

Neighborhood Opportunity  
And Accountability Board:  
Youth Development and  
Diversion Program



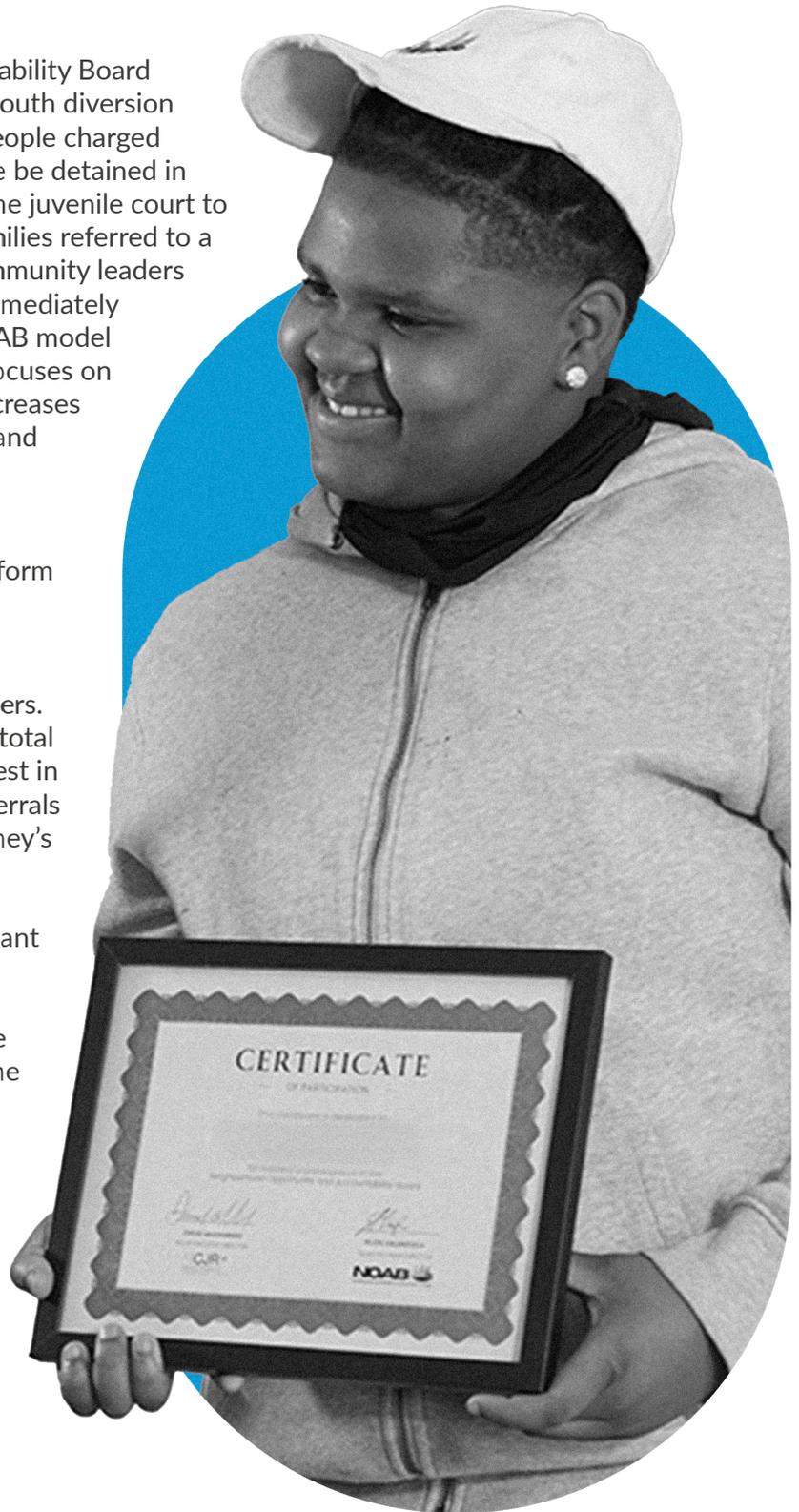
PROGRESS REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 2024

# 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. As of June 2024, the program has received a total of 108 referrals from OPD at the point of arrest in lieu of system involvement and another 9 referrals from other sources such as the District Attorney's Office or Oakland Unified School District.

The Oakland NOAB program receives significant financial support from the City of Oakland Department of Violence Prevention. The program is also supported by a grant from the Zellerbach Family Foundation. Additionally, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has provided grant funding to support NICJR in building a more regional approach to NOAB across Bay Area sites.



# 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 nonviolent crimes (the majority of justice-involved youth), doing nothing creates better outcomes than placing them in the juvenile justice system.<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>

Youth incarceration is also extremely expensive. A 2019 San Francisco Chronicle study discovered that California counties spend upwards of a half-million dollars per year to keep one young person in juvenile detention.<sup>3</sup> 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 reflective of the challenges of their environment, they are plucked out of their families and neighborhoods, sent to an ineffective juvenile facility, 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. 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 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.<sup>4</sup>

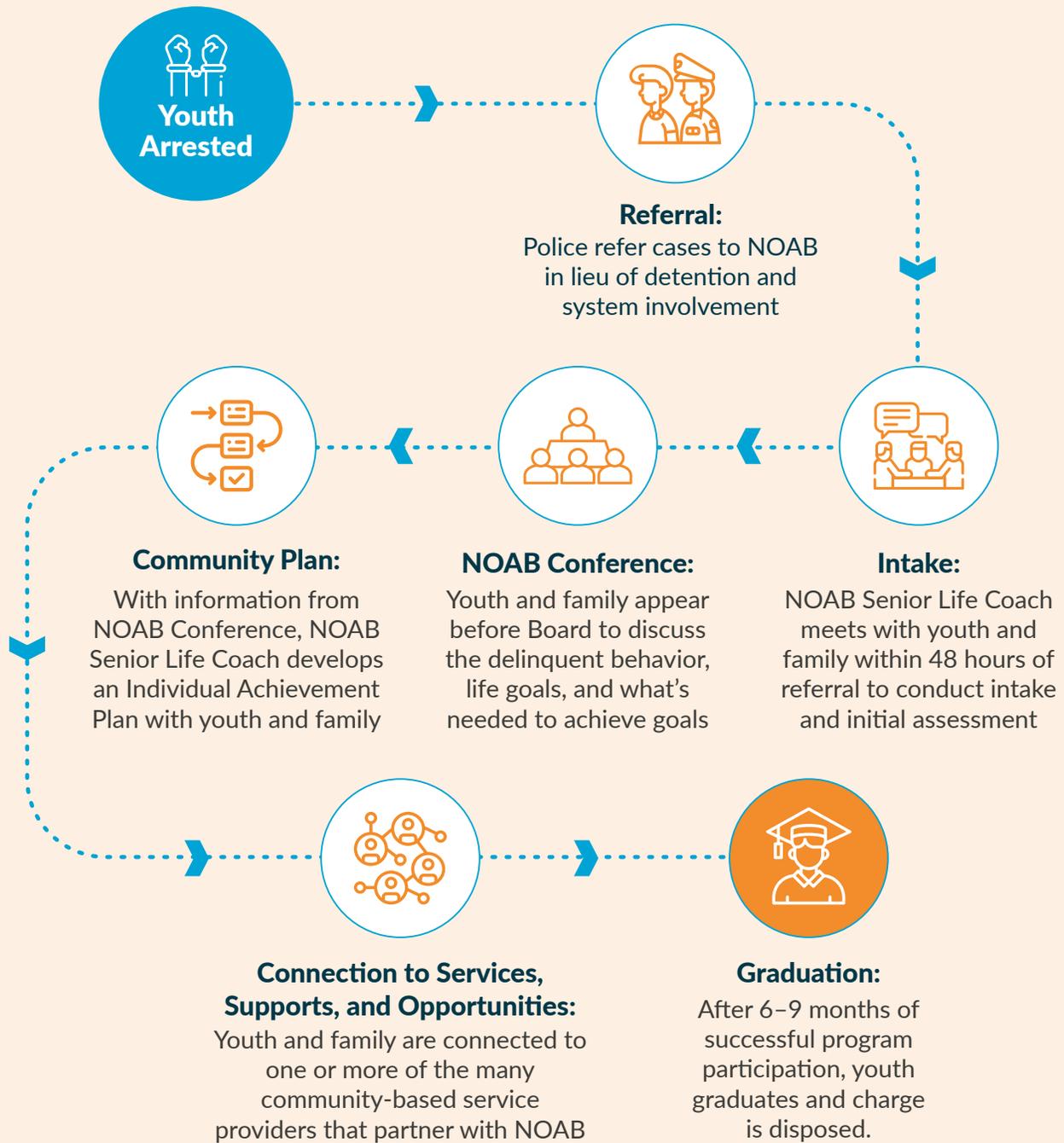
<sup>1</sup> Iatrogenic effect of juvenile justice

<sup>2</sup> Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges

<sup>3</sup> Vanishing Violence

<sup>4</sup> Oakland City Council Resolution

# The NOAB Process



While the Bay Area has long been (and continues to be) home to various juvenile diversion efforts, the NOAB model is unique for its focus on youth with serious offenses and its emphasis on community involvement in the diversion and development process.

Because the NOAB program is committed to being a true diversion from system involvement, youth who commit lower-level offenses and thus would not usually be detained or adjudicated in the juvenile court do not receive a referral to the program. Rather, youth arrested for nonviolent felonies or multi-misdemeanors who would otherwise be processed through the juvenile justice system are referred to the 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 a NOAB Senior Life Coach and must engage with the diversion program. The District Attorney's Office is also alerted that the case should be held for diversion (once a NOAB participant graduates, the case is officially closed in the DA's Office).

Within 48 hours of receiving the referral, a NOAB Senior Life Coach 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 Senior Life Coach schedules a NOAB Conference.

The youth and their family appear before the Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board 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:



**John Jones III**

Director of Reentry and Violence Prevention Programs, Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency; formerly incarcerated; third generation East Oakland resident



**Barbara Lafitte-Oluwole**

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



**Pat Mims**

Director of Reentry Services, Rubicon Programs; formerly incarcerated



**Darren White**

Anger Management Provider at AW Consulting; Certified Life Coach; Executive Director of Realized Potential Inc; lifelong youth advocate

Based on the initial assessment and NOAB conference discussion, the Senior Life Coach works with the youth and family to develop an Individual Achievement Plan (IAP) that will connect them to the most appropriate services and supports, 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 program 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 Senior Life Coach directly connects the youth and family with the identified service providers, in addition to providing life coaching and mentoring services and supporting self-advocacy. The Senior Life Coach 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:



Carl B. Metoyer  
Center for  
Family  
Counseling



# Program Updates

## Evaluation

NICJR, the Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board 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. Key to this growth is our research partnership with the American Institutes for Research (AIR), who is conducting a [rigorous, mixed-methods, four-year evaluation](#) of NOAB's program implementation and outcomes and a quasi-experimental study of program impacts.

AIR shared preliminary findings from the first year of their NOAB implementation study in late 2023. This study seeks to answer two questions: 1) How are NOAB's core components implemented? and 2) How do young people, family members, police, and community members perceive the impact of NOAB? In partnership with NOAB staff, AIR identified young people who were current or previous participants as well as family members (i.e., parents, caregivers) to participate in an interview about their experiences with and perceptions of the Oakland NOAB program. AIR team members observed one young person's conference in June 2023 and conducted a post-conference interview with that young person. Findings from these research activities were very positive overall. Examples include:



Most young people and family members reported satisfaction with their intake/assessment and initial meeting and the support they received from NOAB staff during the meeting. They described the NOAB program as “different than other programs” because the focus is primarily on providing young people with supports and services tailored to their goals and priorities.



Young people and family members were highly satisfied with the IAP. They appreciated that NOAB staff worked to find programs based on young people's input on the types of programs in which they wanted to participate. One family member said, “They're not just setting goals for her as in what they want her to do. They're giving her and me a chance to put in our own input of goals that will work and that we want for her or she wants for herself.”



Young people and family members described NOAB staff as caring, attentive, patient, down to earth, and straightforward. Many family members viewed NOAB staff as positive role models and noted positive changes in their children after they received one-on-one mentorship.

The report also provided preliminary recommendations to strengthen the NOAB model, including inviting the victim to participate in the NOAB conference; hiring additional staff to increase program capacity; and building relationships and other systems of connection with probation officers and public defenders, in addition to police officers, to help with providing consistent information about and referrals to NOAB for young people and family members. We look forward to future findings and recommendations from AIR, and we are committed to using their research to continue strengthening the NOAB model.

## Personnel

One of the major contributing factors to the Oakland NOAB program's success is its board and staff. In spring 2024, the program added a new board member: Pat Mims, who serves as Director of Reentry Services for Rubicon Programs. Pat is committed to helping people realize their potential so their success and joy ripples out into the community. He returned to the community after serving over 20 years in prison and has leveraged his lived experience to cast light on the power of responsibility, healing, and vulnerability. Specifically, he is instrumental in developing actionable and seamless opportunities for people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system, their families, and the communities they return into.

Pat's work in the community has earned him numerous accolades, including the FBI Director's Community Leadership Award; Alameda County District Attorney (DA) Nancy O'Malley's My Hero Award; and the California Association of Black Lawyers Community Leadership Award. In 2016, Pat was acknowledged in a ceremony at the White House by President Barack Obama as an alumni of Mount Tamalpais College and staunch advocate for higher education in the prison system. He is passionate about Restorative Practices and the healing of harms committed against others.

In February 2024, NICJR hired Hilary Bass to serve as the Justice Reform Program Manager, and she was recently promoted to Senior Manager of Bay Area Initiatives. In this role, she leads NICJR's justice reform projects and direct service programs, including NOAB. Hilary is a dynamic public sector leader with a proven track record in driving results through innovative public safety initiatives, community development, and strategic collaboration. Hilary spent the last 20 years working for the Alameda County Sheriff's Office (ACSO), overseeing the launch and development of their nonprofit Deputy Sheriffs' Activities League. She brings deep experience investing in youth and families, along with the communities they reside in, for the purpose of long-term public safety and health.

## Coordination

Over the last year, NOAB program staff have focused heavily on improving coordination with the variety of systems and agencies that serve Oakland youth. In addition to the AIR recommendation noted above, the need for this coordination became especially apparent when we recognized that some youth were both being referred to both NOAB and having their cases sent to the Alameda County DA's Office for adjudication.

### Our efforts to improve coordination have included:

✓ Strengthening our relationship and communications with OPD through regular meetings with the Sergeant who oversees referrals to NOAB; providing a monthly update report to OPD with the status of referrals and highlights of participant outcomes; and conducting presentations on the NOAB

program for OPD staff, including all patrol officers, with the goal of generating more referrals to NOAB from the field

✓ Establishing a formal partnership with the DA's Office to streamline communications about NOAB referrals from OPD, ensuring that the DA's Office holds off on processing those cases until the youth graduates from NOAB, at which time the DA closes the case, or until it is clear that the referred youth will not successfully engage with NOAB, at which time the DA will proceed with adjudication; we are also working with the DA to create a secondary entry point for NOAB even if a youth has already been referred to Probation

✓ Creating pathways for school-based referrals, which is particularly crucial given many schools' move away from working with law enforcement, as it allows for a diversion path for highest-risk youth that does not require police involvement

- Meeting with leadership from the Alameda County Office of Education to explore how best to support highest-risk youth via school-based referrals that leverage the existing infrastructure of the Office's service coordination teams
- Meeting with Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) officials to work toward establishing a formal referral pathway to NOAB
- Presenting on NOAB at a gathering of all OUSD high school principals, offering an opportunity for principals to explore utilizing NOAB to divert students who commit offenses on or off site away from the justice system and toward increased support

✓ Building relationships with community-based organizations funded by the City of Oakland to carry out violence interruption and positive youth development on campuses, both to ensure communication regarding shared clients and to facilitate warm handoffs of youth who are not a strong fit for NOAB



We are taking important steps toward regional coordination of NOAB efforts. In late 2023, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) chose NICJR as one of four Youth Violence Prevention Program awardees.<sup>5</sup> This \$250,000, three-year award will support our work to strengthen NOAB in Oakland, allow us to provide TA to other Bay Area communities as they establish their own NOABs, and work toward building a more regional approach to NOAB across sites.

## Impact

In its first four years of operation, from May 2020 to June 2024, the Oakland NOAB received 117 referrals, with 58 enrollments and 43 program completions. This included 108 referrals from OPD, 89 of which were for youth arrested for felonies such as grand theft auto, carjacking with a firearm, and burglary through forcible entry. The other referrals came from sources such as the Oakland Unified School District and Alameda County District Attorney’s Office.

NOAB Senior Life Coaches 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 and family counseling. Only eight youth were rearrested during this period. The NOAB program continued to engage each of these youth following their 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.*

### “ Taylor

Taylor was referred to NOAB in 2021 after being impacted by gang violence and closely monitored by OPD as a result of her role in stealing vehicles throughout the Bay Area. Well before this, though, she was placed in a school for children with behavioral issues at a young age. There, she felt like she was labeled negatively before she had a chance to show who she was. She describes her time in that school as a daily uphill battle. A naturally shy child, when she had the opportunity to transfer to a mainstream middle school, she found refuge in sports and began to thrive. Being on a basketball team taught her teamwork, discipline, and the thrill of achieving something with others. The team even made it to the playoffs—a moment she says she will never forget. But just as the team was gearing up for their last game, the season was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. She also tried out for the softball team and made it, but that season was canceled too. As she describes it, “Everything I had worked toward seemed to always slip away in an instant.” With schools shut down and instruction moved online, Taylor began to lose motivation and stopped attending class. She began spending time with friends who led her down the path to crime.

<sup>5</sup> OJJDP FY 2023 Youth Violence Prevention Program

In the years since her referral to NOAB, Taylor has made incredible progress. Through NOAB, she was connected to Youth Employment Partnership for workforce development opportunities. She was also connected to the Seneca Center for therapeutic services, and she consistently met several days a week with her NOAB Life Coach. Her journey with NOAB has been marked by exceptional personal growth and dedication, culminating in successfully completed high school this spring. As a testament to her progress, Taylor has been chosen to represent NOAB at the federal Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Conference in Washington, DC, where she will share her transformative experience.

Taylor's passion is clear in her words: "We need to invest in our youth—and provide them with opportunities to engage in sports, arts, education, and mentorship programs. We need to make sure that when kids like me face adversity, there are safe spaces for them to turn to, instead of turning to the streets or distractions that lead to trouble. I am not defined by my struggles. Together, I want to help create places where every kid has the chance to thrive, where they can be part of something greater than themselves, and where they can envision a future full of possibilities."

## “ Brian

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Brian was referred to NOAB at the age of 14, after he was arrested for a vehicle theft during which he was armed. Brian comes from an immensely challenging family situation, with very little support and a history of serious physical abuse from his parents. At the time of his referral to NOAB, he was staying with an uncle after running away from a foster parent with whom he had a falling out. He was afraid to let his social worker know where he was, because he thought they would send him to a group home. The social worker considered him AWOL, and there was a warrant for him as a result. NOAB staff encouraged him to reconnect with his social worker so we could pursue permanent placement with his uncle. After months of NOAB staff working tirelessly with Brian, his uncle, and the County Social Services team, the agency officially agreed to permanent placement with his uncle. In the placement meeting, Social Services acknowledged NOAB as the “glue” that is making this placement possible.

In addition to working closely with the County Social Services agency, Brian's Life Coach helped him to reenroll in school and connected him to a fitness trainer so he can work toward rejoining his school's football team. Although his school has been strongly supportive, Brian's lack of official guardianship has presented barriers to connecting him with resources. His former foster parent is still officially his educational guardian, and guardian permission is required to conduct the assessments needed to create an individualized education program (IEP). The move toward permanent placement with his uncle is a critical step toward accessing these resources. Despite these challenges, in a recent meeting, many of Brian's teachers described him as a very intelligent young man who is a pleasure to have in class.

Brian's story highlights the extent to which systems navigation is a crucial part of the work of NOAB Life Coaches.



## “ Simon

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Like Brian, Simon was referred to NOAB at the age of 14 after being involved in a string of car jackings. Also, like Brian, Simon comes from a highly unstable family situation. His mother is a sex worker who cannot care for him. At the time of his referral, he was staying with an unhoused, unofficial caretaker in a hotel. A NOAB Senior Life Coach conducted his program intake at the hotel and paid for an additional night. Simon eventually ran away from this caretaker and ended up in Alameda County Juvenile Hall after a string of crimes. When his Life Coach visited him there, he said he was doing great and wanted to stay—underscoring the severe instability of his life outside of detention.

Simon’s greatest needs are stable housing and a loving guardian. We recognize that without addressing these deep issues, we cannot coach him to lasting success. This is why Simon’s Life Coach will be accompanying him to court to advocate for a focus on where he will live and how he will be cared for. At the same time, NOAB staff are trying to facilitate a county-level case conference for Simon that would gather staff from multiple public systems (housing, health, employment, etc.) to address his needs in a coordinated manner. Despite these challenges, we are hopeful about Simon’s future. He is a bright kid who, at one point, had a 3.0 GPA despite being homeless and unparented. He has always shown respect and receptivity to his Life Coach and other adults, and he has had high behavioral remarks while in Juvenile Hall. Simon’s peers recognize him as a leader. While his influence has been negative in the past, he has the potential to be a force for good that impacts the trajectory of multiple youth in his orbit.

## “ Mark

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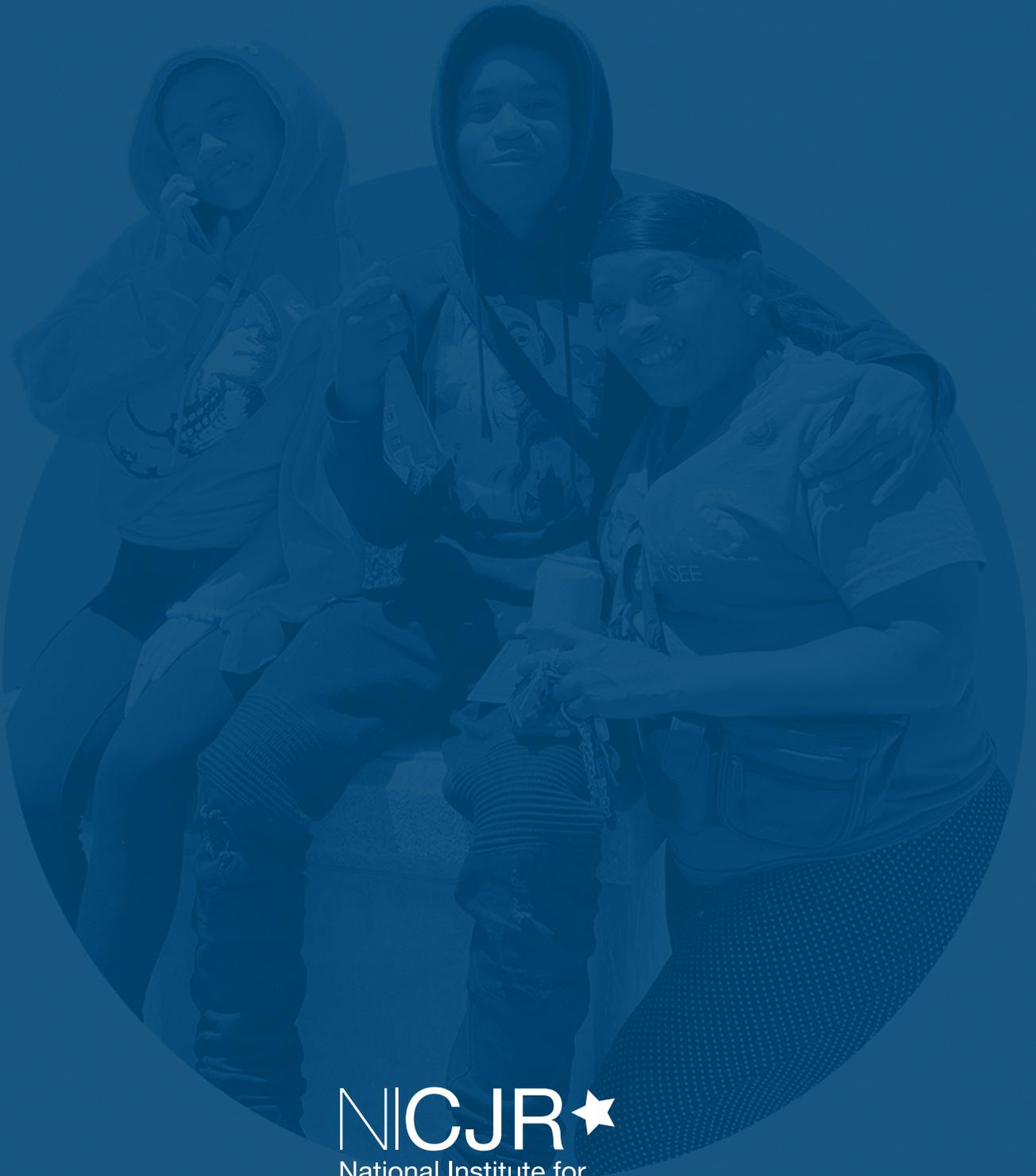
Mark was referred to NOAB by OPD after being arrested for car theft at the age of 17. He also had prior police involvement related to the possession of firearms. As a young man from an immigrant family, he comes from an environment where he does not feel able to talk about his feelings and issues. This made him vulnerable to negative peer influences.

Although he was arrested again for car theft early in his NOAB enrollment, Mark has since been on a very positive trajectory. His Life Coach connected him to a weekly Asian American youth group, where he is able to talk with peers about his feelings and what it means to be Asian American in Oakland. With support from his Life Coach, Mark has also enrolled in Laney College to work toward his high school diploma and, eventually, begin college classes. He has been attending church regularly with his mother, and he recently began training with a professional boxer at a local gym. He also recently signed up for youth employment services through a partner organization. Mark has been vocal about how grateful he is to be connected to life coaching and other supports, and he has made it clear that he is motivated to stay away from crime.

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