

Oakland's Neighborhood Opportunity
and Accountability Board

KEEPING YOUTH OUT OF THE SYSTEM AND CONNECTED TO SUPPORT



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NICJR ★
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

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The Oakland Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB) launched in April 2020 after a multi-year planning process. The NOAB is a youth diversion program that allows young people charged with offenses for which they would otherwise be detained in juvenile hall and adjudicated through the juvenile court, to remain in the community and immediately connected to services and supports. Since April, the Oakland Police Department (OPD) has referred more than 20 youth to the program at the point of arrest in lieu of system involvement. Youth referred to the NOAB appear before a council of community leaders to develop a detailed support plan.

Why the Need for the NOAB?

The juvenile justice system is ineffective, harmful, and extremely expensive. Under the traditional correctional model of juvenile justice, youth are removed from their neighborhoods, at times for minor infractions, the community and even the family is left out of decision-making, and resources that could be used to address root causes of delinquent behavior are wasted on a failed approach.

Numerous studies have found that involvement in the juvenile justice system, even while controlling for other factors, causes youth to have worse outcomes. One study found that for youth who commit nonviolent crimes (the majority of youth in the system) doing nothing creates better outcomes than placing them in the juvenile justice system. Another study that rigorously examined the effects of the juvenile justice system found that incarceration itself resulted in “large decreases in the likelihood of high school completion and large increases in the likelihood of adult incarceration.”

Not only is the system failing, but it is also extremely expensive. A study conducted by the San Francisco Chronicle discovered that California counties spend upwards of a half million dollars per year to keep a youth in juvenile detention. The county where NOAB operates, Alameda County, is reported to spend \$493,000 per year for each youth incarcerated in its juvenile hall.

Most young people who become involved in the juvenile justice system come from neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, substandard schools, and high rates of unemployment. When young people exhibit behavior that is often reflective of the challenges of their environment, they are plucked out of their families and neighborhoods, sent to an ineffective juvenile facility for a long period of time, and then returned to their same resource-deprived community.

In many small neighborhoods within areas with high concentration of poverty and crime, there can easily be a 15 square-block radius with 20 youth in the juvenile justice system. With an average annual cost of \$150,000 per youth, as much as \$3 million is spent every year on incarcerating youth in these neighborhoods, with little, if any, funds going into that community.

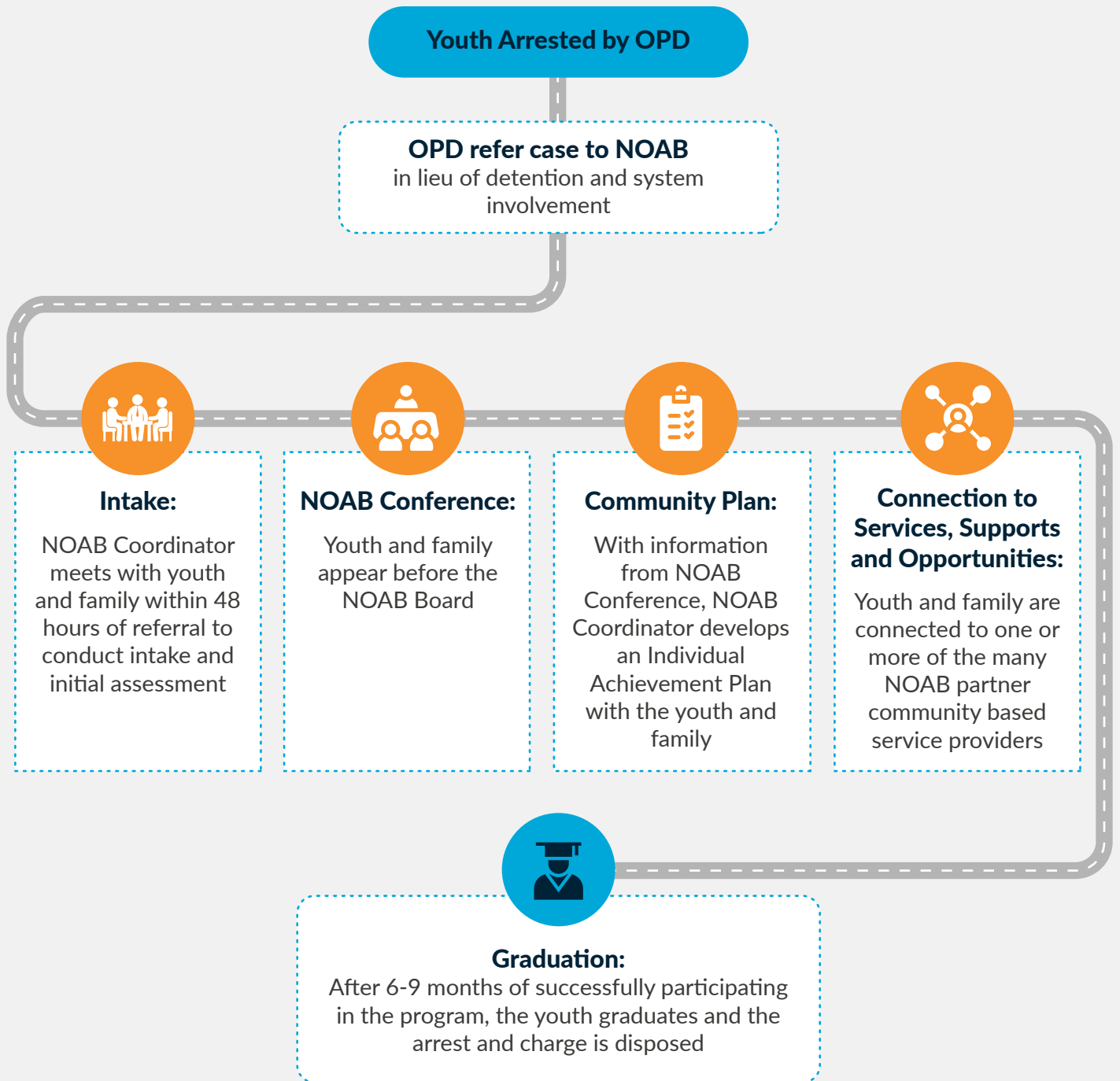
The NOAB initiative offers a new model of youth justice that focuses on restorative, rather than punitive practices, increases community involvement in decision-making, and invests resources in youth, families, and neighborhoods.

Background

A group of community leaders had been discussing the idea of a restorative justice based diversion program in Oakland for several years. Significant progress had been made but funding and political will lapsed. The idea was later revived and merged with the initial effort by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to develop the NOAB. A planning committee was established, including many community based organizations and government partners, that began drafting protocols for the youth diversion program.

In 2017, the J.M. Kaplan Fund awarded an Innovation Prize to NICJR to develop the NOAB. Following two years of negotiation with the OPD and other stakeholders, the Oakland City Council unanimously passed a resolution supporting the NOAB and approving a two-year MOU between OPD and NICJR to launch the program.

The NOAB Process



The Oakland NOAB is committed to being a true diversion from system involvement. Therefore, youth who commit lower level offenses, who would not usually be detained or adjudicated in the juvenile court, do not receive a referral to the NOAB. Youth arrested for non-violent felonies or multi-misdemeanors, who would otherwise be processed through the juvenile justice system, have the opportunity to avoid the punitive process of formal system involvement and, instead, are referred to the community-driven NOAB.

When a youth is arrested by an officer, they are processed through the Youth Desk at OPD. Staff at OPD review the case, assess whether the youth meets the NOAB criteria, and make the decision to refer the case to the NOAB. If the youth is referred, they receive a notice that they will be contacted by the NOAB Coordinator and must engage with the diversion program. If the case has a victim, the victim is consulted for their consent before the youth is referred to the NOAB.

Within 48 hours of receiving the referral, the NOAB Coordinator meets with the youth and family to conduct an initial assessment and intake. The NOAB Coordinator explains the program, including the many benefits, and gains the youth and family's agreement to participate. Then, a NOAB Conference is scheduled.

Youth and their families appear before the NOAB Board at a NOAB Conference that follows a family group conferencing model. The youth and family members discuss their strengths, challenges, and goals, and any specific needs. NOAB members engage the youth and family in a discussion and provide guidance and support.

The NOAB Conference culminates in the development of an Individual Achievement Plan that includes connections to services, supports, and opportunities with an emphasis on educational support, mentoring and life coaching, behavioral health care, family counseling, and youth employment.

The Oakland NOAB is composed of the following eight community members, all residents or business owners in Oakland, who have demonstrated a commitment to the well-being of Oakland youth and the greater community:



Arnold Perkins,
Retired Director of Alameda
County Public Health
Department



Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole,
Faith in Action East Bay;
community leader and mother of
victim of gun violence in Oakland



Rashidah Grinage,
Coordinator, Coalition for Police
Accountability



Daniela Medina,
Masters of Social Work Student
at U.C. Berkeley; UC Berkeley
Underground Scholars



John Jones,
Director of Community and
Political Engagement at Just
Cities, formerly incarcerated.



Keba Konte,
Owner of Red Bay Coffee



Victor Flores,
Oakland Latino Chamber of
Commerce, former staff to
Oakland City Councilman Loren
Taylor; formerly incarcerated



Danny Mai,
Owner of Novatech (local
Oakland business); Chair of
Oakland Rotary's Business
Development Committee

Based on the initial assessment and the discussion with the youth and family during the NOAB Conference, the NOAB Coordinator completes the Individual Achievement Plan with the youth in order to connect them with the most appropriate services. The NOAB Coordinator then directly connects the youth and family with the identified service providers. The NOAB Coordinator maintains consistent contact with the youth, family, and service providers throughout the program. Detailed notes and updates on each youth are maintained in a NOAB database to track progress.

An array of local community-based service providers partner with the NOAB to engage the youth and their families. The organizations providing services, supports, and opportunities include:



In addition to partner service providers, NOAB Board members have directly shown consistent commitment to the success of youth referred to the program. NOAB Board member Keba Konte, owner of a local coffee company, offered his business as the meeting place for NOAB hearings, a stark contrast to the traditional setting of a courtroom. Members have also offered their own resources to support NOAB youth. Keba has offered internships at his shop to youth referred to the program. Board member Danny Mai, owner of Novatech, has not only offered slots in his entrepreneurial camp but has also provided a direct donation to support a participating family.

In NOAB hearings, due to the pride and connection that Board members have for their community, there is a greater focus on healing and caring for the youth and family that may not be able to be achieved in traditional juvenile justice settings. Board members have a deep compassion for youth and a personal interest in their success. One particularly emotional moment during a NOAB hearing underscores this sentiment. During a hearing for a 16-year-old youth, his grandmother shared that she was struggling to support her grandson. She is the primary caregiver for several of her other grandchildren and dealing with her son's incarceration. Board member John Jones then shared details about his own upbringing and reflected on his challenges and the pain his own incarceration caused his mother. By the end of his comments, all attendees were in tears. This is the same family to which Board member Danny Mai generously contributed.

Impact

The Oakland NOAB received 23 youth referrals between April and December 2020. Sixteen of these youth were arrested for felonies, including burglary, grand theft auto, and assault with a firearm. The NOAB Program Coordinator has engaged with all youth and their families, who have been receptive to the program and remain engaged in services. Seven youth have been connected to intensive life coaching services, eight to employment programs, six to family counseling, and one to behavioral health services, with several youth receiving referrals to multiple services.

Just one youth has been re-arrested and charged with a new offense. He was released after five days in custody. NOAB staff attended his court hearing and connected with him immediately following his release. He remains in the program while awaiting adjudication of his new charges. Seven youth have successfully completed the six-month requirement and six will graduate from the program while still remaining connected to the community-based service providers. One of these youth will remain in the program to receive additional services. Throughout the program, youth received monthly gift cards for their participation. The NOAB was also able to provide all 23 youth and families in the program with additional gift cards for the holidays.

The following profiles are a small sample of youth in the NOAB program. They include the successes and challenges of the youth, their families, their neighborhoods, and the public systems to which they are connected.



NOAB Youth Profiles

NICJR has changed the names of the youth highlighted below to protect their privacy.

Jose 14 Years Old Vehicle Theft

On May 26, officers stopped Jose for driving a stolen vehicle. OPD referred him to the NOAB on June 11 and in the next few days the NOAB Coordinator met Jose, his mother, and his sister in their home for the initial assessment.

Though only 14 years old, his family described Jose as having several challenges and in need of significant support. In several meetings with his family, they expressed a need for supporting him with reducing unsafe and risky behaviors, which they noticed had been escalating leading up to his arrest. Jose also shared that he had been shot at within the past six months.

In July 2020, Jose and his family met with the NOAB Board and collectively discussed the best options to meet his needs. The group determined that a Life Coach could provide Jose with regular support and guidance to begin to shift his behavior. Jose was receptive to the recommended services. The NOAB connected him to Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ) an Oakland based organization that specializes in serving Latino youth. CURYJ assigned a Life Coach to Jose who has been working intensely with him. Jose has completed the six months of the program but his involvement will be extended in order to ensure he receives all of the support he needs to be successful.

Jeremiah 15 Years Old Vehicle Theft; Receiving Stolen Property

On July 27, officers arrested Jeremiah for vehicle theft and receiving stolen property, after he was caught weaving in and out of traffic lanes and crashing into a parked car. OPD referred him to the NOAB on August 10. Following the referral, the NOAB Coordinator met with Jeremiah and his parents in their home in Oakland.

Jeremiah has lived with his adoptive parents since he was three, with his older biological sister. His biological mother is currently incarcerated and will be released from prison soon. In meetings with the NOAB Coordinator, Jeremiah expressed that he feels loved in his home but that his ultimate goal is to be reunited with his biological mother. He acknowledges that he has displayed negative behaviors that are only getting worse.

On August 27, Jeremiah and his family met with the NOAB Board to determine how best to support Jeremiah. While Jeremiah had been receiving therapeutic behavioral services, including talk therapy and visits with a psychiatrist, the group collectively identified additional needs, including increasing prosocial behaviors through positive role-modeling and mentoring. The NOAB connected Jeremiah to 1:1 life coaching with a supportive adult, additional behavioral health services, and employment opportunities.

Throughout the process, Jeremiah has been receptive and communicative. In addition to the service providers, Jeremiah remains in constant contact with the NOAB Coordinator. He regularly attends school remotely and began working as a dishwasher at a cafe in downtown Oakland. Jeremiah will graduate from the NOAB program in February.

Michael
16 Years Old
**Assault with a
Deadly Weapon;
Malicious
Mischief**

On May 11, officers arrested Michael for assault with a deadly weapon for firing a paintball gun, accidentally hitting a pedestrian, and causing property damage. Following a referral from OPD, the NOAB Coordinator met with Michael and his primary caregiver in their home in East Oakland.

Born and raised in Oakland, Michael is 16 years old and has been separated from his biological parents since he was a toddler. In meetings with the NOAB Coordinator, Michael expressed remorse for his behavior and a desire to put his mistakes behind him. He shared that he has dreams of playing football professionally.

In July, Michael and his caregiver met with the NOAB Board to determine areas of support. The group identified a need for more positive activities and life coaching. Michael has since been connected to a life coach and employment opportunities through Youth Employment Partnership (YEP). Michael began working at YEP and has maintained good grades in school, while attending remotely. He will graduate from the NOAB program in January 2021.

David
16 Years Old
**Commercial
Burglary**

On April 26, officers responded to the scene of a break-in into a middle school in Oakland. They found David leaving the school carrying laptop computers. David was arrested for burglary but referred to the NOAB program. The NOAB Coordinator met with David and his mother in their home in Oakland.

In meetings with the NOAB Coordinator, family members shared that they have struggled with addiction in the past and that David periodically travels out of the city to stay with his grandparents. David shared that he felt peer pressure to participate in the burglary. The family identified their greatest concerns with David to be managing peer relationships; a lack of positive, pro-social activities; and disengagement from school.

Before David could be scheduled to appear before the NOAB Board, he was shot in East Oakland. It appears that the assailants were attempting to shoot another teenager that was riding in the car with David. After being released from the hospital, David spent a few weeks with his grandparents before returning to Oakland. He then appeared before the NOAB while still unable to fully walk. David made a full recovery and NOAB connected him with Youth Alive!, a local organization that specializes in working with gunshot victims. He has remained in consistent contact with his Youth Alive! Life Coach.

Kevin
14 Years Old
Auto Burglary;
Possession of
Auto Burglary
Tools;
Possession of
Stolen Property

Kevin was arrested for auto theft in June. He was caught with an auto burglary tool after being accused of breaking into cars. OPD referred Kevin to the NOAB on June 11. The NOAB Coordinator met with Kevin and his mother in their home in Oakland immediately afterward.

Kevin is 14 years old and was born and raised in Oakland. His father is currently serving a 10 year prison sentence and his mother is very supportive and loving of Kevin. He acknowledged that his behavior had been challenging recently and his mom requested support with virtual school and more positive reinforcement for Kevin.

Kevin and his mother appeared before the NOAB Board in July. The group identified employment and life coaching as key services to support Kevin in his transition to high school. He is now working with YEP and is connected with a Life Coach. Kevin attends school regularly and maintains close contact with the NOAB Coordinator.

The Oakland NOAB program is funded through the generosity of the JMK Fund and The Zellerbach Family Foundation.



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