

The background is a collage of grayscale photographs showing various community and professional interactions. In the top left, a group of people is seated at tables in what appears to be a dining or meeting area. In the top center, a man in a suit is speaking. In the top right, two men are standing and talking near a door. In the middle right, a group of people is seated at a long table. In the bottom left, a man is looking at a tablet. In the bottom center, a group of young people is smiling, with one wearing a 'GAP' hoodie. In the bottom right, a young person is looking towards the camera.

NOAB

Neighborhood Opportunity
and Accountability Board:
**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
AND DIVERSION PROGRAM**

Progress Report 2023

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NICJR 
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

NOAB

Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board: **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSION PROGRAM**

The Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB) is an innovative, community-driven youth diversion and development model that allows young people charged with offenses for which they would otherwise be detained in juvenile detention and adjudicated through the juvenile court to remain in the community. Youth and their families referred to a NOAB program appear before a board of community leaders to develop a detailed support plan and are immediately connected to services and supports. The NOAB model offers a new approach to youth justice that focuses on restorative, rather than punitive practices; increases community involvement in decision-making; and invests resources in youth, families, and neighborhoods.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) launched the first NOAB program in Oakland in May of 2020, after a multi-year planning process with the Oakland Police Department (OPD) and community stakeholders. In its first two years of operation, the program received 58 referrals from OPD at the point of arrest in lieu of system involvement.



Why the need for NOAB?

Research and many academic studies have confirmed that 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 their family are left out of decision-making processes; and resources that could be used to address the root causes of delinquent behavior are wasted on a failed approach to youth justice.

Numerous studies have found that even when controlling for other factors, involvement in the juvenile justice system causes youth to have worse outcomes than those who are not system involved. One study found that for youth who commit non-violent crimes (the majority of justice-involved youth), doing nothing creates better outcomes than placing them in the juvenile justice system.¹ 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.”²

Not only is the system failing, but it is also extremely expensive. A 2019 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.³ This same study noted that Alameda County, where the Oakland NOAB program operates, 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 with 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 with a high concentration of poverty and crime, there can easily be 20 youth in the juvenile justice system within a 15-square-block radius. Based on the average annual cost of detention noted above, every year approximately \$9.8 million is spent on incarcerating youth in such a neighborhood, with little, if any, funds going into that community.



Background

A group of community leaders had been discussing the idea of a restorative justice-based diversion program in Oakland for several years. Although significant progress was made through these initial discussions, funding and political will eventually lapsed. This idea was later revived and merged with the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform’s efforts to develop and pilot the NOAB model, and a planning committee including many community-based organizations and government partners began drafting protocols for the youth diversion program.⁴

In 2017, the JM Kaplan Fund awarded an Innovation Prize to NICJR to develop and pilot the NOAB model. Following two years of negotiation with the OPD and other stakeholders, the Oakland City Council unanimously passed a resolution supporting the NOAB program and approving a two-year memorandum of understanding between OPD and NICJR to launch the program.⁴

¹ Latrogenic effect of juvenile justice

² Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges

³ Vanishing Violence: Tracking California’s Remarkable Collapse in Youth Crime

⁴ Oakland City Council Resolution

The NOAB Process



The Oakland NOAB program is committed to being a true diversion from system involvement. As such, 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 program. Rather, youth arrested for non-violent felonies or multi-misdemeanors who would otherwise be processed through the juvenile justice system are referred to the community-driven NOAB program, giving them the opportunity to avoid the punitive process of formal system involvement.

When a youth is arrested by an officer, they are processed through the OPD Youth Desk. Staff at OPD review the case, assess whether the youth meets the NOAB criteria, and decide whether to refer the case to the program. If the case has a victim, the victim is consulted for their consent before the youth is referred to the program. 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.

Within 48 hours of receiving the referral, the NOAB Coordinator meets with the youth and their family to explain the program, including its many benefits, and conduct an initial assessment and intake. Following this intake, the Coordinator schedules a NOAB Conference.

The youth and their family appear before the NOAB at a conference that follows a family group conferencing model. In this meeting, board members engage the youth and family in a discussion about their strengths, challenges, and goals, as well as any specific needs, providing guidance and support throughout the conversation. The diversity of board members offers several lenses through which to understand and address the youth's needs and risks, unlike traditional processes dominated by the sole lens of a justice system practitioner.

The Oakland NOAB is composed of the following 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:



Darren White

Program Coordinator, My Brother's Keeper Alliance of the Obama Foundation; lifelong youth advocate



John Jones III

Director of Reentry and Violence Prevention Programs, Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency; formerly incarcerated



Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole

Program and Operations Manager, Faith in Action East Bay; community leader and mother of a victim of gun violence in Oakland



Victor Flores

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



Rashidah Grinage

Coordinator, Police Accountability Board



Danny Mai

Owner, Novatech (local Oakland business); Chair, Oakland Rotary Business Development Committee



Daniela Medina

Associate Director, UC Berkeley Underground Scholars Program

Based on the initial assessment and NOAB Conference discussion, the Coordinator works with the youth and family to develop an Individual Achievement Plan (IAP) that will connect them to the most appropriate services, with an emphasis on educational support, mentoring and life coaching, behavioral health care, family counseling, and youth employment.

If there is an identified victim who is willing to participate in the process, the plan also includes restorative justice programming. When incorporated, restorative justice circles serve as vehicles to drive the development of the IAP, ensuring that victims feel included in the process. When appropriate and feasible, the NOAB also considers providing restitution to victims, particularly in cases where the absence of restitution is a barrier to engaging in a restorative process.

Once the IAP is established, the NOAB Coordinator directly connects the youth and family with the identified service providers, in addition to providing life coaching, self-advocacy, and mentoring services. The 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, and after six to nine months of successful program participation (with specific duration determined on a case-by-case basis), the youth graduates and charges are disposed.

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



Program Updates

NICJR, the NOAB members, and the array of community-based partners involved in the program continue to strengthen and refine the model based on lessons learned in implementation. One of the major contributing factors to the program's success is its board. In May 2021, the Oakland NOAB added a new board member: Darren White. Darren is an award-winning senior practitioner of youth facilitation and advocacy. An Oakland native, he has worked for over twenty years serving his community by providing system-impacted youth with diversion programming and intensive case management. Darren currently serves as program coordinator for My Brother's Keeper Alliance, a subsidiary of the Obama Foundation, where he manages program delivery and direct supports for male youth.

In September 2021, the NOAB program brought on a full-time Life Coach. An Oakland native and former high school football coach, the Life Coach has extensive experience working with youth and is well versed in supporting those impacted by complex trauma. The program also expanded its network of credible messengers and mentors throughout Oakland to support its most at-risk/needs-intensive youth with direct services. Credible messengers are adults who come from the same community and whose backgrounds are similar to those of the youth they engage, often due to a history of justice system involvement.

The Oakland NOAB program has also collaborated with community members to increase support for youth referred to the program. For example, in December 2021, the program hosted a holiday luncheon that brought together youth participants and their families, small business owners, and community members to foster a collaborative discussion around the violence impacting surrounding neighborhoods. The program was able to provide each family with a catered lunch along with a \$100 gift card, distributing over \$800 total. Mistah Fab, a renowned artist and Oakland native, delivered the keynote address at another NOAB program luncheon. After sharing his moving testimony by speaking directly to the youth, he offered paid internships at his Oakland-based clothing store, Dope Era.

More recently, in September 2022, NICJR hosted a dinner with participants and their families at the Oakland Black-owned restaurant, Home of Chicken and Waffles. During the dinner, each family was provided with financial support between \$1,500 and \$2,500 as part of NICJR's Giving Initiative.⁵ Each participant's Life Coach presented the family with their check and made remarks about their work with the family. Several local business owners, community leaders, and City Councilmembers attended and supported the families as well.

Finally, the Oakland NOAB program has recently expanded to serve youth with prior system involvement. Recognizing the positive impact of NOAB on program participants, OPD referred 25 younger youth who had been arrested for more serious offenses in the past. After persistent outreach, four of these youth eventually enrolled in the NOAB program in September of 2022.



⁵ NICJR Giving Initiative distributes nearly \$1 million to Community Violence Intervention programs nationally

Impact

In its first two years of operation, from May 2020 to June 2022, the Oakland NOAB received 58 referrals from OPD. Of those 58 referrals, 40 of the youth had been arrested for felonies such as grand theft auto, carjacking with a firearm, and burglary through forcible entry. In total, 40 youth participated in the NOAB process,⁶ and 31 youth successfully completed the program. The NOAB Coordinator engaged each youth in coaching and mentoring, along with providing referrals to partnering service providers for additional support such as job readiness training and individual counseling. Only three youth were rearrested during this period. The NOAB program continued to engage each of these youth post-arrest, with service intensity increasing as needed via more frequent life coaching and referrals to additional service providers.

The profiles below are a small snapshot of the youth in the Oakland NOAB program. They demonstrate the range of successes and challenges experienced by the youth, their families, and their communities, and the network of systems to which they are connected.

NOAB Youth Profiles

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



Tony

During a traffic stop, officers arrested Tony and his brother for carjacking with a firearm. Tony was only 11 years old at the time of the arrest. While OPD took his brother to the county juvenile detention center, the department referred Tony to the NOAB program. Within a week, the NOAB Coordinator met with Tony and his mom at their home for the initial assessment.

In the initial assessment, Tony shared that he had been surrounded by negative influences his whole life, including being exposed to robberies and carjackings from older siblings. He noted that he was still affected by the arrest and worried daily about his brother's safety. His family also expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated Tony's negative behaviors and highlighted the need for more positive influences in his life.

The family met with the NOAB in September 2022 to discuss the best options for Tony. The group determined that Tony could benefit from mental health services to help shift negative thinking patterns and build his sense of self-worth. Additionally, the Board recommended that an in-house Life Coach provide Tony with weekly support and a positive role model. Tony and his mom were receptive to the recommendations and were referred to the Carl B. Metoyer Center for Family Counseling, an Oakland-based organization that specializes in intensive family counseling and restorative healing. Since being connected to NOAB, Tony has been attending school full time, his brother has safely returned home, and he is doing well.



⁶ Reasons for non-enrolment of referred youth included age (too young), moved out of state, or lack of response from the family.



Juan

Juan was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon in August 2021. He was accused of hitting a housemate with a baseball bat after a verbal altercation escalated between them. The NOAB Coordinator met with Juan at his home within days of the referral to conduct an initial assessment. Juan was transparent about the incident and identified that he had anger issues and a lack of prosocial outlets.

Juan and his mother met with the NOAB to prioritize areas of support. Collectively, the group recommended individual life coaching with a supportive adult and a youth employment opportunity. Juan acknowledged that his anger was avoidable and was highly receptive to recommendations from the Board. Juan was assigned a NOAB Life Coach and he is currently a senior in high school and on track to graduate on time. He regularly meets with his Life Coach and recently graduated from the Fresh Lifelines for Youth Leadership Development program.



John and Terrance

John and Terrance, brothers in their early teens, were arrested for auto theft after they were caught weaving in and out of traffic and crashed into the front gate of a local business. John and Terrence were referred to the NOAB program and within a few days the NOAB Coordinator met with the family for an initial assessment. Both John and Terrance were relieved to learn that they had been diverted to NOAB as opposed to entering the formal juvenile justice system. After several meetings with the NOAB Coordinator, they expressed a need for support around school engagement and mentoring to refrain from negative peers and behavior.

The brothers and their family appeared before the NOAB in August of 2021. The group identified connections to a supportive adult and advocacy surrounding education as key services to assist John and Terrence as they transitioned back into the classroom. John and Terrence were assigned a Life Coach to focus on mentoring and increasing prosocial behaviors. The brothers have a very close relationship with the NOAB Life Coach and have been on numerous outings with him. The Life Coach has also developed a relationship with the boys' dad. They are back in school and doing well. Through the nonprofit Youth Employment Partnership, both brothers also completed job training and an internship and have obtained employment.



Christine

Christine was arrested in Oakland for possession of a stolen vehicle while driving around with friends after midnight. She was 14 years old at the time of arrest. She was referred to NOAB in April 2021. In meetings with the NOAB Coordinator, Christine shared that she had been exposed to sexual exploitation and was separated from her biological parents at two years old. She also experienced a devastating loss when her close friend fell victim to gun violence earlier in 2020.

During the NOAB Conference, Board members discussed the appropriate areas of support for Christine. Along with Christine, the group agreed she needed intensive case management and individual life coaching. The NOAB Coordinator connected Christine to supports including weekly individual therapy and employment opportunities. Christine is now attending school regularly and has stayed connected to her Life Coach.



NOAB in Richmond, CA

In July 2021, NICJR launched a second NOAB program in Richmond, California that is informed by lessons learned through implementation of the Oakland NOAB. NICJR coordinated with the City of Richmond, Richmond Police Department (RPD), Richmond Police Activities League (RPAL), and members of the Richmond community in designing the Richmond NOAB program.

To date, NICJR has recruited, selected, and held an orientation for Richmond NOAB members and grown the Richmond partner referral network with engagement support from other local community-based organizations. The Richmond NOAB program follows the same processes and procedures outlined above for the original program in Oakland. RPAL, which has one of the largest and most established youth development centers in the city, is the primary service provider for the youth. The RPAL facility serves as the program's intake center and youth hub.

While NICJR has experienced delays in finalizing the RPD referral protocols, the program has been accepting and processing referrals from the Contra Costa County Probation Department and Public Defender's Office. These referrals have provided a valuable opportunity to begin establishing the local program and deepening partner relationships despite delays. NICJR anticipates that the program will begin receiving referrals from RPD by February 2023.

Twelve youth were referred to the Richmond NOAB program in the first year of operations (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022).

The profile below provides a small snapshot of a youth served through the Richmond NOAB program.

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

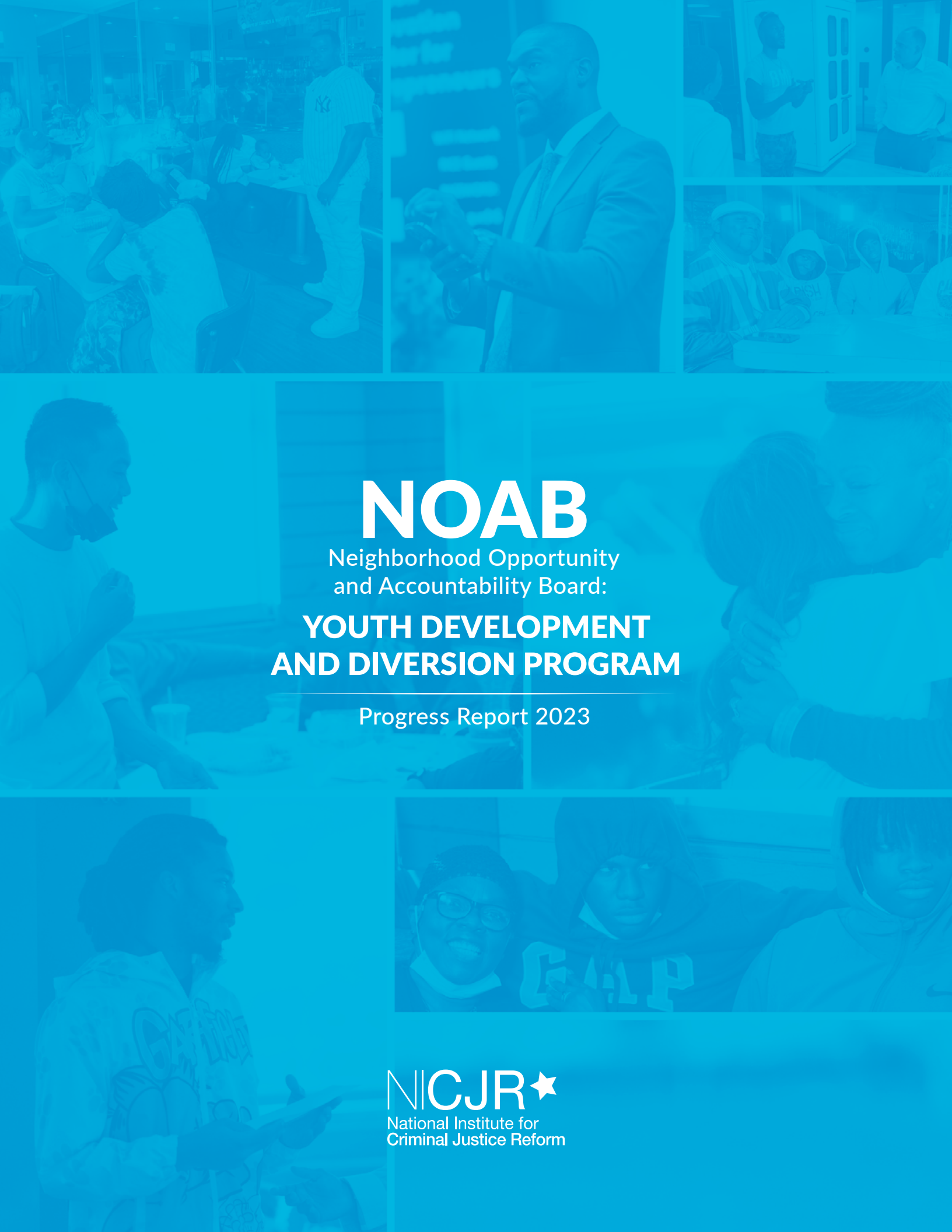


Randy

In January 2022, Randy was arrested for robbery. He was 17 years old at the time of arrest. After spending nearly three weeks in the county juvenile detention center, Randy was referred to NOAB by the Contra Costa County Public Defender's Office. The NOAB Coordinator met with Randy and his family a few days later to conduct an initial intake and assessment and initiate support services. The family was relieved when they learned that Randy would be connected to a positive role model and would receive 1:1 mentoring and life coaching. Randy and his family have had significant traumatic experiences, ranging from prolonged homelessness to substance and domestic abuse from a former caregiver. Additionally, Randy had not attended school regularly for two consecutive years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Randy and his family met with the NOAB to develop a plan to help support Randy remain crime free and graduate high school. The group recommended that Randy receive mental health services to begin the healing process around his trauma. Randy was receptive to the Board and agreed to engage in services. Randy re-enrolled in school, is now attending regularly, and meets several times a week with his Life Coach.





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