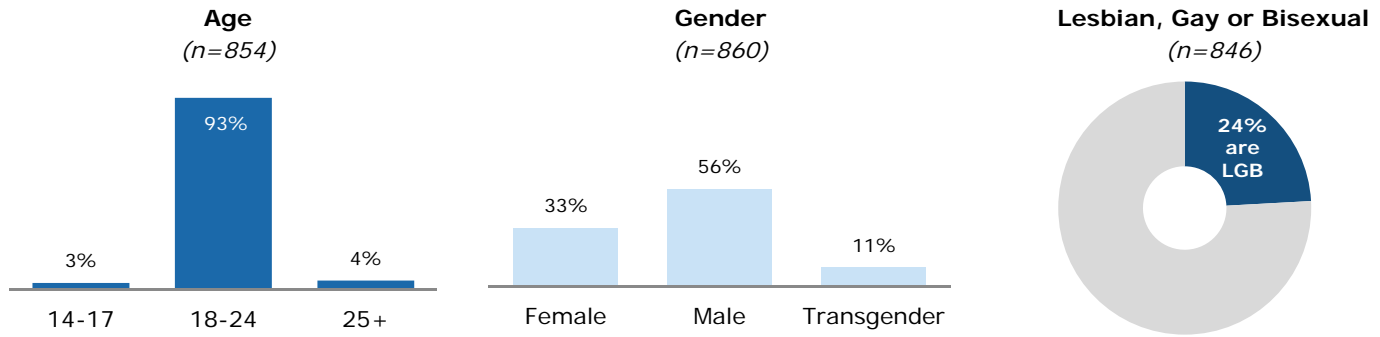
**Exhibit 3. Length of Time Grantees Have Worked with TAY (n=21)**



While three-quarters (76 percent) of DCYF's TAY grantees have a history of serving disconnected TAY for more than ten years as part of their broader client base, their experience providing TAY-specific programming—meaning that programs and services are specifically tailored to the unique needs of TAY—varies. One-third of grantees (33 percent) have been providing TAY-specific programming for two years or less, nearly one-third (29 percent) have been providing TAY-specific programming for three to ten years, and a slightly larger share (38 percent) have more than ten years' experience providing programming specifically targeted to this population. 🇺🇸

**About the TAY Service Participants**

Between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2017, grantees reported providing services to 865 disconnected TAY. This snapshot provides basic participant demographics collected by grantees.





# San Francisco's TAY

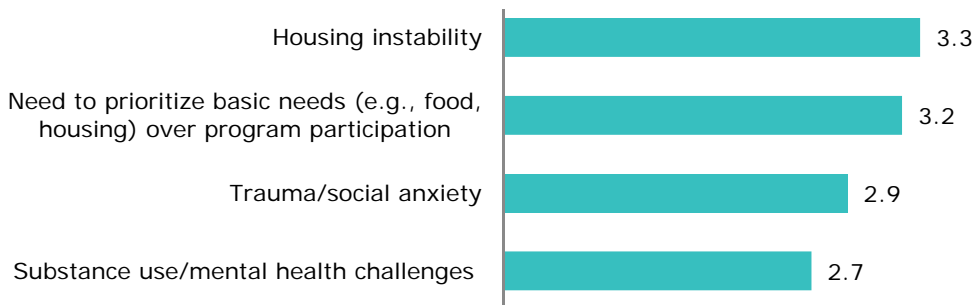
While San Francisco's disconnected TAY face a number of shared challenges, the population includes a number of distinct subgroups including former foster youth, justice-involved TAY, and young parents—each with their own unique experiences and needs. In this section, we first describe the common challenges that disproportionately affect the population as a whole. We then explore these dynamics for several of the subgroups within San Francisco's TAY population. Data sources for this section include the TAY survey, grantee survey, and grantee focus groups.

## Common Challenges and Needs

**Disconnected TAY face a number of common challenges that impact their ability to engage in programming and maintain participation.** According to grantees, the most widespread challenges for this population include being homeless or at risk of homelessness, the need to prioritize basic needs over program participation, trauma exposure and social anxiety, and substance abuse and mental health challenges (see Exhibit 4).

**Exhibit 4. Challenges with Engaging Participants and Sustaining Engagement (n=23)**

Mean score, from 1 (not a challenge) to 4 (serious challenge)



Source: TAY Grantee Survey

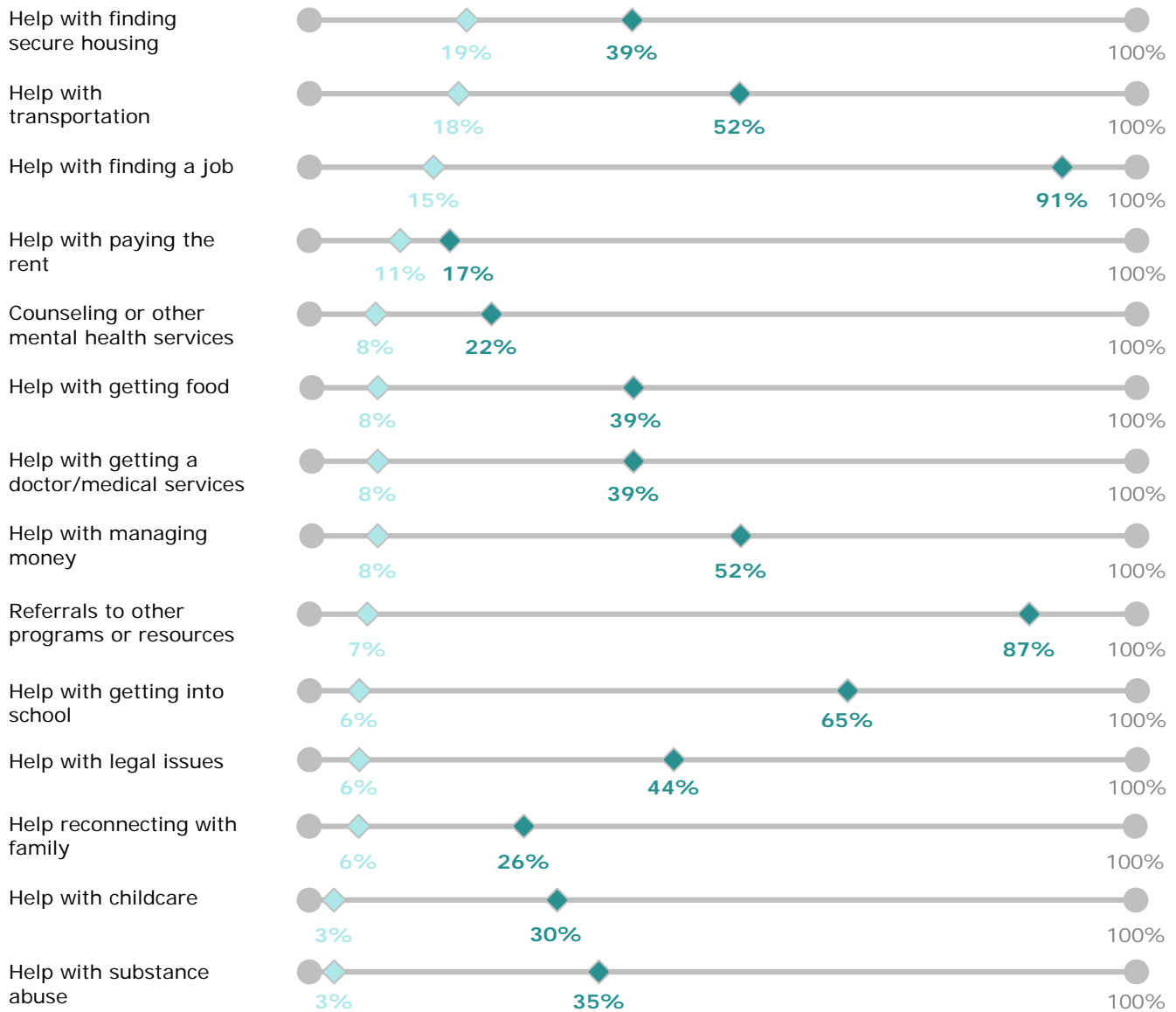
**The drive to meet their own basic needs draws many young people away from programming.** One grantee articulated the struggle many youth face, even in programs that offer a stipend for participation: “Although we offer a modest \$1,000 per semester stipend, it is not enough for the majority of our youth. They often need help with child care, transportation, and their own personal living expenses.” TAY participants also highlighted their struggles to meet their basic needs—only one-third (36 percent) *agreed* that they were able to take care of their basic needs, and none of them *strongly agreed*.

**Some participants' fundamental needs can be more easily met by grantees—and in many cases already are—while others remain a persistent challenge.** Exhibit 5 on the following page displays unmet needs reported by TAY participants and services provided by grantees. Larger gaps between the two indicate a greater share of grantees that provide a given service relative to the share of TAY who indicated that service as an unmet need. Conversely, smaller gaps indicate a smaller share of grantees that provide a given service relative to the share of TAY with that need. It is important to note, however, that almost all

grantees (87 percent) make referrals to other programs or resources so that TAY participants can access additional supports that are not directly delivered by the referring agency.

**Exhibit 5. TAY Needs and Grantee Services<sup>5</sup>**

- ◆ **Unmet needs** reported by TAY survey participants (n=47-141)<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ **Services provided** by grantees as part of their DCYF grants (n=47-141)<sup>7</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Note: The percentages for grantees are higher than the percentages for TAY participants because grantees indicated overall services provided while TAY participants indicated their individual unmet needs.

<sup>6</sup> TAY survey responses to "Are there any services you need that you have not been able to get through this program?"

<sup>7</sup> Grantee survey responses to "What types of services do you provide as part of your DCYF TAY grant?"

Finding secure housing and help with transportation rose to the top as services that about one-fifth of TAY participants (19 percent and 18 percent, respectively) reported not being able to get through the program in which they participated. Among grantees, 39 percent offer services to help participants find secure housing, and about half (52 percent) provide help with transportation. Although almost all grantees (91 percent) reported providing help with finding a job, this was among the top three unmet needs reported by TAY participants, indicating a need for additional supports and/or employment opportunities—the latter being largely outside the scope of what grantees are able to offer. The next most common unmet needs were help with paying the rent and counseling or mental health services, which are both provided by a relatively small share of grantees (17 percent and 22 percent, respectively). While referrals may help meet some of this need, the high cost of living and lack of mental health services for TAY in San Francisco create additional challenges in these areas.

In terms of other commonly-reported needs, smaller percentages of TAY participants (8 percent each) also reported needing help with getting food and with getting medical services (each offered by 39 percent of grantees) and help with managing money (offered by 52 percent of grantees). Smaller shares of TAY participants reported needing support with getting into school, legal issues, reconnecting with family, childcare, and substance abuse treatment.

As described above, some needs are not so easily met by grantees, and speak to structural and systemic constraints that providers and TAY across the city face. These include, most notably, housing, as well as mental health services and substance abuse treatment. As discussed below, grantees shared how these needs can have a significant impact on young people's ability to remain stable and engage in programming.

**All grantees highlighted homelessness and a lack of stable housing as particular challenges for TAY.** Most grantees discussed the extremely high cost of housing in the Bay Area as a tremendous challenge. One provider articulated why stable housing remains a long-term need for TAY, particularly those who have experienced homelessness previously:

*"We know when working with young people with a history of homelessness that it only takes one thing to go wrong in their lives. Every year [they are] out of poverty reduces the likelihood of going back, and it takes at least three years out of poverty to not fall back. Let's say they've got a living wage job and housing stability. If it has only been a year, we have to be ready and keep an eye out for anything that might happen. All it takes is one thing—let's say they lose a family member, then become depressed, they stop working, lose their job, and then lose their housing."*

Some grantees noted that turbulence at home can also impact young people's housing stability. One shared, "I have a lot of students, especially [those who are] parents, who are living with a lot of other family members. They're frequently in and out of homelessness and I get a lot of calls for help [finding] a shelter when things get heated at home." Providers also noted the need for more emergency and short-term shelter options for TAY who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. One grantee highlighted a shortage of TAY-specific beds in emergency shelters throughout San Francisco, sharing that, "for every five young people who experience homelessness, there are two beds. We have one of the worst unsheltered rates in the nation."

**Both grantees and service participants highlighted mental health services and substance abuse treatment as significant needs.**

More than three-quarters of TAY participants (77 percent) reported needing help for emotional or mental health problems during the past year. Grantees agreed that there is a significant need for additional mental health support for TAY in San Francisco. One provider explained, "Challenges accessing mental health services can impact the ability of TAY to participate and succeed." Another elaborated:

*"The circumstances that lead to young people being homeless or disconnected means they experienced some kind of trauma, which exacerbates mental health and substance abuse issues. And the TAY age group is also when more profound and persistent mental health issues, like psychosis and schizophrenia, are more likely to erupt in a person's life."*

Providers discussed the struggle many young people face when trying to deal with both substance abuse and what one called "untreated mental illness." This person remarked:

*"The system has no bandwidth to deal with [TAY's mental health and substance abuse needs]. No residential care. No substance abuse care. Not even outpatient care, and even with outpatient care you still need a place to live. It's a huge barrier when drugs are really easy to come by."*

While none of these grantees were funded to provide mental health services, many still had to address this need as part of their work with disconnected young people. Grantees shared that, while they are able to offer TAY some mental health resources and referrals to outside agencies, their capacity in this area is often limited.

**TAY Subgroups**

While San Francisco's disconnected TAY share some common characteristics as discussed above, there are also a number of distinct and often intersecting subgroups, each with its own unique needs and assets. In fact, intersectionality among San Francisco's TAY seems to be the norm (see sidebar). The intersectional nature of many young people's identities is particularly important to note, because while TAY may engage with services that are designed for a specific facet of their identity, they often have additional needs that impact their ability to engage and sustain participation. The remainder of this section explores several subgroups of San Francisco's disconnected TAY that rose to the top throughout this evaluation.

**Former Foster Youth**



*One-third of program participants (33 percent) reported having lived in a group or foster home.<sup>8</sup>*

**Grantees explained that former foster youth can be "invisible" because they may not disclose their involvement in the foster care system.** One-quarter (26 percent) of grantees identified current or former foster care participants as a target population, yet some held that these participants are often more willing to share information about other characteristics or needs when engaging in services. One provider shared that young people "may not self-identify as foster youth [because] they feel stigmatized sometimes." Another mentioned

<sup>8</sup> Source: TAY participant survey



Source: TAY Participant Survey, n=87

**Intersectionality among TAY Participants**

City and County legislation defines disconnected TAY as young people having one or more of the following characteristics:

- homeless or in danger of homelessness
- dropped out of high school
- have a disability or other special needs, including substance abuse
- low-income parents
- undocumented
- new immigrants and/or English learners
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning
- transitioning from the foster care, juvenile justice, criminal justice or special education system

Among TAY participants surveyed (n=144):

**76 percent** identified with **four or more** of the above characteristics, and

**42 percent** identified with **seven or more**.

that some former foster youth prefer to identify with the present rather than the past, and recalled that one participant “wanted to talk about how he’s a father, and interested in college and teaching, but didn’t talk about foster care.” One provider recalled only learning about a participant’s time in foster care through internal program records, explaining, “I had one former client...[who] had not actually put on the form [that they had been in foster care], but I saw in our data from previous programming that that person had been in our foster care program.” Not knowing this important information about participants’ history makes it challenging for providers to develop a full understanding of their past experiences and thus design an approach to best meet their needs.



### TAY with Disabilities and/or Special Needs

*One-third (32 percent) of TAY participants reported having been diagnosed with a disability and/or special need, and one-fourth (27 percent) reported attending special education classes while in school.<sup>9</sup>*

**While grantees may be meeting the needs of participants with disabilities and special needs, data on this topic is limited.** About one-fourth of funded agencies (26 percent) reported TAY with disabilities or special needs as a target population for their services. This evaluation did not collect additional information from grantees about the extent to which they are able to accommodate these needs. Additional research would be necessary to develop a deeper understanding of what those needs are and how grantees are responding to them.



### LGBTQ TAY

*24 percent of program participants identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and 11 percent identified as transgender.<sup>10</sup>*

**Grantees agreed that community is especially important for young people who identify as LGBTQ.** One-third of grantees (30 percent) identified LGBTQ TAY as a target population, and they shared that many of these young people do not have family support and need to build a “family” of choice among their peers. According to providers who work with this population, these social connections are a key reason why some LGBTQ young people remain engaged in programming. One provider shared,

*“We have [LGBTQ] young people who come for the community, for the connection, for the sense of belonging. They’ve been pushed out of the institutions that are supposed to be there to serve them—whether that’s families or religious institutions or foster care, all those systems—so they come to us to be part of a community, and they figure out, ‘My community needs me, so I’m going to get my life together to serve [them],’ rather than that self-motivation to improve themselves for themselves. For a lot of our young people, they don’t think the motivation is themselves because they don’t think they deserve it.”*

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<sup>9</sup> Source: TAY participant survey

<sup>10</sup> Source: DCYF CMS data submitted by grantees

Knowing that many LGBTQ TAY participate and stay involved in programming as a way to be of service to their peers and community can help inform a tailored approach to engaging and retaining these young people. Such an approach should include mechanisms to support community building, engage current participants to reach out to others, and keep former participants connected.



### Justice System-Involved TAY

*About one-fifth of TAY participants reported having been in juvenile hall (18 percent) and/or jail (23 percent).<sup>11</sup>*

**Providers noted that justice-involved young people may view their programming as an extension of “the system,” and experience referrals as punitive rather than positive.** For these reasons, engaging justice-involved young people in programming can be challenging, although one-third (30 percent) of grantees identified this group as a target population. Recidivism is a significant risk for justice system-involved youth,<sup>12</sup> and grantees stressed the importance of meeting these young people where they are and providing additional supports when necessary. One provider that works with this population with the goal of “having people not recidivate” noted that they “encourage participants to be connected to our program at whatever level feels comfortable [for them].” At another agency, providers advocate for these participants when needed; one grantee reported that “We’re... showing up to people’s court cases, standing up in court to say, ‘I’m here on behalf of so and so.’”

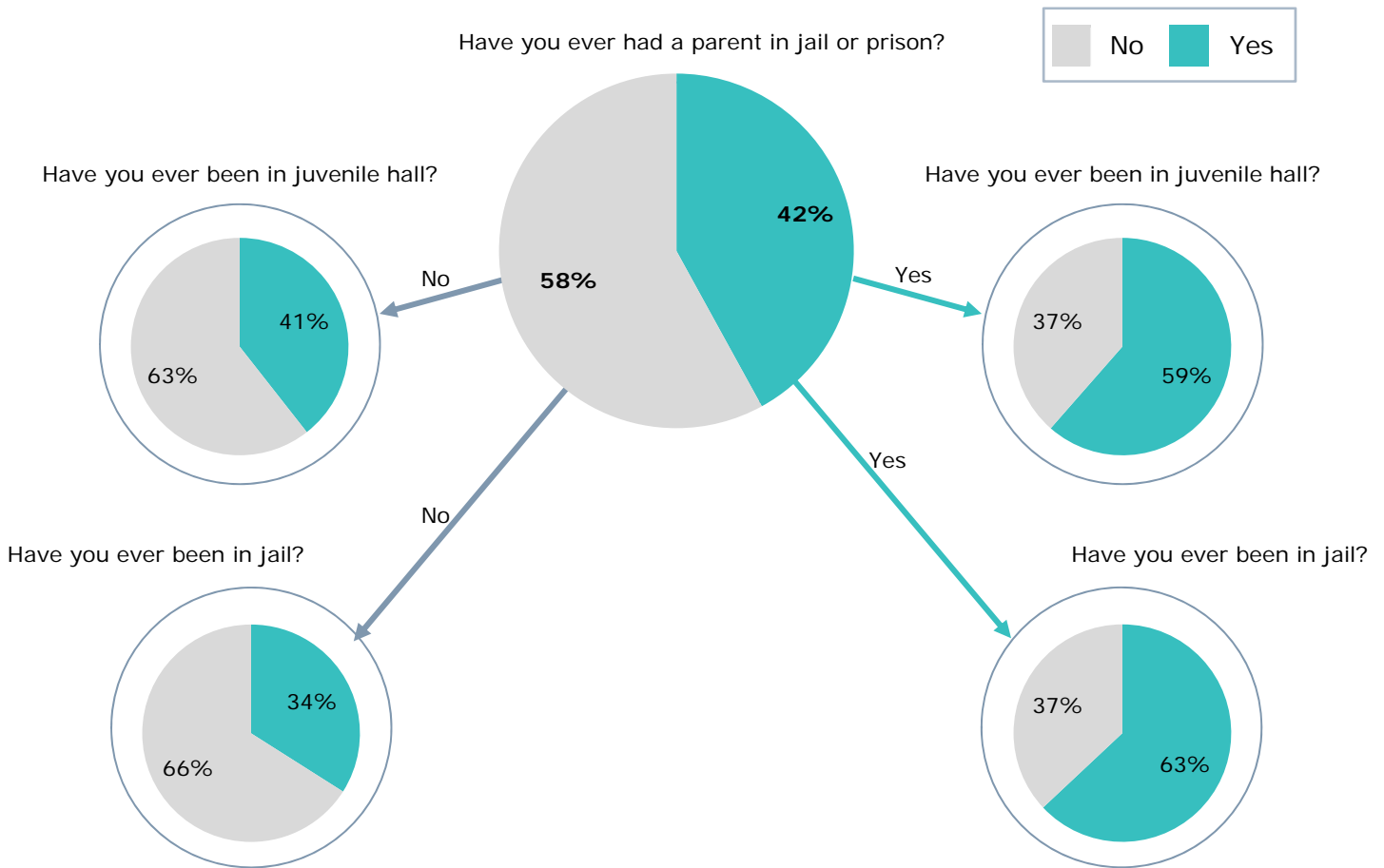
Multigenerational justice system involvement appears to have a significant impact on TAY as well. Forty-two percent of TAY participants reported having a parent who has been incarcerated, and those young people were more likely to report having been detained or incarcerated themselves (see Exhibit 6 on the following page). Parental incarceration can also affect TAY economically and disrupt supportive adult relationships, which grantees identified as being key to TAY stability and success.

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<sup>11</sup> Source: TAY participant survey

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-reducing-recidivism-justice-involved-youth>

**Exhibit 6. TAY Participant Experiences with the Justice System (n=125-130)**



Source: TAY Participant Survey



**Parenting TAY**

Eleven percent of TAY program participants identified as parents.<sup>13</sup>

**TAY parents have responsibilities that their non-parenting peers do not face—most significantly, caring for their children.** About the same percentage of participants who identified as parents (11 percent) reported “being a better parent” as one of their goals when deciding to enroll in the funded program (8 percent). One-third of grantees (30 percent) identified low-income parents as a target TAY population. Those who serve TAY parents noted that many of these young people were not interested in parenting programs designed for the general adult population, suggesting a need for parenting programs and other related services that are tailored to this age group. One provider shared,

*“We try to serve TAY parents, [but] our services aren’t what they’re looking for...We have an embarrassment of riches of services in our buildings, but it’s not what they want. They aren’t connecting to what they see [in our buildings, which is] older homeless families.”*

<sup>13</sup> Source: TAY participant survey

Grantees also noted that a lack of childcare can prevent TAY parents from engaging and persisting with services. Specifically, grantees identified a need for drop-in childcare, in addition to full- and part-time scheduled childcare, allowing for more wraparound support for parenting TAY. One provider explained,

*"For TAY parents it's [about] getting [them] that simple message that parenting is the toughest job in the world. You need a village, and you need your own life too, besides being a parent. That helps us keep them motivated—the chance for them to just hang out and get a break from their kid. We have a 24-hour telephone service for them to call... and we can bring them in to just give them a break, for some respite."*

### Other Subgroups

Grantees also identified several other subgroups with specific characteristics and needs. We do not have data on the percentages of TAY participants that identify with each of these groups.



**"Truly disconnected" TAY.** Many grantees identified TAY who are "truly disconnected" (i.e., not working, in school, or connected to any programs) as particularly difficult to reach even though they may be most in need of services. One provider explained, "it's really difficult to connect with youth that are not connected to any agencies, and don't even know about the services that are available to them." Grantees noted that many of these young people, especially those who do not live or congregate in the locations where other TAY are typically reached, are unaware of available programs and services. Grantees noted, however, that reaching young people in their mid-teens who are at least marginally connected to systems or services can help prevent true disconnection.

Couch-surfing youth who are not connected to systems or services TAY face unique challenges accessing supports in part because they and others may not consider themselves to be homeless and are often unaware of services designed for homeless young people on the streets. One provider explained "we have a hard time engaging couch-surfing youth—not street-based homeless, but unstably housed, difficult to engage youth—using most strategies we have currently." Although they are unstably housed, couch-surfing youth may not identify as truly homeless, and as a result may not seek programs and services that they could benefit from. San Francisco's 2017 Point In Time (PIT) Homeless Count<sup>14</sup> highlights the "hidden nature" of youth homelessness, and notes how that impacts their disconnection from services: "Young people experiencing homelessness have a harder time accessing services... due to the stigma of their housing situation, lack of knowledge of available resources, and a dearth of services targeted to young people."

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**"It is difficult [for TAY parents] to participate if they don't have ongoing childcare support or access to stable housing."**

**-Grantee**

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**"It is difficult really to connect with young people who aren't connected to any system."**

**-Grantee**

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<sup>14</sup> <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-SF-Point-in-Time-Count-General-FINAL-6.21.17.pdf>





**Undocumented TAY.** The current political climate has led to an increased sense of fear and vulnerability among undocumented individuals, including undocumented TAY. Grantees explained that, in some cases, undocumented TAY choose to remain completely disconnected for fear of being reported and/or detained, which can make them difficult to find and serve. According to providers, word-of-mouth referrals, one of the most successful means of reaching TAY in general, are also the most effective way to connect undocumented TAY with services. One provider explained,

*“Working with youth that are undocumented, [I know that] there are a group of very underground youth that are off the radar, they choose to stay that way as long as possible. It’s only with word-of-mouth [that they connect with services], that someone they really trust brings them to us or other providers and then they engage.”*

TAY who are undocumented share a unique set of challenges, particularly related to employment. Some grantees shared that TAY without documentation that allows them to work may not be eligible for certain aspects of workforce development programs, including some internships and job placements. Grantees added that constraints within the immigration system often leave TAY waiting for several years to obtain needed legal documentation.



**Displaced young people.** The housing crisis in San Francisco and the rest of the Bay Area has led to increased youth displacement. According to data submitted by grantees, almost half (47 percent) of TAY participants who are enrolled in high school attend high school outside of San Francisco, indicating that they likely also live outside of the city limits. Grantees reported that some youth commute long distances to remain engaged in services located in San Francisco, as even the cost of living continues to rise in formerly affordable surrounding areas. One grantee noted that not all disconnected TAY who leave San Francisco do so by choice, and may have strong connections to communities that draw them back. This person explained, “San Francisco ships a lot of kids for foster care and transitional housing out of County to the East Bay and out of state. Youth commute from the East Bay back to San Francisco where their community is.”




**TAY from San Francisco.** Some grantees reported that TAY who are originally from San Francisco can be among the most challenging to reach and engage in services. They shared that long-term, multi-generational socioeconomic stress has impacted communities throughout San Francisco, leaving many of these young people with a sense of immobility. One provider noted that “those who have lived in San Francisco the longest are hard to reach,” adding that “TAY who have lived in disadvantaged communities in San Francisco just don’t see the motivation anymore.” Another grantee shared a similar experience, saying,

*“My students that have lived in San Francisco the longest are also the hardest to recruit. I have new immigrant students that are really excited. Most of the participants in our program have only been in San Francisco for the past 10 years.”*

By hiring community members to serve as outreach and program staff, some grantees were able to more effectively engage San Francisco-born TAY. One provider shared their solution as follows:

*“For the last three years it has been tremendously difficult to harness the participants we need. People that have lived in [the neighborhood] for many years just don’t see the motivation to participate. They have outside influences that are more significant than what our program can offer, or someone tells them they shouldn’t join. We’ve met the challenge by using people [from the same background] to do outreach and model what we want to see in the program. So we hired graduates to go recruit, to tell them, ‘Hey I get this and I come from a similar background, and you can do it too.’ From that, we’ve been able to get more participants into our programs since they can identify with the person.”*

**Grantees highlighted the individuality of each disconnected young person, noting that the strengths and challenges they bring impact the way they experience services from outreach to completion.** TAY come to services with different levels of socio-emotional development, soft skills, education, and work experience. They also come with a range of previous experiences, often including significant exposure to trauma. Grantees repeatedly highlighted the need to meet TAY where they are, and tailor services, timelines, and anticipated outcomes to each individual served. The following chapter discusses some of the ways that grantees are working to serve TAY and meet their individual and collective needs. 

# Serving TAY

This section presents grantees' promising approaches to serving San Francisco's disconnected TAY. Grantees shared that TAY will only engage in services if they trust providers, and will meaningfully engage only to the degree that trusting relationships mature. In this section, we highlight strategies that often serve the dual purpose of building trust and deepening engagement. Providers also shared that effectively engaging young people requires an iterative and often long-term approach, and this section addresses the ways that providers learn about and respond to participants' evolving needs and circumstances both at intake and over time. We also share findings related to grantee's efforts to support young people as they transition out of services.

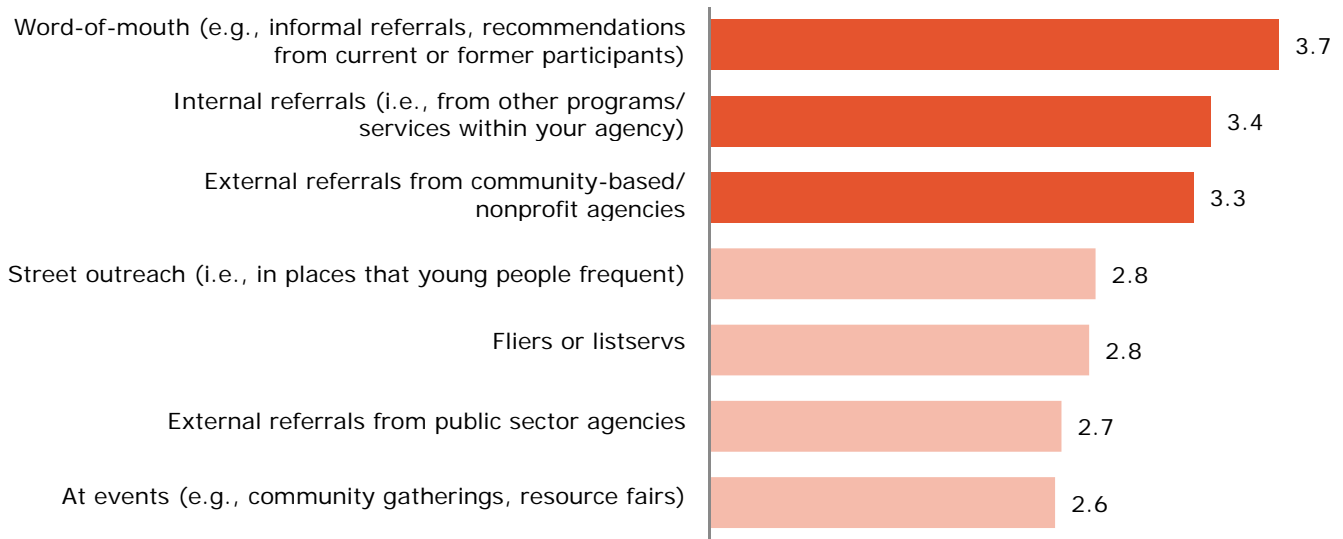
## Building Relationships and Deepening Engagement

**Consistently, grantees reported that trust does not come easily for disconnected TAY.** They highlighted three major reasons for this. First, many of San Francisco's TAY have experienced significant trauma, which can have a profound and debilitating effect on their ability to trust others. One provider shared that the feeling of trust is something many TAY "don't experience because they're coming out of trauma." Second, as one grantee reported, some TAY "have a developmental resistance to services and the system." This person added, "They often have a mindset that 'I am old enough to be on my own and I don't need help from anyone else.'" Third, many disconnected TAY have gone through multiple 'systems' (e.g., foster care, juvenile justice). "Youth are so tired of systems failing them," reflected one provider. Another added, "We're another part of the system to them, and they choose not to participate." While establishing trust with TAY can pose a challenge, grantees also observed that it as the most effective way to recruit and engage TAY in services.

**Relationships help drive successful recruitment.** As illustrated in Exhibit 7 on the following page, grantees reported word-of-mouth as the most successful strategy for outreach and recruitment, followed by internal and external referrals. Word-of-mouth referrals can come through both staff and current or former program participants. In the words of one grantee, "Young people need to trust [us], and the ultimate trust is other youth that have been through the program." Word-of-mouth recruitment requires an established network, which may explain why recruitment was initially more of a challenge for some of the providers with less experience serving this population. "There have been challenges to bring TAY over," shared one grantee whose organization had not historically focused on this population, adding, "We have to build the trust before they [TAY] will even come to us."

**Exhibit 7. Success of TAY Outreach and Recruitment Strategies (n=16-22)\***

Mean score, from 1 (not successful) to 4 (highly successful)



Source: TAY Grantee Survey

\* Throughout this report, the number of respondents for specific items within a single survey question may vary, and in these cases we have indicated the range of response counts for each item.

**Providers strive to create the conditions that allow young people to establish trust, relationships, and community with programmatic staff and fellow TAY.** Grantees reported that building trust with providers is the most effective strategy to promote sustained participant engagement, followed by financial stipends, inviting and inclusive spaces, and building trust with fellow TAY participants (see Exhibit 8 on the following page). When recruiting TAY for their programs, providers often focus on and appeal to relationships. By nature of their disconnection and prior experiences, TAY often lack a strong sense of community. Grantees shared that, if they can provide young people with a meaningful sense of belonging, young people are more likely to engage and continue participating. Grantees also explained that a feeling of belonging is not a state that can be “switched on” through any singular model or action. Rather, it requires authentic relationships with providers and other young people.

TAY participants agreed that the staff and the community are what help make these programs special. One participant shared, “I like how I can be comfortable talking to any one of the staff members without feeling nervous. They actually care for you, and show it too.” Another added, “Everyone here is like my family. They sincerely care about me.”

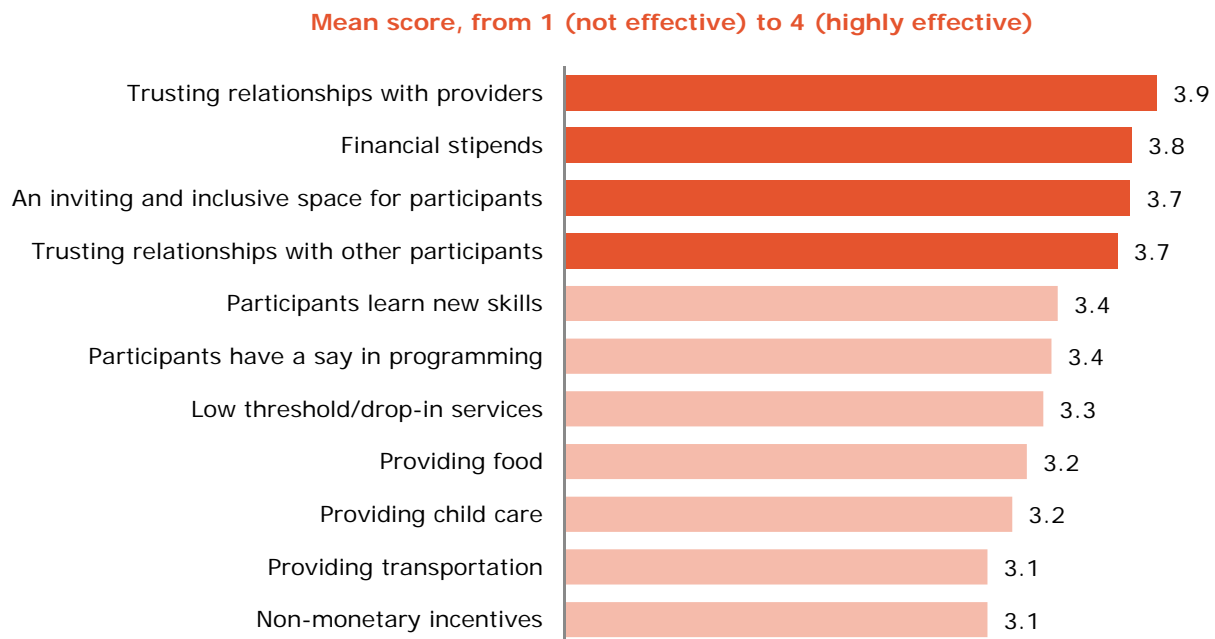
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**“I like how the staff respects me and my ideas.”**

**-TAY Participant**

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**Exhibit 8. Effectiveness of Strategies to Engage Participants and Sustain Engagement (n = 12-23)**



Source: TAY Grantee Survey

Among grantees, the following approaches rose to the top as ways to help build trust and encourage ongoing engagement:



**Make time to connect.** One provider explained that disconnected TAY are more likely to engage with a program in which staff take time to “show up and say ‘Hi, how was your week?’” According to another grantee, “[Providers need the] time to not just do programming but to be with [participants] and connect with them and relate to them.” Another provider echoed these comments, noting, “Making sure you have time to listen to their concerns is essential to building trust.”



**Be patient and persistent.** Grantees acknowledged that it takes time for trust to develop. One shared that it “takes a lot more time to engage disconnected TAY, so you have to be willing to invest in that time in order to then get them to want to engage in the services.” Added another grantee, “Our services do not function on a six-month to one-year timeline, but operate like long-term trusting relationships where youth can lean on our support in a way that is ongoing, robust, and flexible to their [changing] needs.”



**Offer safe and comfortable spaces as an onramp to longer-term engagement.** Grantees noted that TAY participants are more likely to return to a program that offers a safe, comfortable, and welcoming space. Some providers added that spaces for TAY should be “relaxing,” provide a “real refuge,” and allow TAY to “talk about normal things [unrelated to programming],” where they can “get their thoughts out” and “decompress.” One grantee shared, “We all believe in creating this safe and welcoming space that TAY need. If we didn’t have that, we wouldn’t have young people bringing friends or

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**“It takes TAY longer to build trust so when we show up at the same place for a little while, that helps to build the trust.”**

**-Grantee**

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showing up.” Some providers also reported leveraging their safe space to draw participants in, and begin to gradually engage them more deeply. For example, one provider recounted, “[Participants] come in, do their laundry, and use the computers. But it’s co-located with the education center and our clinic, and the behavioral specialist is right there, so linkages can flow through.”



**Ensure that TAY have access to basic needs such as food, child care, and transportation.** While food, child care, and transportation did not rank among the most effective strategies to engage participants and sustain their engagement (see Exhibit 8 above), grantees collectively characterized them as ranging from *moderately* to *highly effective*. Grantees also reported that participants’ need to prioritize their own basic needs (e.g., food and housing) over program participation was the number two challenge that prevents TAY from successfully achieving their goals (see Exhibit 10 below). Taken together, these two findings suggest that the provision of basic needs is necessary—but insufficient on its own—to effectively engage TAY in services. Youth survey results supported this assessment. One participant shared that s/he relies on the DCYF-funded program for food, while others suggested that programs should offer more of these basic supports. One said, “Child care should be here for families and parents that come in while they are trying to get help,” and another remarked, “It would be better if this program offered discount tickets for transportation.”

### Learning about and from TAY

In addition to establishing trust and authentic relationships, providers must get to know each of their clients well enough to build on their individual strengths and respond to their distinct and evolving needs.

**At intake, some providers seek to collect only the most salient information about their clients.** A number of grantees take a “phased” approach to intake and assessment, gradually asking for more sensitive information over time. They shared that trust-building can be compromised if the intake process includes questions that TAY may perceive as intrusive, and that such questions may even turn participants away. One grantee commented, “We’re being asked to use a system where the first thing our outreach workers ask for is a HIPAA consent release form...No one will engage with an outreach worker whose first question is ‘Will you sign this to share your personal information?’” For these reasons, at intake, many grantees choose to focus on gathering information about participants’ basic needs, such as their safety and housing situations; others may only request contact information at the outset.

**After intake, programs have ongoing processes for case management and assessment.** The vast majority (96 percent) of TAY grantees offer case management as part of their services. In general, providers described the ongoing case management process as an opportunity “to capture progress or change” in a client’s circumstances and goals in order to “tailor the program for a specific [individual].” This approach to case management ensures that providers are responsive to participants’ evolving needs while continuing to earn their trust. One grantee from an organization that runs a year-long program meets with participants weekly and shared that, during those meetings, “I can really connect with them on what they’re struggling with.”

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**“When you’re assessing young people, it’s about what information do you need to know that’s going to keep them connected for the long haul.”**

**-Grantee**

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Some grantees use a more formal case management process. For instance, one provider shared that, following intake, they use a standard assessment tool to gather pertinent information related to a participant's psychosocial strengths, needs, and environment. For others, the process is less formal; one such grantee believed that the case management process should occur more "organically."

**Many grantees solicit participant feedback as a way to assess and improve the quality of their TAY programs.** Some incorporate this feedback into their ongoing case management processes, while others administer separate client satisfaction surveys. In some cases, these surveys are used to select discussion topics for "community conversations" or to highlight areas for reflection, capacity building, and/or technical assistance. One program, for instance, shared:

*"We do anonymous client satisfaction surveys by program to ask very direct questions about if they feel listened to...and we look at that and say 'Is that equally true for TAY [with different gender identities]? Is it equally true for youth of color as for white youth?' And we see interesting cuts of the data... [And the result has been that we have] put some really targeted work into raising our staff capacity."*

Listening to TAY and valuing their feedback, grantees noted, can provide helpful insights to service providers that enable them to further strengthen relationships and trust. In the words of one grantee, "Making sure you have time to listen to their concerns is very essential to building trust." Like other strategies highlighted above, this practice can support both a programmatic function and the trust-building process.

### **Supporting TAY after they Transition Out**

Whether programs have a finite term of engagement or are available on an ongoing basis, TAY providers know that their clients will ultimately transition out. Grantees work to help TAY achieve their goals in advance of their transitions, while recognizing that many participants will continue to need support into the future.

**TAY and grantees generally agreed that the most important goals for program participants are related to workforce, academics, mental/emotional health, and strong personal relationships.** Exhibit 9 on the following page shows both the alignment and the divergence of goal perceptions between TAY participants and grantees.<sup>15</sup> Among TAY participants, the most common transition goals were having a steady job and learning a new skill or trade (just over half of respondents), followed by mental/emotional health, a safe and comfortable place to live, and strong personal relationships (about one-third of respondents). Similarly, grantees most commonly reported that success includes academic enrollment or completion, mental/emotional health, strong personal relationships, learning a new skill or trade, and having a steady job (about three-fourths for each).

### **Developing Key Skills**

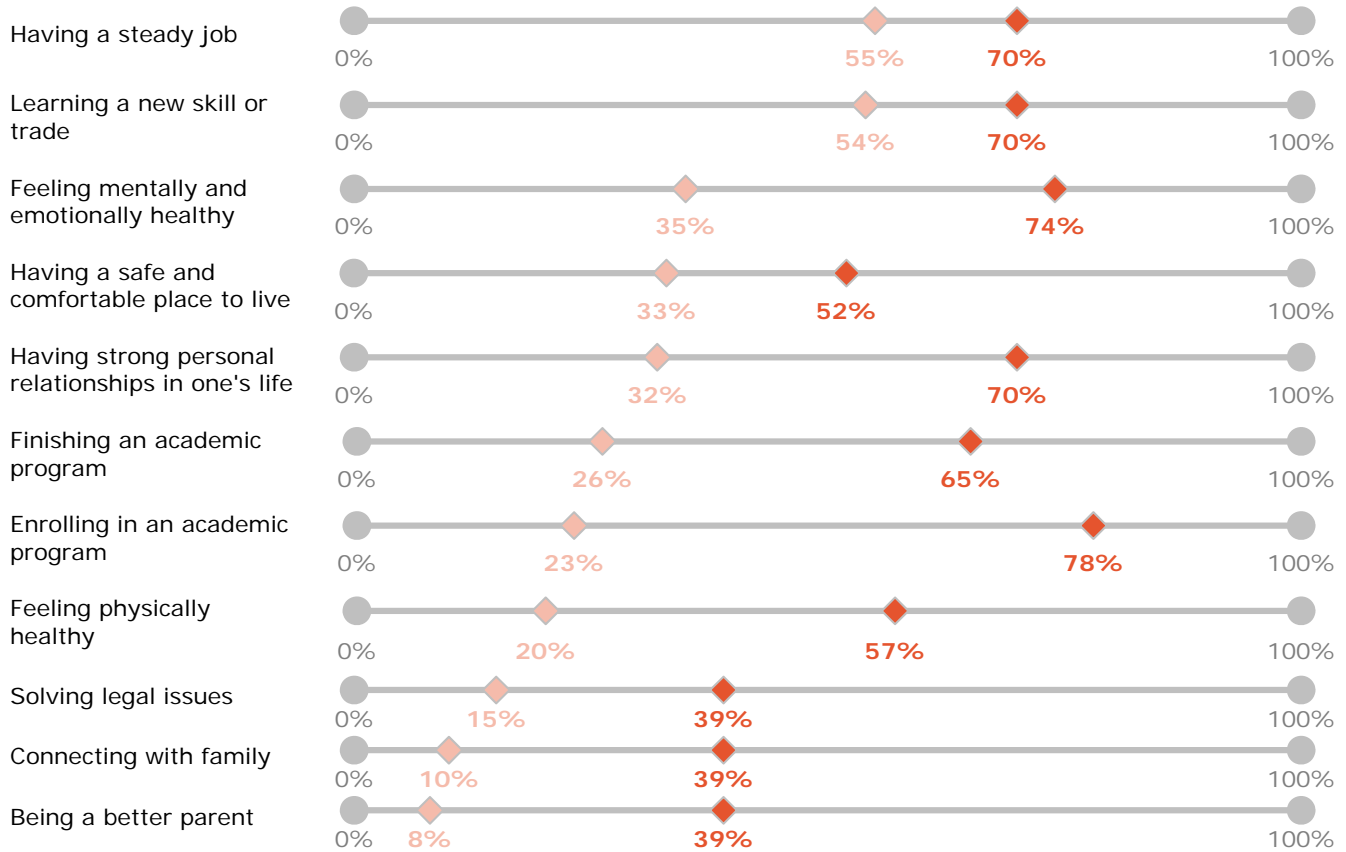
Some grantees reported helping TAY learn "soft skills" that serve them in the job market and in life. These skills that help ensure that TAY develop the confidence to approach new situations and the resilience to overcome future challenges. Providers reported the following skills as particularly relevant for today's TAY population:

- **Socio-emotional skills** including self-regulation, mindfulness, impulse control, conflict resolution, and the ability to trust.
- **Professional skills**, including networking, punctuality, the ability to approach authority figures, and how to code-switch between their communities and their workplaces.
- **Self-advocacy skills**, such as knowing where to go for help, and learning how to state their needs.

<sup>15</sup> Note: In general, grantees listed more goals than participants, likely because they were responding on behalf of all the TAY in their programs. Participants reported fewer goals because their responses were limited to their own "personal" goals. This explains the higher percentages attributed to grantee responses.

**Exhibit 9. TAY Transition Goals/What Success Looks Like**

- ◆ Personal goals reported by TAY survey participants<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ What success looks like for participants as they transition out of programming, reported by grantees<sup>17</sup>



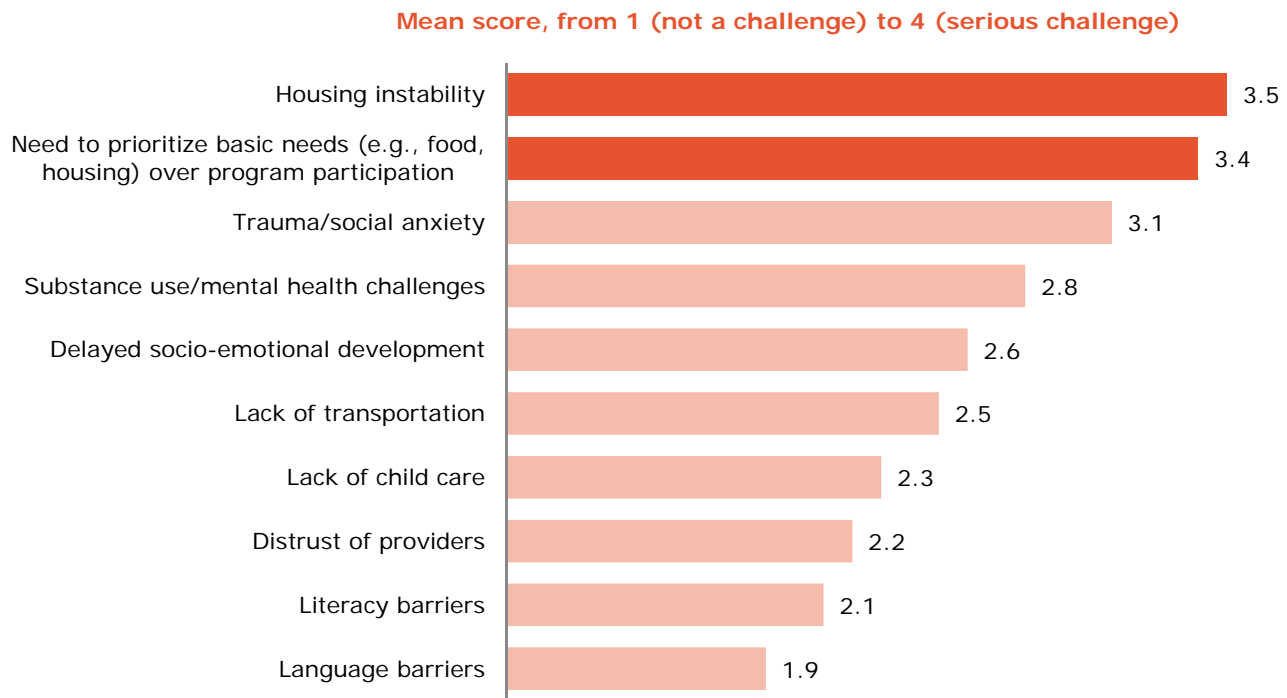
<sup>16</sup> Data from TAY responses to the following survey item: "What were your personal goals when deciding to enroll in this program?" (n=68-144)

<sup>17</sup> Data from grantee responses to the following survey item: "What does success look like for participants as they transition out of your DCYF-funded TAY programming?" (n=23)



**Common challenges to successful transitions include structural barriers as well as personal difficulties.** Grantees shared that, when participants do not successfully complete a program, the underlying cause may be beyond providers’ control. Housing instability and the need to prioritize basic needs—the top two challenges to program retention—are also the top barriers to successful transitions (see Exhibit 10 below). One grantee reported, “We often lose students due to outside factors such as relocation due to housing costs.” The next most common challenges that impede successful program completion include trauma/social anxiety, substance use and mental health challenges, and delayed socio-emotional challenges. As discussed earlier, grantees pointed out that these issues are exacerbated by the local dearth of both outpatient and residential mental health treatment services.

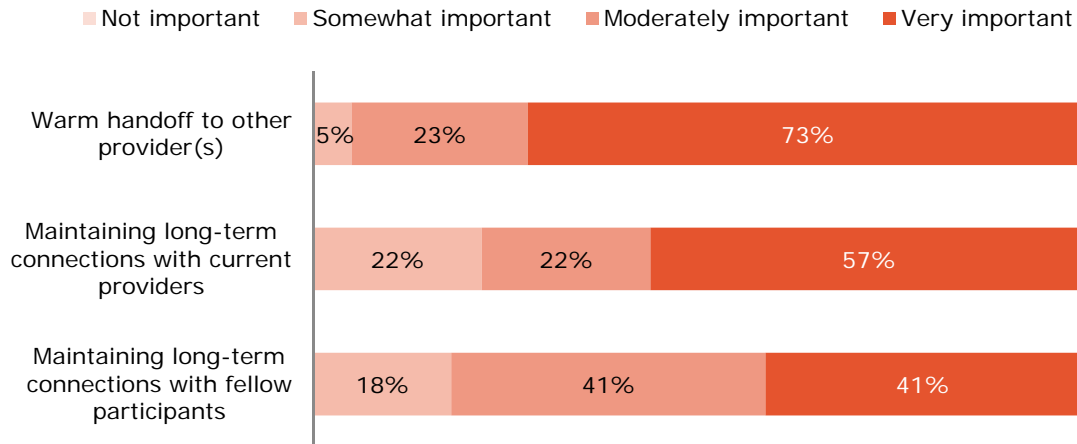
**Exhibit 10. Challenges for TAY Successfully Achieving Goals after Transitioning Out (n = 23)**



Source: TAY Grantee Survey

**Long-term relationships and warm handoffs help promote successful transitions.** Almost all grantees reported that long-term connections with participants and providers and warm handoffs are *moderately* or *very* important for supporting successful transitions (see Exhibit 11).

**Exhibit 11. Strategies for Supporting TAY as they Transition Out of Programming (n=22-23)**



Source: TAY Grantee Survey

Because participants' lives often remain vulnerable after exiting services, many programs' transition processes strive to maintain relationships with TAY beyond a particular program, workshop, or period of engagement. While some programs celebrate successful program completion, others intentionally do not use the term "graduation" because they prefer not to give young people the impression that their participation should end. A number of grantees shared this desire to remain available to TAY. One provider reported giving participants a "blank check to come back and get case management and advice indefinitely." 🇺🇸

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**"We're in it for life.  
[There's] no wrong door.  
We're there."**

**-Grantee**

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# Provider Capacity

The previous sections provided an in-depth look at San Francisco's disconnected TAY populations and a detailed discussion of promising practices for addressing their needs. In order to effectively and efficiently serve the City's most disconnected young people, providers need appropriate resources, supports, and information. This section explores needs, challenges, and strategies related to building and strengthening provider capacity, including how funders like DCYF can ensure they continue to be responsive to the needs of grantees and program participants. We start by identifying promising approaches to measuring TAY-serving organizations' activities and outcomes, and then present information about what is needed to strengthen the network of providers throughout San Francisco. This section closes with a description of common capacity-related challenges identified by DCYF's TAY grantees.

## Promising Approaches for Measuring Activities and Outcomes

**In addition to delivering direct services to TAY clients, successful providers channel resources toward building and strengthening relationships with participants.** As discussed in the previous section, fostering trusting relationships with participants and other providers is foundational to any TAY program's success. TAY participants reported that positive experiences with program staff and a sense of community were the aspects of TAY programs that most encouraged them to continue participating. Regarding positive experiences with staff, one young person shared, "I feel like the staff here really care about you, and something like that is getting harder and harder to find," and another commented, "I like how the staff respects me and my ideas." Feeling like part of a community also helps support participant retention. One participant explained, "What I like about this program is we're like a family and I feel safe here and everybody is treated equally."

As discussed in the previous section, grantees also reported that *building trusting relationships* with providers and participants and *creating an inviting and inclusive space for participants* are among the most effective strategies for engaging participants and sustaining engagement (see Exhibit 8 on page 20). Providers also noted that offering additional wraparound supports—such as food, transportation, and child care—also help build trust and sustain client engagement. Several grantees explained that, despite the importance of these aspects of TAY programming, they are often under-valued and relative to more direct service delivery. One person explained:

*"There's been a lack of investment in having safe spaces for [young] people. There's a focus on getting services. At one level it makes sense—these 23-year-olds need jobs, not somewhere to hang out and play video games. But at the same time, having spaces provides the community the opportunity to have a place to be to build those relationships of trust."*

**Maintaining relationships with other providers is also necessary for making and receiving successful referrals, and for supporting transitions out of programming.** As explained in the previous section about serving TAY, providers rely heavily on relationships with one another. Almost all (87 percent) of grantees provide referrals to other programs and resources as part of their DCYF-funded TAY programming. They reported that word-of-mouth (including informal

referrals) and referrals from other community-based organizations or nonprofits are among the most successful outreach and recruitment strategies. However, a third of grantees (35 percent) characterized a lack of connection with other TAY providers as a *moderate* or *serious* capacity challenge related to outreach and recruitment.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, only one-fourth of grantees (26 percent) rated themselves as *highly successful* when it came to fostering trusting relationships with providers from other programs or referral sources; over half (57 percent) felt they were *moderately successful* at doing so. Grantees recognized the need to strengthen connections with other providers, with about two-thirds (61 percent) reporting that training or technical assistance on partnering and collaborating with other service providers was *very needed*.

**Providers often lack resources to implement and track these crucial relationship-building activities.** All of DCYF's TAY grantees recognized the importance of investing time and resources in building these relationships, while sharing that these efforts are often not funded. One provider cited a recurring street outreach event their agency holds, noting the overall lack of resources to support this kind of activity:

*"[We say] 'hey how you doing' [to young people], and have lots of food and music to get folks [interested]. We plant right where they're hanging out. We've done that throughout our whole district, and we've seen huge results getting people to come in. That relationship building aspect...that's the only way that this begins to work, and there's no recognition for the time and effort that it takes to build those relationships. Systemically, that's not really respected or funded. We're kind of expected to do that, or there's minimal dollars that are connected to that kind of outreach."*

**Grantees felt that traditional metrics of outcomes and impact do not capture the full breadth of how TAY participants benefit from services.** Some providers noted the importance of contextualizing outcomes by building a more nuanced understanding of service participants. This includes not just identifying effective practices, but also noting for whom and under what circumstances those practices do or not appear to lead to the intended results. As one grantee recommended, evaluations should assess "what works for some folks and what doesn't [work for others]," and added, "That's something we don't look at: disparities." Members of one collaborative also stressed the need to account for programs' different understandings of what makes a TAY participant truly "disconnected." According to the grantee survey, nearly half (48 percent) of DCYF's TAY grantees reported that eligibility criteria for their grant-funded programs did not include any of the characteristics that define TAY per City and County of San Francisco legislation (e.g., homeless or in danger of homelessness, system involvement).<sup>19</sup> This led one grantee to wonder, "How are you going to start comparing the half of programs that are working with disconnected TAY to the programs that are working with TAY [who are not disconnected]?" Providers also shared the following suggestions for ways to measure TAY program effectiveness, in addition to capturing more traditional outcome and impact indicators.

<sup>18</sup> Findings were similar for both types of grants (33 percent of innovation grantees and 36 percent of collaborative grantees).

<sup>19</sup> Per DCYF's funding guidelines, TAY grantees needed to ensure that participants met at least one of the criteria for "disconnected" as defined by the legislation. Additional comments from some of the 11 grantees that reported none of those characteristics being eligibility criteria included: "These are low-barrier services that do not require eligibility requirements;" "As long as they can respect the community agreements they can participate;" and "We serve all disconnected TAY. Some of the TAY we serve are also NOT disconnected."



**Track longer-term outcomes.** Some grantees expressed the need to fund programs, and track outcomes, over a longer period of time. As discussed in the previous section, achieving results for TAY participants often takes longer than what can be measured during a single grant period. One person explained, “This concept of ‘in three to six months they’re going to be employed’ needs to go away. Stabilization can literally take years... [We] need a long-term investment in their stabilization process.” Another provider agreed, adding, “In an ideal world we’d track [outcomes] over multiple years to measure how long it really takes—and how many hours—to get to the outcomes, because we’re not going to get there in this year and a half of our program.”



**Measure changes in attitude and behavior.** Several providers noted that more intermediate outcomes—such as trust, relationships, and safety—are key to participants’ success and should be captured in any assessment of TAY program effectiveness. One grantee commented, “Young people’s feeling of safety over time is [critical]. That’s a huge part of the work we’re doing, and something we miss when we just talk about services: young people’s growth in terms of their physical and emotional safety.” Another provider remarked on the importance of valuing, defining, and measuring socio-emotional development, and explained:

*“Because it takes so long [to achieve certain outcomes, we should look at things like] how we are impacting our young people to make better decisions that help them get out of these systems? Do they have more resources? What is their locus of control? [We should look at] socio-emotional learning. All those things are going to make a huge difference in the lives of our young people, and we need a measure for that that’s [used] across the board, so that we can all know how to adjust and develop our programs to support [participants].”*



**Learn from qualitative data.** A number of grantees also spoke about the value-add of gathering qualitative information for understanding how young people experience and benefit from funded services. Since each participant brings a unique set of assets and challenges, individual stories can bring additional value and insight. One provider felt that “the anecdotal stories are much more significant than the outcomes we’re held accountable to from funders.” This person characterized those stories as “more gratifying” than traditional outcomes, adding that they “humanize the experience and bring a face to the program—and I think that’s really the piece that we’re missing.” Another grantee shared this sentiment, and commented, “I don’t want to be judged on numbers, but on what I do for individuals.” Some providers suggested interviewing program participants, “following them through their journey,” and asking them how they feel “before and after” as potential ways to gather useful qualitative information directly from young people.



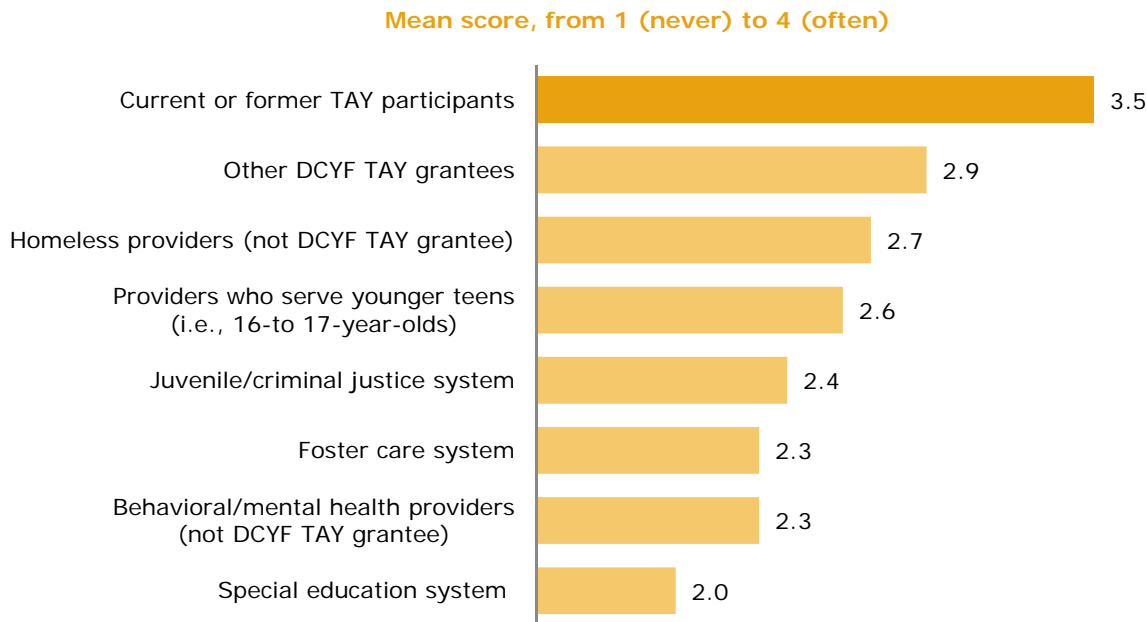
**Look at provider connections.** Because many disconnected TAY have a range of needs, they often interact with a number of different service providers. Consequently, gathering data to better understand how participants access different services across agencies is an important step toward building a stronger and more interconnected TAY service system. One collaborative grantee posed the following questions: “What would it look like to really have tighter connections, shared consent forms, and agreed-upon case management collaboration between

organizations? How to track the data in order to really make meaningful change in this population?” This person suggested that gathering data on connections among providers could help improve both the reach and quality of services for disconnected TAY.

**What Providers Need to Strengthen the Network**

**Providers need relationships with one another in order to make successful referrals and share relevant client information.** As discussed at length in the *Serving TAY* section, relationships among providers are key. As one grantee explained, “Established partnerships become more robust referrals.” One-fourth (26 percent) of grantees rated themselves as *highly effective* at fostering trusting relationships with other providers, and over half (57 percent) rated themselves as *moderately effective* at doing so. While this is clearly an area in which grantees are fairly strong, there is still room for improvement—particularly among providers who are newer to serving this population. Because of their growing familiarity with one another, DCYF’s TAY grantees often receive referrals from other grantee agencies. In fact, other DCYF TAY grantees were the most common referral source after current or former TAY participants (see Exhibit 12).

**Exhibit 12. Frequency of Referrals from Various Sources (n=21-23)**



Source: TAY Grantee Survey

One grantee shared that the quarterly provider meetings convened by DCYF were an effective way to foster these connections. Others agreed that it was beneficial for grantees to be in the same room with one another and “notice that we serve the same population.” However, not all grantees felt that they were part of a strong referral network, and some wanted DCYF to play a stronger role in making those connections. One person explained,

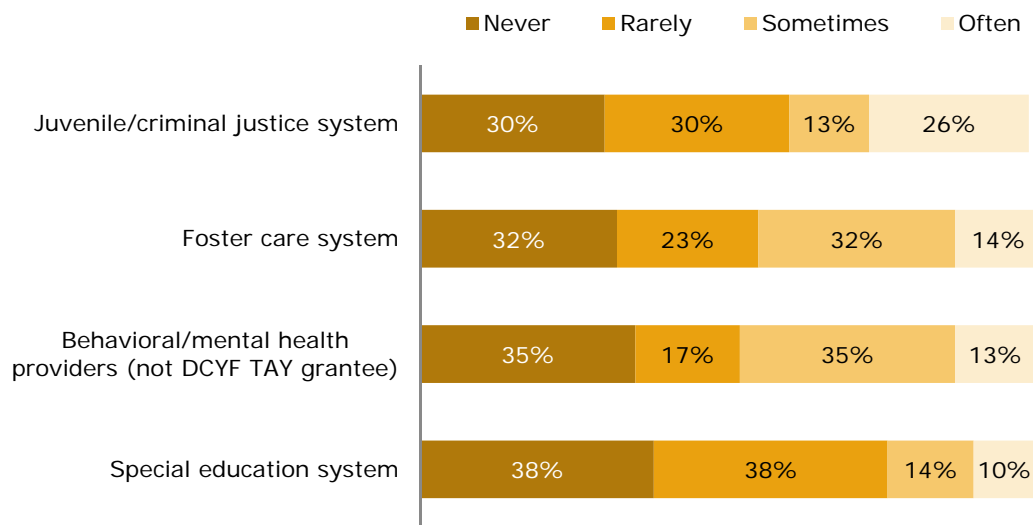
*“We all have been granted money but we need a referral network. We know that [other grantees] may have gotten funding, but we don’t have a real referral network. I can’t pick up the phone and say, ‘Hey, I have this [young person] who we can’t help but I think your services [would be right].’ I think for DCYF to just help us coordinate that system to where*

*we're able to lean on each other [would be helpful]."*

Another grantee mentioned a flyer listing other TAY providers and their contact information, and noted the importance of ensuring that information is kept up to date to make it "more live and accessible."

**Grantees cited challenges working with public agencies that serve this population.** As displayed in Exhibit 12 above, referrals into grantee programs from the juvenile justice, foster care, behavioral/mental health, and special education systems are less frequent than referrals from most other sources. In fact, about one-third of TAY grantees reported that they *never* receive referrals from those types of providers (see Exhibit 13).

**Exhibit 13. Frequency of Referrals from Public Agencies (n=21-23)**



Source: TAY Grantee Survey

According to one provider who received funding that required partnering with certain "public sector entities," "severely out of date" client information from those agencies, and the fact that they "don't have any relationship to leverage," made those referrals difficult or impossible to carry out. Another grantee described their organization's experience reaching out to the Juvenile Probation Department's Youth Guidance Center (Juvenile Hall), and said, "Our outreach coordinators go up there and give out information, but I've never gotten one referral from anybody saying they're from Youth Guidance Center coming to our program." This person saw a great potential for partnerships between Juvenile Probation and TAY service providers, and explained, "I don't really know why they're not sending [young people] to us. To me, it would look good [for Juvenile Probation] to say, 'We're just letting you out, and now we're sending you to a program where you can keep yourself out,'" adding, however, that "it just hasn't happened."

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**"Most of our justice-involved youth are coming in not through [the Juvenile] Probation [Department] but through friends or outreach."**

**—Grantee**

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Several grantees observed that one reason for this “disconnect” is the lack of relationships between public sector agencies and community-based organizations. Some also suggested that perceived differences in service delivery approach—and “culture” more broadly—create barriers to closer partnerships between these two sectors. One grantee noted, “All of us [DCYF TAY grantees] are coming from a youth development perspective, and certainly with juvenile justice a lot of it is ‘these are bad kids.’ It’s a very moralistic framework.” Several others agreed, and one provider added, “[Probation’s] lens is one of supervision and suppression, versus us being [focused on] basic needs, skill building, and strength-based. We just come from different lenses.” Another grantee reflected on similar experiences working with “smaller municipality-driven agencies,” commenting that “They want outcomes now. It’s ‘Did they get the job done?’ not ‘How are [participants] feeling today?’ or ‘How are they engaging in a way that’s more positive than before?’”

**Some grantees stressed the importance of a shared data system that can capture client and referral information.** Providers from one collaborative shared participant information with one another in an effort to track how many young people were accessing services across multiple agencies. Collaborative partners found this type of data sharing valuable, and reported that they would like to see a larger shared database that includes more nonprofit and public sector agencies that work with disconnected TAY. One grantee felt that DCYF’s Contract Management System (CMS) “holds the key to where the youth are flowing through, and tracking youth and hours of service,” and advocated for bringing public agencies such as the school district and Juvenile Probation into the system. This person explained, “To track kids who have been arrested and where they go next is very hard to do... [and] to hold other people in the community who serve these youth as well to outcomes is really hard,” adding that such an effort would need to be done over multiple years in order to generate useful information. Another provider agreed, and felt that “it’s the City’s job to get those systems talking to each other...If the City wants to increase provider capacity, then it’s about getting systems to talk with each other, starting with their own systems.”

### Organizational Capacity Challenges

**Staff turnover—largely driven by San Francisco’s high cost of living—is a major challenge for local nonprofit agencies.** Just over half of grantees (52 percent) reported that staff turnover was a challenge for their internal capacity to conduct outreach and recruitment. Turnover is an especially pressing issue for younger, more entry-level (and lower-wage) staff who often work directly with clients on a regular basis. According to one grantee, some staff commute an hour and a half each way because they are unable to afford housing closer to where they work. Staff turnover also makes it hard for providers to build and maintain cross-agency relationships. One grantee noted that their agency’s biggest challenge was staff retention and, more recently, filling vacancies when staff leave:

*“Our direct service staff are the ones who are mostly holding those relationships [with TAY participants]. They’re the most likely to refer a young person to another organization, and if the [staff member] at the other organization that they knew has left, then there’s no longer the opportunity for a warm handoff. Those are our lowest-paid positions. They are the most likely to turn over...That’s always been a challenge, but more recently, with the extremity of the affordability crisis, we can’t fill them. So it’s not that there’s a revolving door, it’s that there are these long vacancies where there’s no person to put into that job. And so we lose so much momentum in the informal networks that we rely on to help engage youth across organizations and systems.”*

**“We [DCYF grantees] spend a lot of time with each other, we’re in each other houses all the time, dropping off flyers and doing things together. [It would be different] if the [public] system folks were showing up at our doors the way the community folks are.”**

**—Grantee**

#### San Francisco’s Housing Crisis

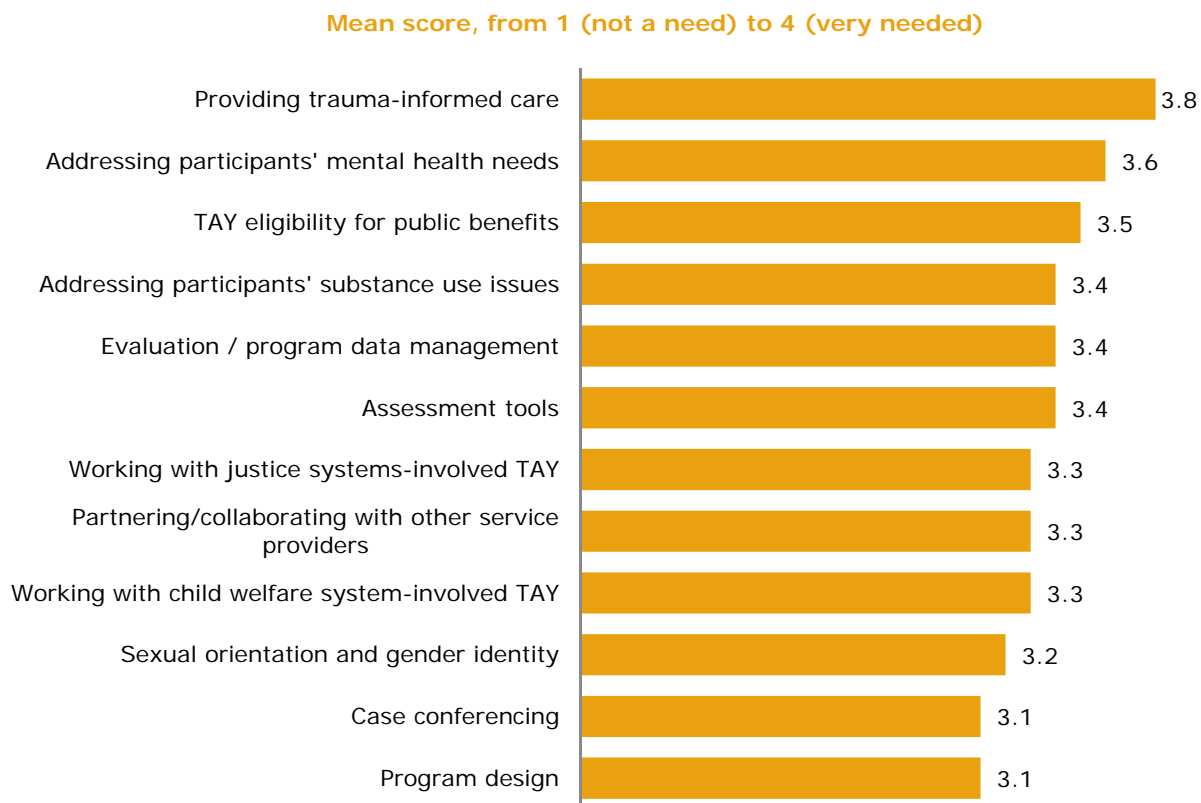
The high cost of housing—and living—in San Francisco creates additional challenges for TAY service participants and providers alike.

- TAY participants reported that finding secure housing was the number one service they needed but were unable to get.
- Grantees reported housing instability as the top challenge for engaging participants and sustaining participant engagement, and for participants’ ability to successfully achieve their goals once they transition out.
- The lack of affordable housing for nonprofit staff also impacts hiring and retention of quality TAY service providers.



**Grantees identified a number of areas in which San Francisco’s TAY providers need additional training and technical assistance.** They appreciated the training provided as part of DCYF’s peer learning sessions, and emphasized the need for more—not just for themselves, but for all agencies that interact with disconnected TAY. As displayed in Exhibit 14 below, requested training topics range from approaches to service delivery (e.g., providing trauma-informed care), to working with populations with unique needs (e.g., systems-involved and LGBTQ TAY), to internal capacity building (e.g., evaluation and assessment). This type of support is particularly important for organizations that are newer to providing TAY-specific services.

**Exhibit 14. Necessity of Training and/or Technical Assistance for Service Providers (n=23)**



*Source: TAY Grantee Survey*

Grantees felt that this training and technical assistance could be delivered by TAY providers with relevant expertise or by external trainers, noting that the most important characteristics for any trainer or technical assistance provider were experience working with TAY providers, experience providing TAY services, and an ability to serve as an ongoing resource for TAY providers. Some grantees added that bringing in skilled trainers and facilitators would help San Francisco’s providers align more closely with the broader field of TAY research and service delivery. One recommended that DCYF support a “high-level training on disconnected youth...so the whole system can begin looking at why this particular group of young people is such a priority and what the long-term outcomes are.” Another grantee agreed, and felt that such “multi-system, multi-agency” capacity building efforts have the potential to “put some life” into the work and “lift up the energy” that DCYF’s grantees bring to the table. 📌

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**“I loved all the trainings DCYF and the service providers in our collaborative provided.”**

**–Grantee**

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# Recommendations

This report contains key learnings from DCYF's pilot round of TAY grants, with an eye to how service providers, DCYF, and other funders can continue to improve and strengthen the existing network of programs and supports for San Francisco's disconnected TAY. We shed light on the unique characteristics and needs of notable subgroups, while acknowledging the intersectionality of many of the City's disconnected young people. We also highlighted promising practices for TAY providers, which center on building trusting relationships in a variety of ways. Lastly, we addressed providers' capacity-related needs, including their suggestions for how funders can respond to and support those needs. Based on these findings, we offer the following recommendations for DCYF and other funders that support San Francisco's TAY-serving organizations.

- 1. Help build providers' capacity to work with specific subgroups of disconnected TAY.** Grantees bring a range of experiences serving different sub-populations of San Francisco's disconnected young people (e.g., former foster youth, parenting TAY, justice system-involved TAY). Over time, providers typically gain more experience working with some groups than with others. At the same time, this evaluation found that TAY program participants frequently identify with multiple subgroups. Many of DCYF's TAY grantees voiced a need for additional training in order for all TAY-serving organizations to appropriately support young people with diverse experiences and identities. LGBTQ TAY rose to the top as a population served by a range of providers in San Francisco, many of whom may lack the cultural competency skills to effectively serve them. In addition to supporting external training and technical assistance, funders like DCYF can take advantage of grantees' expertise by inviting those with more experience to lead trainings and share best practices and appropriate language.
- 2. Encourage grantees to be thoughtful and intentional about their intake, assessment, and case management processes.** While grantees vary in their approaches to intake and assessment, they generally agreed on the importance of starting with less intrusive questions and gradually phasing into asking for more personal information. Consequently, to the extent possible, funders should avoid requiring that grantees collect personal information as part of program intake. Many—but not all—of DCYF's TAY grantees also have processes in place to collect updates and gather feedback from program participants on a regular basis. Additionally, over half of grantees (61 percent) reported that training and/or technical assistance on assessment tools is *very needed* among San Francisco's TAY-serving organizations. DCYF and other funders should consider lifting up and sharing promising practices for intake, assessment, and case management—including approaches that give young people a seat at the table—by drawing on the experiences of agencies that have a longer history successfully working with disconnected TAY.
- 3. Continue strengthening the network of San Francisco's TAY-serving organizations, including partnerships between nonprofit and public sector providers.** Grantees valued DCYF's efforts to bring them together to build relationships and share information, particularly during peer learning sessions. Some, however, highlighted a "missed opportunity" to

take full advantage of the knowledge, skills, and practices that each grantee could have contributed at those sessions. They agreed that service providers and participants alike would benefit from continuing to build stronger relationships to help streamline referrals and facilitate the sharing of best practices. Grantees also felt that, as a funder that already has relationships with a number of TAY-serving organizations across the City, DCYF should be involved in these efforts. One grantee shared, “Just having the City step into the conversation with us, and think creatively about [TAY services], and what is the City’s role and what is the community’s role ...would be amazing.”

This evaluation also uncovered a particular need for stronger communications between nonprofit and public agencies that work with disconnected young people. Grantees suggested starting by building a greater understanding of how each system operates, for example, “assessing how [public sector agencies] are taking in their clients, asking them, ‘Do you know about the services and organizations that are in your community?’” As one of several City and County departments that supports this population, DCYF may be well-positioned to support and/or take part in those efforts.

#### **4. Explore ways to measure different types of activities and impacts.**

Grantees overwhelmingly agreed that traditional metrics are unable to capture the full breadth of how service participants experience and benefit from TAY programming. They recommended tracking longer-term outcomes, which would require mechanisms for staying in contact with participants after they have transitioned out of TAY services. They also suggested measuring changes in participant attitudes and behavior and gathering qualitative data, both of which support the value of a mixed-methods approach to evaluation—which may include surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups—as well as more participatory data collection methods that engage young people in design, data collection, and analysis.

Finally, grantees noted the importance of assessing provider connections as a way to more fully understand the TAY service network’s strengths and areas for improvement as a whole. To do so, it would be necessary to first take stock of the full universe of TAY providers in San Francisco, and then gather information about their connections with one another through surveys and/or interviews. On a related note, some grantees commented that a shared data system with the capacity to track young people across programs would help them better understand how TAY access services and more effectively exchange information with other providers.

- #### **5. Consider offering and/or advocating for longer-term, flexible funding for well-established TAY service providers.**
- Overall, grantees appreciated DCYF’s trust in providers to create programs that would best meet their clients’ needs. At the same time, they commented on the limitations of short- and medium-term funding for this population, and explained that longer-term funding allows TAY programs to be more impactful. They shared that, when funders shift their focus every few years, providers are forced to adjust their programming accordingly which can disrupt the implementation of promising programs and services.

**6. Advocate for strategies to help retain San Francisco’s nonprofit workforce.** Grantees cited staff turnover—largely related to San Francisco’s high cost of housing and living—as one of the greatest capacity-related challenges they currently face. This was especially true for direct service providers, who are often the first point of contact for TAY participants. To acknowledge and help address this issue, DCYF may wish to look for opportunities to get involved in current efforts that seek to establish living wages and create affordable housing for nonprofit staff. This could include spreading the word about these initiatives, supporting and participating when appropriate, and sharing information about these challenges as a way to advocate on behalf of its grantees. 🏠

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