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EXTENDED FOSTER CARE IN SAN FRANCISCO: ENHANCING SUPPORT FOR FORMER PROBATION FOSTER YOUTH

— Marisa Lin

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This article presents recommendations to improve outcomes for foster youth in the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (JPD)'s extended foster care (AB 12) program. The program serves foster youth ages 18 to 21 with former involvement with San Francisco's juvenile justice system, a particularly vulnerable population that often experiences a high degree of trauma and lack of consistent familial support.

SUMMARY

In this article, Marisa Lin evaluates the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (JPD)'s extended foster care (AB 12) program.¹ Based on interviews with AB 12 participants and staff, she finds that youth in the program face challenges with building connections, affording housing, and making the transition out of support programs. She makes recommendations for how JPD can better cultivate youths' relationships with supportive adults, make more financial resources available to access housing in the Bay Area, and increase support for youth aging out of foster care.

BACKGROUND

California's Assembly Bill 12 offers voluntary, extended foster care for youth aged eighteen through twenty-one.² The San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (JPD)'s AB 12 program serves the subset of foster youth who have had contact with the juvenile justice system. Other foster youth in the child welfare system in San Francisco are served by the County's Human Services Agency (HSA).

By extending foster care, AB 12 programs give foster youth more time to focus on housing, education, employment, and health, along with forming supportive connections with other adults. Youth receive caseworker support and monthly payments from the County or a transitional housing agency. Studies from other jurisdictions have shown that youth who remained in foster care after 18 were more likely to pursue postsecondary education, have higher earnings, and delay pregnancy.³ Exhibit 1 shows the eligibility and participation criteria for the AB 12 program.

Exhibit 1: AB 12 Eligibility and Participation Criteria

Initial Eligibility Requirements	Ongoing Participation Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must have an out-of-home placement order by age 18• Must be off juvenile probation*• Must be able to meet one of the ongoing participation requirements (right)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must live in an approved placement• Must meet monthly with social worker• Must meet one of the following:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Secondary education2) Post-secondary education3) Employment of at least 80 hours per month4) Program designed to "promote or remove barriers" to gaining employment5) A documented medical condition that prevents the youth from doing any of the above

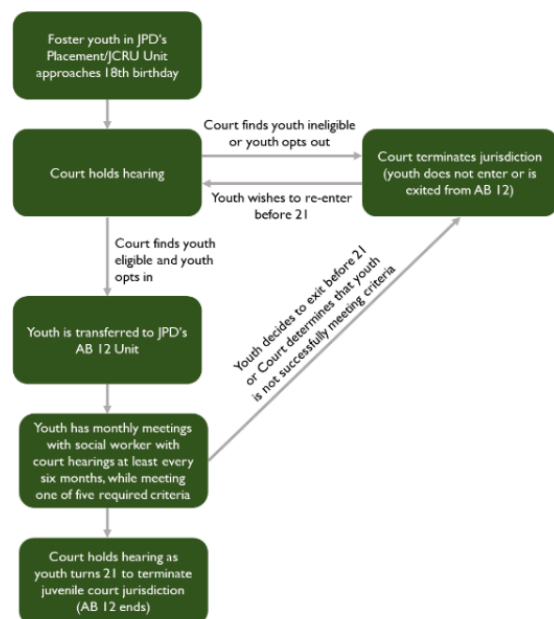
Source: All County Letters 11-61 and interviews with JPD staff.

*San Francisco requirement. Youth who do not successfully complete their probation are still eligible for AB 12. However, they may need to meet certain expectations before entering the program.

JPD’s AB 12 program is a voluntary program, meaning that the youth can opt in and out of the program at age eighteen or anytime before they turn twenty-one. The process is depicted in Exhibit 2.

Other primary roles in the AB 12 program include the judge and a youth’s attorney, typically from the San Francisco Public Defender’s Office.

Exhibit 2: AB 12 Program Flowchart



Social workers and other stakeholders support youth in JPD’s AB 12 program.

Social workers are typically a youth’s primary contact in JPD’s AB 12 program. They support youth in meeting their goals in education, employment, health, parenting, and independent living skills. In monthly in-person meetings, social workers check in on a youth’s progress, which is documented in court reports filed at least every six months.⁴

Social workers may assist youth with a variety of tasks such as opening a bank account, applying to jobs, applying to college, securing housing, and making appointments. In addition, social workers connect youth to outside resources, such as for mental health, education, job training, and independent living skills.

Exhibit 3: AB 12 Roles

Social Worker (JPD)	Judge (Superior Court)	Attorney (Public Defender)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Monthly meetings with youth •Support and guidance to youth •Referrals to service providers •Collaboration with youth’s support team •Court reports every six months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Determines youth eligibility for the program •Receives court reports •Hosts court visits for each youth at least every six months •Identifies areas for additional support and connects youth to resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Address and represent youth on any legal issues that may arise (i.e., adult cases, restraining orders, gender/name changes)

Source: Interviews with various County staff.

In addition to social workers, attorneys, the judge, and other stakeholders come together to support youth. Having multiple people in a youth’s circle of support allows for continuity of relationships and increases the likelihood that the youth will engage with the program. One service provider described how he used his rapport with one youth to loop the social worker into their conversations and better engage him. This collaborative culture is integral to JPD’s AB 12 program.

Most youth in JPD’s program are youth of color.

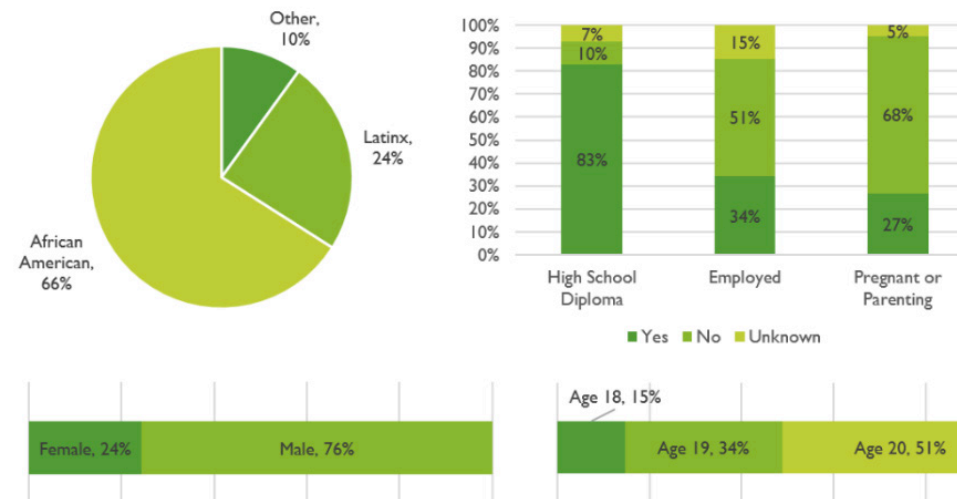
Exhibit 4: AB 12 Youth’s Circle of Support



Source: Analysis based on staff interviews.

In June 2023, there were 41 youths in JPD’s AB 12 program. Almost 95 percent of AB 12 youth were youth of color (Hispanic/Latinx and African American) and three in four were male. While 83 percent had a high school diploma, only a third were employed in June.⁵ In addition, about a quarter were pregnant or parenting. Roughly half of AB 12 youth were twenty years old, indicating that they will age out of the program by the end of 2023.

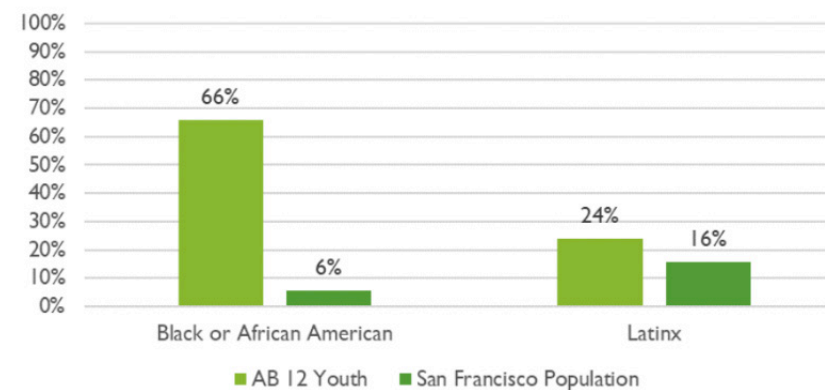
Exhibit 5: Characteristics of JPD’s AB 12 Youth (N=41)



Source: Internal JPD data as of June 30, 2023.

The racial demographics of youth in the AB 12 program is significantly different than the overall San Francisco population, as shown in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6: AB 12 Youth are Disproportionately Black and Latino



Source: AB 12 youth figures from JPD internal data as of June 30, 2023. San Francisco figures are 2022 estimates from the US Census (2023 was not yet available at the time of this writing).

AB 12 supports youth in the path towards adulthood.

Exhibit 7: AB 12 Youth Success Areas

Permanent Connections	Relationships with caring and supportive adults and peers
Housing	Safe and stable housing
Education and Employment	Enrollment in education, employed, or in a program that reduces barriers to employment
Healthcare	Access to services and resources to maintain positive physical and mental health
Independent Living Skills	Skills to navigate daily independent living and achieve education/career goals
Long-term Plan	A sustainable long-term plan with a demonstrated commitment to follow through

Source: This framework was informed by interviews with staff and SFCASA’s five advocacy areas, which can be found here: <https://www.sfcasa.org/s/SFCASAAadvocacyAreas02-2020.pdf>.

SFCASA is an organization that trains and supports Court Appointed Special Advocates to San Francisco-based foster youth.

The following findings are informed by analysis of internal department data, interviews with City/County staff at JPD and other departments, a Superior Court Judge, community-based organizations, and foster youth.

Finding 1: Relationships are key to transitioning foster youth to adulthood.

Youth may experience trauma from remaining with JPD.

Although the AB 12 program is not a probation program, the Juvenile Probation Department oversees the program for youth with former involvement in the juvenile justice system. This arrangement can exacerbate the trauma AB 12 youth have experienced in the system. One youth expressed that he was initially concerned that AB 12 would be—or feel like—an extension of probation. He stated that he had friends who quit the program because it felt too much like probation. While he personally benefited from the program, he chose not to attend his AB 12 court hearings because it reminded him of being incarcerated.

Staff noted that youth may be hesitant to visit JPD since that is where they attended court while on probation. And one service provider pointed out that youth in JPD’s AB 12 program must still have a law enforcement agency approve their housing placements, even though they are off probation.

Relational permanency is critical for success.

Enabling youth to form strong, supportive relationships within their communities can reduce the need for them to depend on the formal foster care system. Relational permanency is “a sense of belonging through enduring, lifelong connections to parents, extended family or other caring adults, including at least one adult who will provide

a permanent, parent-like connection for that youth.”⁶ Studies have shown that permanency has long-term beneficial impacts on youths’ social, psychological, and financial outcomes.⁷ Parents and extended family can offer important ongoing support that is difficult to replace with programs and outside individuals.

Relational permanency looks different for each individual. While some youth may have relationships with parents and other biological connections, others may prefer alternative structures of support. Those in the LGBTQ+ community, for instance, often rely on “chosen families”—individuals who are biologically unrelated but provide mutual love and support that is lacking from their biological families.⁸ Recognizing the value of these nontraditional communities for LGBTQ+ youth and helping them engage with chosen family networks can assist them in achieving permanency.

Establishing relational permanency is especially critical for AB 12 youth, since they may have faced previous barriers to developing permanent connections, including incarceration. They only have at most three years before they age out of care, and many live away from their home communities in San Francisco due to cost. Currently, social workers encourage youth to cultivate “lifelong” connections; if a youth doesn’t have permanent connections, social workers may connect youth with San Francisco CASA⁹ or other service providers. Because youth are legal adults, social workers do not contact the youth’s family members. Permanency should be a priority given that youth will soon be emancipating from care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop formal processes to help youth cultivate close connections with family members and other supportive individuals. These efforts may include:

- Covering transportation costs for visits
- Identifying and connecting youth and their families to counseling services

Finding 2: AB 12 youth do not receive enough funding to afford housing and basic living costs.

Stable housing is critical for the health and success of foster youth.

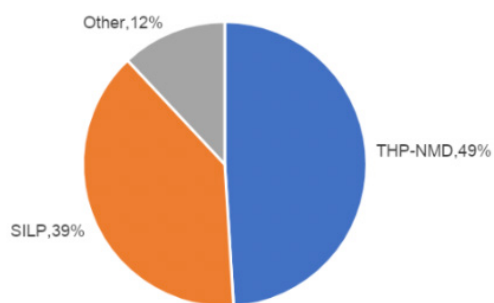
The purpose of housing in extended foster care is safety, preparation for independence, and stability. According to program guidance, AB 12 youth should live in “placements that are least restrictive and encourage as much independence as possible, based on the youth’s development needs and readiness for independence.”¹⁰ JPD staff described how housing stability allows youth to better focus on their education, employment, and independent living goals:

“Without the basic stability of housing, people can’t survive in any other aspect of their life. Giving either a transitional housing program or a stipend to pay for housing provides stability [for youth] to work on mental health issues, safety issues, education issues, employment issues—all those things.” – JPD staff

AB 12 youth live in two placement types: Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILPs) and transitional housing programs (THPs). A SILP is a placement that the youth is responsible for arranging, such as an apartment, single room occupancy, dorm, or an arrangement with a family member. THP housing, on the other hand, is managed through an agency that provides case

management and other services onsite. As of July 2023, half of JPD’s AB 12 youth resided in transitional housing placements and forty percent in SILPs.¹¹

Exhibit 8: Half of AB 12 Youth Live in Transitional Housing Placements (N=41)



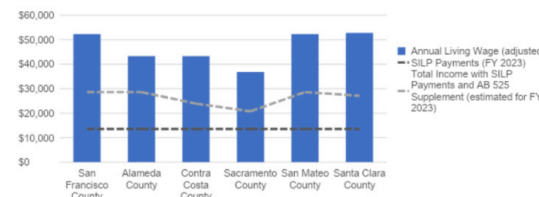
Source: Internal JPD data as of July 21, 2023. THP-NMD stands for Transitional Housing for Non-Minor Dependents. The “Other” category includes incarcerated youth and unapproved SILPs.

Living costs are a major factor driving youth to live outside of San Francisco.

AB 12 does not require youth to live in the same county as the court whose jurisdiction they are under. As of June 2023, about eighty percent of JPD’s AB 12 youth lived outside of San Francisco. The most common counties where JPD’s foster youth live are Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Mateo.

Housing costs are a significant factor in causing youth to relocate outside of the city. Rents can exceed the monthly AB 12 payments they receive, which are meant to cover both housing and other living costs. In interviews, some youth described leaving San Francisco to escape gang-related violence.

Exhibit 9: SILP Payments are Lower than Living Wages in California Counties



Source: Annual living wage based on 2022-23 estimates from MIT Living Wage Calculator. These include food, housing, transportation, and other costs. Medical costs were subtracted from MIT’s original estimates since youth are eligible to receive medical services free of cost through the County. AB 525 supplements are estimated based on the methodology proposed by the bill.

AB 525 proposes funding to increase housing affordability for youth.

In February 2023, the Legislature proposed AB 525, a bill to provide a housing supplement for youth living in SILPs based on their county of residence. The State would calculate this supplement based on the difference between half of the fair market rent of a two-bedroom apartment in the county of residence and 30 percent of the rate currently paid out to youth in SILPs, adjusted annually with HUD fair market rent data. With this method, AB 12 youth living in Bay Area counties and Sacramento would have each received at least \$20,000 as a supplement for FY 2023.

Although AB 525 did not pass during the 2023 legislative session, supporting similar initiatives can ensure that youth have the resources to afford housing that is supportive to their development. Adequate funds for housing allow youth to have greater agency over where they live, who they live with, and the opportunities they can access.

Recommendations:

- Support advocacy efforts for housing supplements for youth living in SILPs, such as legislation similar to AB 525.
- Until AB 525 or similar legislation is passed, provide financial supplements to youth living in SILPs according to their county of residence, no less than the amounts based on the approach proposed by AB 525 and using the MIT Living Wage Estimates as a reference.
- Identify how much income youth in transitional housing programs (THPs) are receiving each month and supplement it using the MIT Living Wage Estimates as a reference.

Finding 3: More resources are needed to support youth beyond 21.

AB 12 support abruptly ends at age twenty-one.

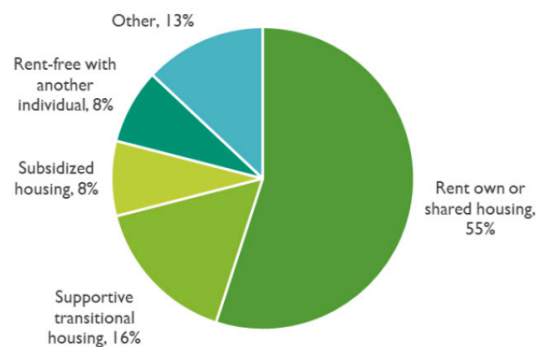
Youth age out of AB 12 on their twenty-first birthday. This means that they are no longer eligible to receive AB 12 monthly payments and lose the formal support of their social worker, judge, and attorney. Staff and service providers expressed concern that the loss of support and lack of transitional services put youth at risk of adverse outcomes.

Interviewees consistently identified housing as the main challenge for youth aging out. To avoid homelessness, youth must secure a transitional housing program-plus (THP+) placement, which is designated for youth over 18, or other living arrangement. However, THP+ beds for youth over twenty-one are scarce; in November 2022, projections estimated that San Francisco needed sixty-nine beds over its current capacity to meet the

estimated number of youth aging out in 2023. Moreover, San Francisco only has THP+ placements available within the county, meaning that youth living in other counties must apply through other county agencies, leading to potentially long wait times. To address this gap, JPD should make additional THP+ beds available within San Francisco and other counties.

Exacerbating housing challenges is the reality that many youth emancipating from care may not have the financial ability to live on their own. Of the thirty-eight youth who exited JPD’s AB 12 program in 2022, only twenty-eight were employed, while nearly forty percent were receiving temporary financial assistance and twenty-four percent were receiving CalFresh benefits.¹²

Exhibit 10: Housing Status of JPD’s AB 12 Youth Exiting in 2022 (N = 38)

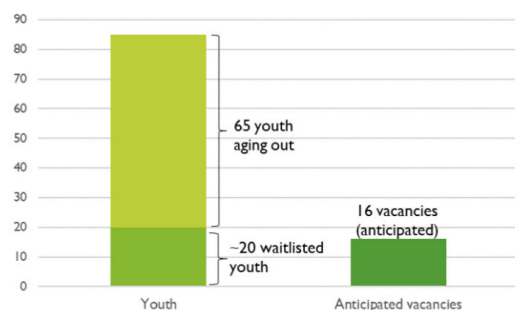


Source: Exit survey data collected by JPD staff and reported to HSA. “Other” includes youth with other types of arrangements, unknown arrangements, or no arrangements.

During this stressful time, youth aging out often need additional support in their transition. According to staff, some former AB 12 youth remain in contact with their social worker and attorney. While abruptly cutting off ties with youth who have aged out may

not be humane, these relationships impose additional demands on staff. To address this, JPD should create a community-based aftercare program that can be a resource for former foster youth.

Exhibit 11: Projections of THP+ Vacancies and AB 12 Youth (as of November 2022)



Source: HSA internal projections for 2023 as of November 2022. Of the 65 youth anticipated to age out of AB 12 in 2023, 39 are from HSA and 26 from JPD. Waitlisted youth are former AB 12 youth who are still waiting for a THP+ bed. Note that this graph reflects a snapshot in time and numbers are subject to change.

New initiatives have provided financial support to youth aging out.

In addition to housing, there have been initiatives to continue financial support for youth after they age out of extended foster care, described in Exhibit 12.

Exhibit 12: Efforts to Support Youth Aging Out of AB 12

Effort	Description
Emergency Housing Assistance Payments	San Francisco began issuing payments to youth who emancipated from extended foster care at the end of 2021. Youth in the first cohort received \$1,060 per month for 18 months.
Guaranteed Income (GI) Pilot	In November 2022, San Francisco’s Human Services Agency was one of seven applicants across California selected to participate in the first State-funded guaranteed income pilot program. The San Francisco GI pilot launched in October 2023 and is issuing \$1,200 per month to AB 12 youth who emancipated from care anytime in 2022 or 2023.
Senate Bill 9	In December 2022, Senator Dave Cortese introduced Senate Bill 9 (SB 9) to facilitate a 3-year pilot program in at least three counties to extend foster care up to age 22.

Source: Interviews with staff and City/County communications.

Efforts like SB 9, EHAP, and the GI pilot are important, as interviewees recognized that three years is not long enough for youth to be adequately prepared for adulthood. “Age twenty-one is just very young for that major transition [out] of AB 12 to happen,” one service provider remarked, recommending that youth should have “more time and more support.”

JPD should identify ways to continue financial support for AB 12 youth aging out of care while supporting advocacy efforts to pass SB 9. These efforts will help extend the runway for AB 12 youth transitioning into adulthood and increase their chances of success.

Recommendations

- Expand the number of available THP+ beds in San Francisco and work with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to make THP+ beds available in counties where many of the Department’s AB 12 youth live.
- Create and fund a community-based after-care program for youth to facilitate connections to resources, programs, and caring adults as youth transition into adulthood.
- Support advocacy efforts for SB 9 and similar initiatives. Continue funding the Guaranteed Income program beyond the initial pilot until SB 9 or similar bill is passed.

CONCLUSION

The San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department’s (JPD) AB 12 program fills a crucial gap in supporting probation youth who have been placed in foster care as they transition to adulthood. As a “downstream”

program, extended foster care is limited in its ability to prevent the harm that youth experience in the child welfare and justice systems. At best, however, it is a responsive intervention that provides youth with one of their final opportunities to build a life free from these systems.

This report shows that accomplishing this outcome requires more than the effort of any single individual; rather, it involves a community of supportive adults who can offer permanency, wisdom, and resources. It also requires adequate financial support that covers more basic living costs—enough to enable youth to live healthy, vibrant lives while building an educational and economic foundation for their futures.

ENDNOTES

1 This article is a shortened version of a report the author presented to the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Commission on October 11, 2023. The full version of this report can be found on JPD's website: <https://sf.gov/reports/october-2023/juvenile-probation-department-reports>
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2 In legal terms, these youth are referred to as Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs). They will be referred to as "youth" for the remainder of this report.

3 Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A. & Pollack, H., (2007). When Should the State Cease Parenting? Evidence from the Midwest Study. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

4 May be more frequent if the court requests interim report(s), depending on a youth's needs.

5 As of September 2023, staff reported that four youth were enrolled in college, and one had recently graduated with an Associate's Degree.

6 Annette Semanchin Jones, Traci LaLiberte, "Measuring youth connections: A component of relational permanence for foster youth." Children and Youth Services Review, Volume 35, Issue 3, 2013, Pages 509-517.

7 Ibid.

8 Blum, Dani. "The Joy in Finding Your Chosen Family." The New York Times, The New York Times Company, 25 June 2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/well/lgbtq-chosen-families.html.

9 San Francisco CASA is an organization that trains and supports Court Appointed Special Advocates to San Francisco-based foster youth.

10 All County Letter 11-77.

11 The most common THP providers were Unity Care, Holly's Place, and Pacific Clinics.

12 According to the State's instructions for completing the exit survey (Form SOC 405XP), temporary financial assistance could include Independent Living Program support, Emancipated Youth Stipend, or other.