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# Evaluation of Community-Based Programs Funded by the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act

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Los Angeles County Department of Public Health  
Substance Abuse Prevention and Control Youth  
Services, Library Probation Outreach Program, and  
Beaches & Harbors WATER Youth Program

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# About This Report

California’s Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) funds the implementation of programs that provide a variety of services to youth who are justice-involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system (referred to as *at-promise youth*). Administered by the California Office of Youth and Community Restoration, JJCPA provides funding to counties to support programs or models that have demonstrated evidence in curbing crime among at-promise youth and youth involved in the juvenile justice system. In Los Angeles (L.A.) County, the Probation Department oversees the implementation of JJCPA-funded programs, which are approved by the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (a group comprising stakeholders from county agencies, city agencies, and community-based organizations). In 2019, the Probation Department selected RAND to provide evaluation services related to JJCPA-funded programs. In this report, we present findings from our evaluation of the programs, which three L.A. County Departments operate, for youth who are probation-involved or at-promise.<sup>1</sup> Findings will be of particular interest to program staff, Probation Department staff, and members of the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council. Agencies in other communities implementing or interested in implementing similar programs will find value in this report as well.

## Justice Policy Program

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## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the JJCPA-funded program leadership and staff who generously participated in this study and in interviews. We thank the Probation Department for supporting the study and providing quantitative program data. We would also like to acknowledge peer reviewers Andrea Phillips and Danielle Rudes, and we acknowledge Emily Allendorf for conducting quality assurance of our quantitative analyses and the RAND Communications and External Affairs department for preparing this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this report have been adapted from other reports in this series, including Whitaker, Smucker, and Brooks Holliday, 2022; Jones et al., 2024; and Whitaker et al., 2024.

# Summary

California's Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) funds the implementation of programs that provide a variety of services to youth who are justice-involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system (referred to as *at-promise youth*), to reduce delinquency and future justice system involvement. In Los Angeles (L.A.) County, JJCPA funds are administered by the L.A. County Probation Department. In some cases, JJCPA funding is used for programs that are implemented solely with this funding stream; in other cases, JJCPA funding is used to support a portion of a larger program (e.g., services specifically for at-promise and probation-involved youth within a program that serves a broader population of youth, or services at a particular site within a program that serves multiple sites).

L.A. County programs funded by JJCPA are required to submit data to the Probation Department for the purposes of evaluating the programs. In 2019, the Probation Department selected RAND to conduct these evaluations. In this report, we evaluate three L.A. County programs: the L.A. County Department of Public Health (DPH) Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (SAPC) Youth Services, the L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program, and the L.A. County Department of Beaches & Harbors' Russell Walker Water Awareness, Training, Education, and Recreation (WATER) Youth Program, commonly referred to as the WATER Youth Program.

## Department of Public Health Substance Abuse Prevention and Control Youth Services

DPH receives JJCPA funding for three of its programs and contracts community-based organizations to provide the services. These programs include Youth Enhancement Services (YES), which supports outreach and engagement activities; Client Engagement and Navigation Services, which conducts onsite screenings in juvenile halls to determine detained youth's postrelease treatment needs; and Youth Substance Abuse services, which supports youth substance use disorder treatment. Key findings from our evaluation of the three DPH SAPC Youth Services programs are as follows:

- YES funding improves youth's access to services by providing transportation, food, and family engagement activities.
- However, staff noted that there are challenges with retaining youth in treatment and that, because of inconsistent attendance, some youth need higher levels of care than they are receiving.
- Staff reported that they believed the program is effective when youth consistently attend and engage in programming.
- Because of low reimbursement levels and billing issues related to treatment services, funds—especially YES funds—are underused.

Drawing on these findings, we recommend the following:

- Enhance outreach and partnerships to reach a broader youth population.
- Expand services to include more nontreatment and early intervention support.
- Revisit the reimbursement rate and billing process for YES funds.

## **L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program**

The L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program provides library services and life skills lessons to probation-involved and at-risk youth at libraries and Juvenile Day Reporting Centers (JDRCs), or alternative high schools, to help prepare youth for adulthood. Key findings are as follows:

- One main challenge is low program attendance, in part because of challenges that youth face in their personal lives, such as managing school, a job, or children of their own (sometimes in combination). Staff reported that when youth meaningfully engage with the program's lessons, they gain life skills, ideas for career paths, cultural humility, awareness of social issues, and other benefits.
- Cocreation and tailoring programs to local needs, as well as staff ability to build relationships and trust with youth, are essential for meaningful engagement.
- Hiring staff with skills, expertise, and lived experience similar to that of participating youth—for example, staff who reflect the youth's race, ethnicity, or gender or who speak the same language—have enabled program implementation.
- Coordination among partner agencies (i.e., local libraries, JDRCs, and the Probation Department) was crucial for reaching more youth. Staff hope to serve more youth by improving these relationships and delivering the program in more venues.

Drawing on these findings, we recommend the following:

- Deliver programming in additional venues to reach and serve more youth.
- Enhance outreach and incentives to improve attendance, particularly at library locations.
- Improve coordination and communication between and among the program and its partners.
- Enhance programming materials and clarify the program's goals and mission.

## **Department of Beaches & Harbors WATER Youth Program**

The WATER Youth Program offers exposure to L.A. beaches, ocean-safety education, and ocean-related careers. JJCPA funds allow probation-involved youth to attend the program. In 2023, the funding expanded to also allow at-risk youth to attend. Key findings are as follows:

- Low program attendance among probation-involved youth is one challenge to program implementation. The program increasingly serves at-risk youth through partnerships with the L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services and schools in underserved communities.

- Youth might not attend because they might be apprehensive to participate in water-based activities because of a fear of the ocean or because they lack a bathing suit or towel. Staff work one-on-one with youth to help them overcome their fears and learn about ocean safety.
- At the time of our interviews, understaffing was a challenge, and the program was in the process of hiring more lifeguards. Staff noted a need to hire more individuals who reflect the diverse youth whom the program serves. Strong staff morale and commitment to the program's mission are key facilitators to the program's implementation.

Drawing on these findings, we recommend the following:

- Encourage participation by offering community service opportunities or providing bathing suits, towels, or other supplies to youth.
- Improve partnerships with agencies that refer probation-involved youth and enhance efforts that increase at-promise youth attendance.
- Improve hiring efforts, which should involve hiring more diverse staff members.
- With more staff, consider expanding offerings, such as additional camps during school breaks, given the program's success of serving at-promise youth during those periods.

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# Introduction

Established in 2000, California’s Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) provides funding to counties to implement programs aimed at reducing crime and delinquency among justice-involved and *at-promise* (or what was formerly referred to as *at-risk*) youth.<sup>2</sup> As of 2024, the California Office of Youth and Community Restoration administers the program and provides funding to counties. The office bases its funding decisions on local priorities and decision-making processes (California Board of State and Community Corrections, undated).

In Los Angeles (L.A.) County, the L.A. County Probation Department oversees and provides grant funding to programs that are selected by the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, which is made up of individuals from local government agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs). In L.A. County, JJCPA funds ongoing programs (through funding referred to as *base funding*) and one-time projects (through funding referred to as *growth funds*) (County of L.A., 2023b). In fiscal year (FY) 2022–2023, the available funding for JJCPA programs was nearly \$45 million (County of L.A., 2021). In some cases, programs are implemented solely with JJCPA funding; in other cases, JJCPA funding supports a portion of a program (e.g., services specifically for at-promise and probation-involved youth within a program that serves a broader population of youth, or services at a particular site within a program that serves multiple sites).

In recent years, the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council has aimed to allocate 60 percent of funding to *primary prevention and early intervention* (County of L.A., 2022; County of L.A., 2023b), which the Probation Department defines as “upfront supports and services to children and families, whose holistic needs put them at greater risk of delinquency system involvement, in order to intervene early and prevent involvement or further penetration into the delinquency system” (County of L.A., 2023a). Such programs encompass a wide variety of services, such as teaching life skills, offering arts and recreation activities, presenting career opportunities, and providing access to behavioral health treatment operated by government agencies or CBOs. Programs that use primary prevention and early intervention recognize the importance of protective factors and improved access to positive, prosocial activities rather than a sole focus on reducing risks (Development Services Group, Inc., 2014).

In 2019, the Probation Department selected RAND to evaluate the implementation process and outcomes of these programs. Over the course of the five-year evaluation period (2019–2024), we evaluated 16 JJCPA-funded programs across 12 city and county departments and CBOs (Jones et al., 2024; Whitaker et al., 2024). This report focuses on programs administered by three L.A. County

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<sup>2</sup> In 2019, with Assembly Bill 413, the State of California established the term *at-promise* to replace *at-risk* in state law to emphasize a strengths-based approach when referring to youth who experience risk factors for becoming involved with the justice system (California State Assembly, 2019). These include but are not limited to socioeconomically disadvantaged youth, youth of color, foster youth, and youth experiencing homelessness.

departments (more details on these programs are included in their respective chapters). The programs are as follows:

- **L.A. County Department of Public Health (DPH) Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (SAPC) Youth Services**, which is a collection of substance use disorder (SUD) treatment programs, three of which receive JJPCA funding. These three are the Youth Enhancement Services (YES) Pilot Program, which provides funding for services that engage and retain youth in SUD treatment programs; Client Engagement and Navigation Services (CENS), which assesses youth at juvenile halls and supports their connection to treatment post-release; and Youth Substance Abuse services, which are SUD treatment services provided through a network of CBOs.
- **L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program**, which provides library resources and life skills to probation-involved and at-promise youth at local libraries and Juvenile Day Reporting Centers (JDRCs), which are alternative schools for youth at risk of not completing their education, such as probation-involved youth
- **L.A. County Department of Beaches & Harbors (DBH) Russell Walker Water Awareness, Training, Education, and Recreation (WATER) Youth Program**, commonly referred to as the WATER Youth Program, which provides ocean recreation and education to youth, including probation-involved and at-promise youth.

For each of our evaluations of JJPCA-funded programs (including Whitaker et al., 2024, and Jones et al., 2024), we used a mixed-methods approach to answer the following process and outcome questions:

- How does the program operate? For example, what are the goals and services the program offers?
- What factors have shaped the programs' implementation? For example, what have been the barriers and facilitators to implementing the program? How have considerations related to equity or resources influenced the implementation?
- Who are typical clients of the program?

In this report, we provide details on our evaluation methods (Chapter 2). We then present findings from the evaluations of the DPH SAPC programs (Chapter 3), the Probation Outreach Program (Chapter 4) and the WATER Youth Program (Chapter 5). In these three chapters, we also outline our recommendations for improving the programs. We conclude with cross-program considerations and recommendations (Chapter 6).

# Methods

For each program, we conducted a mixed-methods evaluation that included interviews with program staff and an analysis of program data provided by the Probation Department. Because of logistical and ethical barriers, we were unable to interview youth or caregivers (more details are provided in the “Limitations” section). This chapter provides detail on our research methods and has been adapted from other JJCPA-funded program evaluations published by our team, specifically Whitaker et al. (2024) and Jones et al. (2024), because we used similar methods for each program.

## Qualitative Methods

To understand program operations and implementation, we conducted semistructured interviews with staff. For the DPH SAPC evaluation, we conducted interviews between May and November 2022 with DPH staff who oversee program services and staff from programs contracted under the SAPC funding network, including administrative staff and direct service providers. For the L.A. County Library, we conducted interviews between March and May 2024 with program leadership and with librarians, who are directly responsible for implementing program services. Also, between March and May 2024, we conducted interviews with DBH program leadership and with lifeguards who implement the program.

We aimed to interview up to 15 staff from each program to reach saturation, or the point at which no new themes emerge from qualitative data (Guest, Namey, and Chen, 2020); however, some of these programs have fewer than 15 staff, in which case we invited all program staff members to participate in the evaluation. To recruit participants, the Probation Department provided contact information for program leadership with whom we met, and in turn, leadership provided contact information for staff. In all, we conducted 28 interviews across the programs, 14 from DPH and contracted agencies or CBOs, seven from the L.A. County Library, and seven from DBH. Participation was voluntary and responses were confidential.

## Interview Protocol and Methods

As described in our other evaluation reports, our interview guides were designed using the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), informed by implementation science and program evaluation best practices, and designed to elicit detail on each program’s description, implementation, and outcomes (Damschroder et al., 2009; Damschroder et al., 2022). For example, questions were related to program goals and objectives, staffing and training, program services and clients, client-engagement strategies, equity-related considerations, perceptions of program outcomes, and barriers and facilitators to implementation. We conducted interviews virtually via Microsoft

Teams lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A member of the research team took notes during the interviews and, with the interviewee's permission, we recorded the interview via Teams. Following the DPH SAPC interviews, which took place in 2022, a member of the research team finalized notes using the recordings. We also used documents, specifically funding applications the programs provided to us, to supplement our understanding of the programs and their goals. For the evaluations of the L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program and WATER Youth Program, recordings were professionally transcribed using Rev software.

## Analysis

To analyze the data, we used Dedoose, an online qualitative data-analysis program. For consistency, we used a codebook established by our team's prior JJCPA-funded program evaluations (see, for example, Whitaker et al., 2024, and Jones et al., 2024). That codebook was developed deductively (i.e., using the interview protocol) and inductively (i.e., using codes that emerged during the coding process) (Azungah, 2018). For example, deductive codes included codes for engagement strategies, program goals, and staffing. Inductive codes included codes for the Probation Department's role and how the program changed over time. Prior to individual coding, three team members coded a subset of transcripts to ensure consistency in our work. Throughout the coding process, the team met regularly to discuss and resolve any uncertainties.

We then organized codes and developed themes related to the programs' descriptions. To analyze the findings related to implementation determinants (i.e., barriers and facilitators), we used CFIR as an analytic framework. CFIR provides a comprehensive and systematic framework for identifying and understanding implementation determinants and for targeting recommendations (Damschroder et al., 2022). CFIR involves the following five domains: *innovation* (i.e., the program characteristics itself), *outer setting* (i.e., the setting in which the program exists), *inner setting* (i.e., the setting in which the program is implemented, which includes the program's resources, infrastructure, and staffing levels), *individuals* (i.e., the roles and characteristics of the people who implement the program and receive program services), and *process* (i.e., the activities and strategies used to implement the program) (Damschroder et al., 2022). It should be noted that factors related to staffing can fall under both inner setting and individuals. In the context of the inner setting, themes can include staffing levels, hiring strategies, and the organization of roles. For the individuals domain, themes focus on staff characteristics and capabilities. For each program, we categorized barriers and facilitators in the five CFIR domains or in a subset of domains if the findings did not map directly onto all five domains.

We report interviewees' perceptions of program effectiveness and areas of improvement.

## Quantitative Methods

### Data Sources

We received quantitative program data from the Probation Department for each of the three departments implementing JJCPA programs. As part of their contracts with the Probation Department, programs collect data on the youth served and submit these data to the Probation

Department. The data were then made available to RAND for purposes of the evaluation. The specific data collected varies by program but typically includes a youth’s name, age or date of birth, gender, race or ethnicity, and zip code. The specific datasets and time frames that we received for each program are summarized in Table 2.1.

There were limitations to the data that we received. As indicated in Table 2.1, we had limited time frames of data for some programs (e.g., we only received four months’ worth of data for the L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program). For DBH, we received data on youth who were referred to the program, but the data did not have details about which youth went on to enroll in the program. For DPH, we received data only on the Youth Substance Abuse services and not for YES or CENS. Please see the “Limitations” section for more detail. The Probation Department continues to work closely with these agencies to improve the data that are submitted, which can then be used for evaluation purposes. Our team has also developed a toolkit to support programs in their data collection (Byeon, Whitaker, and Brooks Holliday, 2024). However, for this report, we opted to analyze all the data that the programs provided us to give a sense of the youth who are being referred or served, depending on the program.

**Table 2.1. Evaluation Data Sources**

| <b>Program</b>                          | <b>Program Data Available</b>                                   |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| DPH SAPC Youth Substance Abuse services | Data on referred and enrolled youth from July 2020 to June 2023 |
| Library Probation Outreach Program      | Data on enrolled youth July 2022 to October 2022                |
| DBH WATER Youth Program                 | Data on referred youth from July 2022 to June 2023              |

## Analysis

We began by deduplicating each dataset to report the number of unique youth who were referred to or enrolled in each program. We then conducted descriptive analyses to understand the sociodemographic characteristics of youth referred to or being served by each program.

## Synthesizing Findings

Finally, we synthesized findings from the qualitative and quantitative data analyses and developed recommendations to improve each program’s implementation. We focused specifically on ways to enhance implementation facilitators and to remove implementation barriers, and we based these on staff recommendations and literature on implementation science, education, and youth mental health, then we organized our recommendations using the CFIR framework. As with identifying barriers and facilitators, CFIR provides a comprehensive and systemic way to develop recommendations. Moreover, categorizing recommendations by CFIR domain helps clarify the target of the recommendations. For example, recommendations related to the innovation or the inner setting are more within the realm of control of the program staff, whereas recommendations related to the outer

setting might require additional support, such as from the Probation Department or the larger continuum of care in L.A. County.

## Limitations

There are certain limitations that should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings from this evaluation. First, the interviews for the DPH programs were conducted approximately one-and-a-half to two years before the interviews for the Library Probation Outreach Program and the WATER Youth Program. There were still many restrictions related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in place at the time that we conducted the DPH program interviews, and the restrictions influenced those programs' findings more than they did the other programs' findings.

Second, we were unable to speak to youth or their caregivers as part of our evaluation. For our evaluations of other JJCPA-funded programs, we attempted to recruit youth and caregivers, but our response rates were extremely low because of logistical and ethical barriers (e.g., the need to obtain written consent from an attorney before reaching out to caregivers or youth; the need to obtain written consent from a legal guardian; the need to obtain youth assent or consent, depending on the youth's age). As a result of these difficulties and given limited project resources, we did not recruit youth and caregivers for these programs. However, we believe that youth and caregivers have essential perspectives on program implementation, including any challenges or facilitators to participating in the program, perceptions of the fit between the services a program offers and youth's and caregiver's needs, and potential areas for improvement. Therefore, engaging service recipients should remain a priority for future evaluations.

Another limitation relates to the quantitative data we had available for our evaluation. As mentioned previously, DBH provided data only on youth who were referred to the program and not those who went on to participate in the program. For DPH, we received data on referrals and youth who had a program start date; however, only a very small proportion of referred youth had a program start date. It is difficult to know whether this reflects a true challenge of engaging youth who are referred to the program or whether it is a data-quality issue. There was also a lack of quantitative outcome data. The Probation Department ran youth names and dates of birth through its Information Systems Bureau (ISB) to determine whether youth had been arrested since enrolling in the program and whether there were any case dispositions (e.g., becoming probation-involved or being committed to a Secure Youth Treatment Facility). However, we did not have ISB data for DPH youth. In addition, although we received ISB data for DBH, we could not determine which youth had actually gone on to participate in the program. Therefore, we opted not to report ISB data across the three agencies. It will be important for the Probation Department to continue working with programs to address barriers to collecting data that can be used for program monitoring and evaluation.

Because of these limitations, the findings presented in this report could be considered more of a *formative evaluation* (i.e., an evaluation during the development or early implementation of a program). Although it was not our original goal to conduct a formative evaluation, the factors described here impeded our ability to conduct a more outcomes-focused evaluation. In the final chapter, we present recommendations related to future evaluation efforts that could build on the present findings.

# **L.A. County Department of Public Health Substance Abuse Prevention and Control Youth Services Programs**

SUD is significantly more prevalent among youth involved in the juvenile justice system than among the general population. Studies have found that an estimated 62 to 81 percent of youth involved in the justice system have been diagnosed with an SUD compared with an estimated 6 to 10 percent of all youth (Davis et al., 2020). Previously detained youth are also likely to continue to struggle with SUDs following their release back into their communities (Welty et al., 2017). SUD among youth in the juvenile justice system is also linked to an increased likelihood of recidivism and continued contact with the system (Robertson et al., 2023).

For many justice-involved youth, contact with the justice system presents a first-time linkage to SUD treatment, and successful completion of treatment for these youth might result in better individual outcomes, including decreased recidivism and decreased chances of relapse (Johnson and Tran, 2020). However, much of the research supporting SUD treatment programs for justice-involved youth has focused on residential facilities and not outpatient treatment. Extant studies on outpatient treatment have yielded mixed findings about the treatment's success. For example, one study found no difference in substance use frequency between youth who received outpatient treatment and youth who received no treatment; however, another study found significant decreases in substance use following outpatient treatment, particularly in youth with high family involvement (Chassin et al., 2009; Hogue et al., 2018).

The DPH SAPC Youth Services division manages a network of 40 SUD treatment programs operated by CBOs that serve youth ages 12 to 20. These programs use a mix of Drug Medi-Cal (DMC) and L.A. County funding sources. The programs provide a continuum of care, including outpatient, intensive outpatient, and residential services, which is consistent with the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) levels of care (Walker, 2023). The programs support youth who are transitioning from treatment to recovery by providing services to help prevent relapse. Additionally, Youth Services' early intervention services provide outreach, education, and support for youth who do not meet SUD diagnostic criteria but who have used substances and are at risk of developing an SUD. All youth served by this network have access to individual and group counseling, family therapy, patient-education services, extracurricular and enrichment activities, and linkages to other support services (L.A. County DPH, undated).

Prior JJCPA evaluations have examined the outcomes associated with participation in Youth Substance Abuse services, although the findings of these evaluations have varied from year to year. Previously, there were six state-mandated outcomes that JJCPA-funded programs were required to

measure. Referred to as the “big six,” these were: “(1) successful completion of probation, (2) arrests, (3) probation violations, (4) incarcerations, (5) successful completion of restitution, and (6) successful completion of community service” (Fain, Turner, and Greathouse, 2015). At the end of each FY, the outcomes for youth served during that FY were compared with the outcomes of the youth served the FY prior. The evaluation of the program in FY 2010–2011 showed that youth were significantly more likely to complete restitution than the youth the program served in the previous FY; however, there were no significant differences with respect to the other big six outcomes (Fain, Turner, and Ridgeway, 2012). Two other evaluations (focused on FY 2013–2014 and FY 2016–2017) found no significant differences between youth outcomes on the big six during those years and the FY immediately prior (FY 2012–2013 and FY 2015–2016, respectively). This outcome—no significant differences from year to year—was still considered a sign of success because there had not been *increases* in adverse outcomes among youth (such as arrests or incarceration) (Fain, Turner, and Greathouse, 2015; Fain, Turner, and Shahidinia, 2018). These reports also captured changes in rates of positive drug tests among participating youth, comparing youth’s test results in the six months prior to program enrollment with results in the six months following program enrollment. A first set of analyses that focused on the percentage of positive drug tests across all tests conducted (which could include multiple tests per an individual youth) found that the rate of positive drug tests decreased after enrollment in FY 2010–2011 and FY 2013–2014, although there was no significant change in FY 2016–2017. The evaluators also examined whether there was a change in the percentage of youth with positive drug tests in the six months prior to enrollment compared with the six months following enrollment (which would account for individuals who had multiple tests). There was a significant decrease in the percentage of youth with a positive test in FY 2010–2011 but no significant difference in FY 2013–2014 or FY 2016–2017. Given these mixed findings and the time that has elapsed since these evaluations were conducted, there is value to understanding the contemporary implementation of this program.

## Program Description

JJCPA provides funding to DPH to cover prevention and intervention services for youth who are at risk for becoming involved in the justice system and for youth who are formally involved with the Probation Department. DPH receives funding for three different programs and, in turn, contracts with CBOs to support the provision of the programs’ services. The three DPH programs we evaluated are as follows:

- **YES:** YES is a collaboration between DPH SAPC and the Probation Department. The program’s goal is to retain and engage youth in the DPH Youth Services’ network of SUD treatment programs. CBOs (i.e., service providers) can use YES funding to reimburse services that are not covered under DMC, including outreach and engagement services, early intervention, positive youth development, and transportation services for youth in outpatient treatment. YES focuses on conducting outreach and engagement activities. The program aims to identify youth who might need SUD treatment but are not receiving services, and it aims to supplement SUD treatment with additional programming that can keep youth engaged and address needs beyond those addressed through treatment (e.g., providing psychoeducation,

addressing social skills, providing recreational activities). These supportive services are also designed to promote retention.

- **CENS:** CENS funding covers SUD treatment for youth at juvenile halls and after their release. CENS providers screen for an SUD and risk factors that can lead to an SUD, and they provide patient education, care coordination, and collateral services. CENS focuses on making sure that youth who are released from juvenile halls and need SUD treatment services are connected to care in the community.
- **Youth Substance Abuse services:** JJCPA funds are used to reimburse service providers for SUD treatment, given to probation-involved youth, that is not covered by DMC. Youth Substance Abuse services reimburse treatment that is deemed medically necessary. JJCPA funds can pay for portions of services for youth that are not otherwise covered by DMC or the whole service. The goal of Youth Substance Abuse services is to connect youth with the appropriate level of SUD treatment to match their needs and to help youth achieve their treatment goals and work toward sobriety. Because substance use can place youth at risk of future contact with the juvenile justice system, the program's longer-term goal is to reduce participation in criminal and antisocial behaviors.

Table 3.1 summarizes the goals for each of the JJCPA-funded programs managed by DPH.

**Table 3.1. DPH SAPC Youth Services' Individual Program's Goals and Target Populations**

| Program                        | Goals                                                                                                                                   | Target Populations                                                      |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| YES                            | Conduct outreach and engagement, identify youth in need of treatment, promote retention in services, and address needs beyond treatment | Probation-involved and at-promise youth in the community                |
| CENS                           | Conduct on-site screenings in juvenile halls to determine treatment needs and link youth to postrelease services                        | Probation-involved youth returning to the community from juvenile halls |
| Youth Substance Abuse services | Connect youth to SUD treatment services and help youth achieve treatment goals and sobriety                                             | Probation-involved and at-promise youth in the community                |

The overarching aim of these programs is to assess youth for SUD treatment and to engage and retain youth in such treatment. The DPH programs aim to engage youth who might be misusing substances, even if they do not formally qualify for an SUD diagnosis. Staff members noted that their programming generally has a harm-reduction orientation (Kimmel et al., 2021; Stockings et al., 2016) in which the immediate goal is to reduce substance use and its downstream consequences and ultimately help youth work toward sobriety.

## Program Services and Enrollment

**YES.** YES funds are used to engage youth in SUD treatment, provide holistic support, and promote treatment retention. There are multiple services that YES funds support, and treatment providers have the flexibility to decide how they will use the funds. In this way, YES funding can be thought of as funding that supports a certain set of activities rather than as a coordinated program that is delivered in the same way to all youth.

Outreach is an important aspect of YES-funded activities. According to interviewees, the community-based SUD treatment providers use YES funds for educational presentations and other outreach efforts that occur in settings such as schools. Agencies and CBOs use YES funds to cover staff time when engaging potential clients (i.e., youth) and connecting them to services—for example, having initial conversations, answering questions, following up with youth and their parents, and scheduling the initial treatment appointment. Typically, these activities are not covered by fee-for-service treatment funding, and YES funding has helped reimburse staff for the time spent on these important activities. Staff sometimes engage youth who are referred by the Probation Department, but staff can also engage youth referred through other sources (e.g., schools, family members, the Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS], or community-based providers that do not offer SUD treatment) or self-referred youth.

SUD treatment providers have also used YES funds to support activities that promote the ongoing engagement and retention of youth receiving SUD treatment, regardless of whether the youth are on probation. One common use of funds is to support supplemental activities, such as bringing in community groups to lead acting or other arts-focused classes, offering parenting classes or vocational-focused programming, and holding recreational activities (e.g., field trips, movie nights).

**CENS.** CENS focuses on youth who will transition from juvenile halls to the community. This program works to ensure that youth who might have a substance use treatment need are identified while still in the juvenile hall so that the program can make intentional linkages to community-based treatment. According to interviewees, there is not a formal referral process because CENS staff are co-located within the juvenile halls and screen every youth to determine whether they might have SUD treatment needs. Staff members noted that there is not much SUD treatment taking place in the juvenile halls, so if youth have an identified treatment need, CENS staff work to create a warm handoff to community-based treatment providers.

**Youth Substance Abuse services.** When youth who are on probation experience issues related to substance use, their Probation Officer can refer them to community-based SUD treatment providers. After referring youth, treatment staff schedule youth for an intake assessment, during which they complete the ASAM Intake Assessment Guide, which involves a biopsychosocial assessment and potential needs (e.g., mental health, housing). Using the ASAM assessment, treatment staff determine the appropriate level of SUD treatment for a given youth, using ASAM-defined levels. The specific levels of care vary across CBOs, but they typically include outpatient level 1.0 (long-term remission monitoring) and sometimes level 2.1 (intensive outpatient care). After determining the level of care, providers engage youth in a treatment planning process, at which time the youth will also set treatment goals.

Our interviews revealed that most youth receive level 1.0 care and receive outpatient SUD treatment, which generally includes one hour of individual treatment and one hour of group treatment

per week. However, the frequency and intensity of treatment depend on an individual youth's needs, and some youth are referred to higher levels of care as needed. Across the levels of care, treatment includes a variety of evidence-based methods, including motivational interviewing (Steele et al., 2020), Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for Substance Use and other cognitive behavioral therapy approaches (Hogue et al., 2018), and Seeking Safety (Becker et al., 2024), a curriculum focusing on substance use and trauma.

While youth are engaged in and attending services, staff members regularly assess progress toward the youths' treatment goals. Staff members have ongoing discussions with clients that enable staff to support youth as they work toward their goals, which could include reductions in substance use but also goals related to other areas of youths' lives. The provider's decision to end treatment services depends on whether a youth has achieved their treatment goals and on their level of care and participation in services. Interviewees said that the typical length of time that youth participate in the program can vary from three to nine months, although a six-month course of treatment is typical.

SUD treatment providers also offer recovery-support services, which involve a level of care that is sometimes assigned when youth do not meet the threshold for level 1.0, and such services are also used as a step-down for youth who have completed level 1.0 but would still benefit from support. While engaged in recovery support services, youth might work on other goals, such as finding activities to participate in outside the treatment program (e.g., sports programs) or applying to jobs. Interviewees described recovery support services as a useful resource for helping youth transition out of treatment without having an abrupt end date. One interviewee described the individualized nature of services as follows:

[I]t could be three weeks, three weeks could be three months, it could be six months . . . every client's journey is different. And so, you know, we also—if they start in a higher level of care like 2.1 and they're getting better, then we do, [we] go to 1.0 . . . Or if they're in 1.0, we can then step down into what's called RSS, which is recovery support services, which is just kind of like, "OK, this is like, we're not, we're not *done*. But you're doing good. I know you're not quite ready. Wanna hang on a little bit longer? OK. So let's meet every other week. I mean, call me if you need anything, but let's go. Let's titrate now."

Participation in Youth Substance Abuse services is voluntary, even though youth are on probation, although some providers indicated that they provide progress reports for clients on probation to judges that might influence court decisions.

## Youth Served

The Probation Department provided our team with data on youth who were referred to the Youth Substance Abuse services program during FYs 2020–2021, 2021–2022, and 2022–2023. In total, 648 unique youth were referred to services during that period, although some youth had multiple referrals. Table 3.2 presents the characteristics of youth who were referred to the program. About 85 percent of youth were male and most were 16 years or older. The larger group of youth (11.6 percent) were from the Antelope Valley—specifically, the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale.

**Table 3.2. Youth Referred to the Department of Public Health Substance Abuse Prevention and Control Youth Substance Abuse Services Program**

| <b>Demographic</b>                                         | <b>Referred Youth<br/>N = 648<br/>% (n)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Gender                                                     |                                             |
| Female                                                     | 14.51 (94)                                  |
| Male                                                       | 85.19 (552)                                 |
| Unknown                                                    | 0.31 (2)                                    |
| Age                                                        |                                             |
| 13                                                         | 1.08 (7)                                    |
| 14                                                         | 4.32 (28)                                   |
| 15                                                         | 11.88 (77)                                  |
| 16                                                         | 26.39 (171)                                 |
| 17                                                         | 34.26 (222)                                 |
| 18 or older                                                | 17.75 (135)                                 |
| Unknown                                                    | 1.23 (8)                                    |
| Five most common zip codes (and their cities) <sup>a</sup> |                                             |
| 93535 (Lancaster and surrounding area)                     | 5.25 (34)                                   |
| 93550 (Palmdale and surrounding area)                      | 4.01 (26)                                   |
| 91331 (Pacoima)                                            | 2.78 (18)                                   |
| 93534 (Lancaster)                                          | 2.31 (15)                                   |
| 90011 (South Central L.A.)                                 | 2.16 (14)                                   |
| 90805 (Long Beach)                                         | 2.16 (14)                                   |
| 91766 (Pomona)                                             | 2.16 (14)                                   |

<sup>a</sup> More than five zip codes are listed because there was a three-way tie for the fifth-most-common zip code.

The data had service start dates for a small subset of youth (approximately 10 percent of enrolled youth). However, after speaking with DPH staff members, this is likely an underestimate of the number of youth who were actually assessed and enrolled in treatment. There are multiple possible reasons for this issue with the data; for example, CBOs are supposed to report on the youth who engage in treatment to the Probation Department, but inconsistencies in the maintenance of that tracking system mean that not all CBOs may have submitted data consistently. There have also been concerns about sharing data on youth receiving services because of Title 42, Part 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, which governs the confidentiality of SUD treatment data (42 CFR 2). Anecdotally, DPH staff shared that between June 2023 and March 2024, the Youth Substance Abuse services program served between 24 and 33 youth per month. However, staff members also

acknowledged that there are challenges in retaining youth in treatment; providers were unable to contact as many as half of formerly participating youth during the providers' follow-up efforts.

Among these referred youth, service start dates were available for 53 youth. The demographic characteristics of self-referred youth resembled the characteristics of the broader population of referred youth, though there were more youth ages 18 or older who started services.

We did not have data on youth served using CENS or YES funding.

## Implementation Findings

We explored factors that have shaped the implementation of the DPH SAPC Youth Services SUD-focused programs. In this section, we present findings across the three programs because several of the CBOs we interviewed receive funding for both YES and Youth Substance Abuse services, and the CBOs discussed their experiences implementing both programs. However, when possible, we indicate when a particular factor was specific to one or two of the programs. In this section, we describe the implementation determinants we identified through the interviews, organized by the five CFIR domains: innovation, individuals, inner setting (for purposes of these programs, defined as both the CBOs and DPH), outer setting, and process. Barriers and facilitators for each of the overarching themes are displayed in Table 3.3.

### Innovation

Several agencies and CBOs cited the importance of flexibility in targeting programming to its clients, especially with respect to YES and Youth Substance Abuse services. For example, YES funding allows providers to serve youth with a variety of substance use treatment needs, including for youth who might not screen positive as needing SUD treatment on the ASAM but who would still benefit from services. Another example of flexibility came from a treatment provider who described the process of allowing youth to choose different therapy groups to attend, depending on the style and personality of the therapist leading the group.

With YES funds, providers have also aimed to identify outreach and engagement strategies that their client population will receive well. For example, providers noted that it can be challenging to engage youth, but the treatment providers have developed strategies to encourage participation by covering services that might not have been reimbursable under a fee-for-service model. One such strategy has been engaging families, such as by offering education to parents and guardians during youth's prescreening to help onboard families into the process early. Several interviewees mentioned that their programs had been shifting to holistically engaging youths' families in the SUD treatment process, which interviewees described as a "good thing" and "really important" for successful treatment. Many programs also used therapeutic and prosocial activities (funded through YES) to maintain youth's engagement with the treatment program and attract youth away from social activities that might involve drugs or alcohol. Some examples of these prosocial activities are movie nights, arts and crafts sessions, trips to the beach, and pizza parties.

## Individuals

Some facilitators to implementation that emerged from interviews with administrative staff and treatment providers were the CBO staff members' and counselors' skills and expertise. Interviewees described the importance of coordinators who have strong organizational skills and are able to develop systems to track intakes and ensure that youth "don't fall through the cracks." Other interviewees mentioned having counselors who are especially adept at engaging youth, in some cases because the counselors' personalities are well-suited to working with youth, and in other cases because the counselors use such strategies as making services more engaging with creative activities and video clips. Hiring bilingual or multilingual staff that reflect community demographics and hiring staff with lived experience with SUDs have also been important factors in meeting the needs of the diverse population of clients.

The most frequently reported barrier to serving youth was low attendance. Although the program has made efforts to encourage participation, there are multiple factors that have limited youth participation. Interviewees cited youth's lack of willingness to attend sessions as being largely a byproduct of the stigma associated with SUD treatment, which often results in youth and their families denying that the youth's SUD until an overdose or other acute event occurs. In turn, when youth do not consistently attend services, they might not be getting the recommended level of care. As one interviewee explained,

The majority of the youth, though, are mostly under the 1.0 level of care, because even though the severity of their use is high, their readiness to come to treatment may be very low and so we can't meet the 2.1 level of care requirements in terms of hours of treatment and whatnot, so we keep them on 1.0.

## Inner Setting

According to our interviews, some of the provider organizations have struggled to maintain an adequate number of staff members. Some organizations have unfilled positions and others have struggled to serve their existing client base with the number of clinicians on staff. This has affected all three programs (YES, CENS, and Youth Substance Abuse services). Interviewees described several factors contributing to staffing shortages. One interviewee suggested that the pay was not competitive enough to attract candidates. Another staff member said that they had trouble finding job candidates who have experience with both youth and SUD treatment, noting that it is important that staff members have both. Interviewees said that with more staff, they could support a wider variety of activities, including additional prevention and engagement work.

Although there have been challenges related to staff shortages, organizations have also identified resources that have supported their existing staff members. Staff members have had access to trainings on topics from motivational interviewing to diversity to time management, which have helped reinforce clinical and other workplace skills.

## Outer Setting

In addition to low attendance because of youth's personal challenges, interviewees reported a lack of referrals to their services as a barrier to implementation. At the time of these interviews (which took place in 2022), staff members said that they had noticed a significant drop in referrals, specifically from the Probation Department. One interviewee was unsure about the reason for the drop in referrals:

We know it's out there, we know kids are using, so for us to not see kids from probation or drug court, I would say that's a barrier. We are not able to reach some of these kids because [the Probation Department is] not resuming the referrals . . . Honestly, from that side, I don't know why referrals have dropped off.

Other interviewees attributed a decrease in referrals to other factors, including a lack of understanding among referral sources of what services youth need, school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, closures of juvenile halls and camps, cannabis legalization, and a referrers' general inability to link youth to services.

There were also a small number of barriers specific to CENS, which operates in the juvenile halls. First, staff members sometimes encountered challenges in scheduling youth for a screening because a Probation Officer must accompany the youth, and officers are not always available. In addition, CENS staff do not always know when youth are going to be released from the juvenile hall, which made it difficult to effectively coordinate care and a transition plan.

Interviewees mentioned the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and the telehealth model had on program attendance. Throughout the pandemic, they expressed experiencing high attrition and difficulty engaging clients via their telehealth model. One staff member explained the challenges that youth in particular face when attending sessions that are not held in person:

Especially with young people, it's—I think—more challenging to build a relationship when you're operating in a telehealth model . . . there's privacy issues, there's bandwidth issues, there's just general timing issues . . . mom, dad, uncle, aunt, grandma. Somebody is in bringing them into the office for services. They're not reminding them [about their telehealth session] . . . they gotta find a safe place at home and a lot of them live in settings where they don't have privacy.

These challenges related to telehealth have affected both treatment initiation and retention.

With regard to facilitators, the outreach efforts funded by YES have been critical for helping programs drive referrals and increase early intervention and education for youth who might be at risk of developing an SUD. Some of the strategies that programs have used were conducting educational presentations at schools on the effects of drug use and outreach to court systems.

Other interviewees described the importance of strategic partnerships and the flexibility that a large provider network offers, such as connections to services for youth (e.g., food banks). One interviewee mentioned that a strong partnership with Probation Officers was central in triaging care for youth on probation.

Interviewees also mentioned that YES and Youth Substance Abuse services funding were themselves an important facilitating factor because they have enabled providers to offer many services that would otherwise not have been funded, including screening and care coordination, enhancement

services, transportation, education and early intervention services, and family outreach and onboarding. In turn, these services have been valuable for engaging youth and promoting consistent attendance. For example, interviewees from agencies that offered outpatient services stressed the importance of providing transportation to maintain client attendance, which was made possible with YES funding. Similarly, these funds can be used to cover food and beverages, which was seen as an effective way to attract youth to sessions and programming.

Although YES funds have been a key facilitator, interviewees also noted that they have not taken full advantage of available YES funding because of reimbursement and billing issues, such as an issue with the process of billing for services. One interviewee explained that services covered by YES funds are reimbursed through paper billing rather than electronic billing, which DMC uses. Because agencies have more experience with DMC funding, staff members are not equipped to handle the tracking and paperwork that YES requires for reimbursements.

Another issue relates to the reimbursement rate for YES funds: An interviewee explained that YES funding reimburses per client, and the funding is often insufficient to cover services that only a small number of clients attend. An added challenge is that the reimbursement rate for YES services is lower than a treatment reimbursement rate. The interviewee shared,

YES, I think as an early intervention, would be a great model. I mean, I think it's designed to sort of pick up the slack of what treatment can't. But I think it's sort of challenging to make it work when the rate is lower than a treatment rate.

Therefore, even though providers described the value of these preventive services, they are sometimes unable to take full advantage of YES funds for these reasons.

When asked about perceptions on how the program had changed over time, many interviewees cited broad changes in the youth SUD treatment network, particularly the expansion of all SAPC network services to all youth who are eligible for DMC and other L.A. County funding, which has affected YES, CENS, and Youth Substance Abuse services. One interviewee explained how adapting to this shift has been challenging at times:

We are still in the early stages of really trying to build out a system because, prior to the Drug Medi-Cal waiver, we had limited funding sources that were really targeted to certain populations, whereas now it expanded to the entire network of individuals who are eligible for Drug Medi-Cal or other specialized [L.A.] County funding sources.

## Process

Through the interviews, we identified one facilitator who related to the implementation process. Specifically, interviewees from some organizations said that they have conducted surveys of youth or otherwise requested feedback to understand what methods would best keep youth engaged and interested in attending sessions. This feedback has helped the organizations more intentionally tailor their programming.

**Table 3.3. Barriers to and Facilitators of DPH SAPC Youth Services Program Implementation**

| <b>CFIR Domain</b> | <b>Barriers</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Facilitators</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Innovation         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not applicable</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility to strategize youth engagement activities</li> <li>• Therapeutic and prosocial activities</li> <li>• Free consultations and engaging family members</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Individuals        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low attendance because of youth personal challenges</li> <li>• Stigma associated with SUD treatment</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills of staff and counselors</li> <li>• Bilingual or multilingual staff</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Inner setting      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staffing shortages</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing staff trainings</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Outer setting      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of referrals, including from the Probation Department</li> <li>• Reimbursement and billing issues leading to the underuse of YES and Youth Substance Abuse services funding</li> <li>• COVID-19 pandemic restrictions resulting in telehealth sessions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational presentations at schools</li> <li>• Outreach to mental health program partners and the court system</li> <li>• Partnerships with other referral sources across the continuum of care</li> <li>• Additional funding through YES and Youth Substance Abuse services, which has made transportation and the provision of food possible</li> </ul> |
| Process            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not applicable</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys of youth to understand the best client-engagement strategies</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

## Perceptions of Program Outcomes

The majority of interviewees believed that the SUD treatment programming was effective. Interviewees described the YES program as “an awesome pilot and program” and a “great idea.” Others said that the program was effective particularly because of partnerships or because of being well structured.

Interviewees explained that Youth Substance Abuse services and CENS were only effective as long as clients were willing to attend treatment, and that there still remained issues with engagement and underuse of the programs. However, there was a perception that services are effective only when youth engage in the services.

When asked whether programming effectively provided equal access across various groups of people, interviewees responded that, in their perceptions, it did. Interviewees attributed this to facilitators, such as hiring bilingual or multilingual staff who reflect the communities’ demographics, implementing a community-leadership development program for youth, and sending staff to diversity trainings. Two agencies reported that they needed more culturally appropriate outreach and education for populations that tend to not come for treatment until it is “too late.”

## Perceived Opportunities for Improvement

In interviews, recommendations for improving the programs focused on funding and strategies for providing services that employ more outreach, engagement, and early intervention rather than focusing solely on providing counseling. Respondents from some organizations suggested ending the fee-for-service model and recommended increasing the hourly reimbursement for outreach and prevention services to match treatment reimbursement, which they said would incentivize nontreatment service provision. Several other interviewees echoed this sentiment that the available funding does not reflect the importance of prevention and early intervention. One interviewee explained,

They're [youth clients] . . . not seeking help and there's a lot of buzz going around right now because of the fentanyl issue. But that's not treatment, right? So I feel like maybe funding needs to change to better match what's needed in the community. Maybe they're not looking for counseling, maybe they need, like, a drop-in center.

Some staff members went further to say that outreach should include more field-based services and more of a focus on hard-to-reach youth. One provider recommended broadening the approach to SUD treatment to include more family support. Several agencies remarked on the success of the idea behind YES programming and recommended continuing to work on boosting engagement and growing the network to provide a larger array of services.

## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Staff from the agencies and CBOs in the DPH SAPC Youth Services network shared important lessons that they learned in implementing their programs. Additional funding sources, such as YES, have helped enhance client access to programs by providing transportation, food, and family engagement. Nevertheless, interviewees noted that there are youth who need a higher level of care but are not receiving it because their attendance is inconsistent. If youth are engaged in care and attending treatment, staff members generally believe the program is effective; although quantitative data were not available to thoroughly assess program outcomes, staff members highlighted their efforts to enhance youth engagement, partner with youth to develop their own treatment goals, check on those goals regularly, and ensure continuity of care once treatment ends. Staff noted that recovery support services help youth start to think about bigger goals, such as engaging in extracurriculars or thinking about academic or vocational paths, and it is also a way to step down SUD treatment services slowly so there is not an abrupt end. But staff members also believe that JJCPA funding streams are underused, in part because of low attendance and lack of referrals but also because of reimbursement issues—for example, prioritizing SUD treatment services that have a higher reimbursement rate than YES services, even though staff members underscored the value of YES-supported outreach and engagement.

Using our findings, we developed the following recommendations for improved program implementation, organized by CFIR domain.

## Innovation

The recommendation in this section relates to the nature of the interventions themselves and is a consideration for DPH and the CBOs that provide services.

### Expand Services to Include More Nontreatment and Early Intervention Support

In interviews, we learned that additional services might be needed to better engage youth in the treatment process, particularly to retain youth in the Youth Substance Abuse services program. Evidence suggests that residential and outpatient SUD treatment services can reduce substance use among justice-involved youth, and in some cases also reduce the risk of arrest (Applegarth, Jones, and Brooks Holliday, 2023), so youth who are more engaged in treatment might have better outcomes (Mears and Kelly, 2002). Therefore, it is important to find ways to meaningfully connect youth with treatment and ensure their participation.

Although YES funds have allowed service providers to do more community-based outreach to youth who might benefit from services, and the funds have also enabled providers to offer supplemental activities to keep youth engaged once they have enrolled in services, attendance has remained a challenge. Some strategies that CBOs could test include providing field-based services, such as a drop-in center or mobile treatment unit that can bring services to the communities rather than waiting for youth to come to treatment—an approach that has shown promise in other contexts (e.g., adult populations, medication treatment for opioid use disorders) (Bailey et al., 2024; Stewart et al., 2021). Supporting families in addition to youth receiving treatment could also help further the programs' missions. Recent discussions between RAND and DPH revealed that the programs have started to expand their offerings to focus on caregivers and parents, such as by developing a caregiver guide to SUD treatment and offering a support group for parents and caregivers. Ultimately, these services might help with youth engagement and retention because parents and caregivers can support their participation.

## Outer Setting

The recommendations in this section relate to the outer setting; that is, the broader community, policies, and external agencies (including the Probation Department) that influence the implementation of DPH's programs. These recommendations would require the support of entities other than DPH and the CBOs to implement. This support would come from the Probation Department but might also involve a consideration of the state policies that shape reimbursement rates.

### Enhance Outreach and Partnerships to Reach a Broader Population of Youth

To support more youth and enhance attendance, DPH and the CBOs could consider investing in additional outreach and marketing efforts. YES funds have helped the programs expand their outreach efforts and form partnerships with other relevant agencies, such as schools. Another step that the programs could take to reach other populations could be to increase the availability of culturally appropriate outreach and education. Staff noted that such outreach and education would help engage

populations that experience increased stigma of SUDs and SUD treatment. One way to do this might be to grow the network of providers and organizations to include family-based organizations. Family involvement, in particular, is a best practice for juvenile justice system programs (Whitaker, Smucker, and Brooks Holliday, 2022) and youth SUD treatment (Chassin et al., 2009; Hogue et al., 2018), and engaging families as part of the treatment process might help address any stigma held within those family units (which could, in part, be a function of the families' cultural backgrounds) (Ahad, Sanchez-Gonzalez, and Junquera, 2023; Misra et al., 2021). The CBOs could also develop relationships with local culturally based and grassroots organizations that already have deep ties to the community. Not only would these relationships help DPH and the service provider organizations publicize their services, but these partnerships could eventually help CBOs integrate more culturally responsive programming, such as by helping providers understand barriers to treatment that are unique to certain cultural groups or adapting service delivery (González Castro and Garfinkle, 2003).

### Revisit the Reimbursement Rate and Billing Process for YES Funds

YES funds are an important facilitator and allow agencies to identify potential clients, engage those clients, and improve attendance. However, CBOs were having some difficulty using the funds because the reimbursement rate is lower for services that YES funds than it is for SUD treatment. DPH and the Probation Department could explore options to incentivize the use of YES funds or allow the maximum flexibility for using them so that CBOs do not feel as if they must choose between offering outreach and engagement activities and ensuring that they are generating enough revenue to cover their services, staff, and infrastructure.

# The L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program

Library services can help prevent youth from becoming involved in the justice system, and public libraries often serve at-promise youth who face increased risk of justice system involvement (Bruan et al., 2013; Campana et al., 2022). Students who attend after-school programs in general, such as those held at public libraries, have higher school attendance and lower suspension and expulsion rates (Jenson et al., 2018), which in turn correlates with reduced justice system involvement (Fabelo et al., 2011). Life skills programs have also shown promise to reduce recidivism among adults with justice system involvement (Cecil et al., 2000).

The L.A. County Library developed the Probation Outreach Program to provide probation-involved and *at-promise youth* (defined by the program as those living in “under resourced communities” who are chosen in coordination with the L.A. County Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services) with a variety of programming related to library resources and life skills. One such program is Adult 101 Life Skills, which the L.A. County Library created to teach teenagers soft skills that are needed to be successful in adulthood, such as digital literacy, basic finances, and nutrition (California State Library, undated). Moreover, because libraries have increasingly embraced social justice as a core tenet of how they operate (Jaeger, Shilton, and Koepfler, 2016), the Probation Outreach Program incorporates cultural and social issues as well. Librarians deliver this programming during school hours at JDRCs, which are alternative high schools for youth who are probation-involved, at-promise, or expelled from their high school, including youth returning to the community from juvenile halls or camps. After-school programming is also offered at local libraries across L.A. County to engage at-promise youth.

## Program Description

The Library Probation Outreach Program provides library services, prevention programs, life skills classes, and other beneficial alternatives to delinquent behavior to probation-involved and at-promise youth at JDRCs and local libraries.

## Program Goals

The program aims to introduce youth to library resources and prepare them for adulthood, and to divert them from risky behaviors. Specifically, the program aims to provide life skills and resources to bridge the gap between youth and adulthood (L.A. County Library, 2021). Some interviewees

described goals of encouraging youth to finish high school, preparing them for the transition into adulthood, and providing support that youth might not otherwise have. Staff also described building relationships with and taking interest in youth as essential to achieving these goals. As one interviewee shared, “part of that is building relationships with the youth as much as possible and helping to hopefully set them on a good path in life.”

Librarians spoke of the array of library resources they offer to youth and the importance of promoting the library as a free, safe, and unbiased place to find extensive resources that many communities might not be aware of. For example, students and their families can access not only free books and digital resources, but also internet, online education, General Educational Development (GED) certification, and family activities, which were noted as important for students with children of their own. Staff aim to provide a library card to each student. One interviewee described the connection between library resources and program goals as follows:

Ultimately, we want [youth] to see the bigger, broader world. I think libraries in general are a window into the world. I think there’s a lot of information and knowledge in libraries, and as librarians, we value creating opportunities and experiences for people to explore that information and learn about the world. And so we really promote that and create opportunities for them to see that there are resources available to them; that there are opportunities that the library can be a gateway for those opportunities.

## Program Services and Operations

Interviewees described program services as “soft interventions” that incorporate life skills, job readiness, and financial literacy. Program services also include a variety of educational and cultural programs. For example, the program offers science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) programs, which, interviewees noted, students particularly enjoyed because of the hands-on nature of the programs with problem-solving and teamwork. Librarians also deliver a curriculum called Adult 101 Life Skills, in which they teach life skills in a fun and engaging way, such as by incorporating such topics as budgeting and car maintenance into games and activities. For example, one interviewee reported using a basketball game to teach budgeting skills. In another example, students received a first aid kit as part of a Red Cross–developed program on emergency preparedness for earthquakes, fires, and other natural disasters. Job-readiness programs included lessons on resume writing, interviewing, and using the right resources for finding a job, including jobs with the L.A. County Library. As one interviewee shared, “[B]uilding life skills into the programs is a real hallmark of what we do.”

Interviewees often described cultural and heritage programs as central to the program. Librarians plan a holiday, heritage, or awareness month celebration each month; the celebrations incorporate an activity, promote resources, and connect with a historical or social issue. Examples include programming for Black History, Hispanic Heritage, and Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage months. These programs have connected to such topics as Black hair and wellness and combatting anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. For Women’s History month, one interviewee described leading a project about Dolores Huerta, a labor leader, activist, and

co-founder of the United Farmworkers Association. Interviewees described the importance of the program connecting to the cultures and identities of the students and of the local communities.

The program occasionally partners with other organizations to bring in guest presentations, called “performers.” These activities have included a presentation on urban gardening, a science show that involved making ice cream, and a demonstration from a professional anime artist. Performers may connect their topic or presentation to an awareness month (e.g., gardening for Earth Day) or to a potential career option (e.g., anime artist).

The L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program is staffed by five full-time librarians who work within one of five library regions: North, South, East, West, and Central. Each librarian is employed by the L.A. County Library, is embedded at one library location, and delivers programs at a JDRC (if one is located in the librarian’s assigned region) and library locations across their region (the librarian delivers programs at several local libraries each month). Additionally, the program employs one library administrator, one coordinator, and one library assistant. In implementing the program, these staff members closely coordinate with local librarians, JDRC teachers, and Probation Officers.

When onboarding staff, interviewees described a process that includes training on the program, the Probation Department, and behavioral trainings, such as de-escalation training. Leadership described taking advantage of county-provided training, such as Positive Parenting Training offered by the L.A. County Department of Mental Health. New librarians also spend time shadowing other Probation Outreach Program librarians prior to working on their own, which interviewees described as useful for observing different teaching styles and ways of implementing the program.

Librarians develop the programming and lesson plans, cocreating them with youth to tailor lessons to student’s needs and interests. The Probation Department requires some lessons, such as the Adult 101 curriculum, but librarians are able to develop creative ways to deliver these lessons using a pool of programs to which all librarians have access. Probation Outreach Program librarians also work together each month to develop a pool of programs that each will share and take turns implementing. A suite of Microsoft PowerPoint templates and lesson plans, developed by librarians who formerly worked for the program, are also available for use.

Librarians deliver the same programs each month at JDRCs and library locations, but the librarians tailor lessons to the interests and needs of the youth at each location. For example, JDRCs reportedly see better attendance at the beginning of the school year, so staff front-load Probation Department–required lessons. Programming at library locations tends to be less formal because registration is not always required and attendees often drop in to the event. JDRCs have different security restrictions, which can affect the supplies that librarians can bring into the facilities and, therefore, the librarians might need to modify the programming.

Students enroll in or attend programming in different ways, and recruitment differs between JDRCs and library locations. For JDRCs, the program does not conduct outreach or recruitment. As mentioned, students are enrolled in JDRCs when they are otherwise not able to attend their high school; for example, because they are probation-involved, they have been expelled from their previous high school, or they are returning from a juvenile hall or camp. All youth enrolled at the JDRCs are encouraged by their JDRC teachers to attend the Probation Outreach Program. JDRC staff members, which include a teacher and a Probation Officer, keep track of student attendance. Interviewees reported that attendance fluctuates and ranges from three to 12 students. In this small classroom

setting, librarians provide instruction for one hour once per week at most JDRCs and twice per week at the Boyle Heights JDRC.

At library locations, Probation Outreach Program librarians work with local librarians to schedule and promote programming and recruit students. Program librarians create and provide promotional materials, but promotion is the responsibility of the local library. At these events, librarians track attendance, collect information from students (including their name, age, zip code, and race or ethnicity), and provide that information to the Probation Department.

Although libraries formally promote the program, staff reported that they promoted the program at L.A. County department events, such as the Office of Violence Prevention’s teen mental health summit, and at L.A. County Library system-wide events.

## Youth Served

According to interviewees, the program serves a diversity of youth with populations varying between JDRCs and library locations. Most youth at JDRCs are likely probation-involved, and librarians noted that because of privacy and safety concerns (i.e., gang involvement), the Probation Department does not provide—and librarians do not request—specific details of students’ backgrounds. Interviewees noted that they perceived these youth to have little parental involvement in their academic careers, and interviewees noted that many students were working and raising younger siblings or families of their own. According to staff interviewed, JDRC students tended to be 15 to 18 years old (sometimes older), in the 9th to 12th grades, and are required to attend to graduate high school. One interviewee noted that probation-involved youth tended to be youth of color, specifically Black and Hispanic or Latinx youth.

At library locations, youth were primarily at-promise, or at risk of being probation-involved; this is likely because the program selects locations to prioritize underserved communities. Interviewees reported that, compared with youth at JDRCs, youth at library locations were more likely to have parental involvement, have grown up going to libraries, and attend programming to complete high school community-service requirements.

Table 4.1 summarizes the characteristics of youth served by program using data the program collected and provided to the Probation Department. There were 97 unique participants reported from July 2022 through October 2022, about half of whom (44 percent) were male and half of whom (47 percent) identified as Hispanic or Latinx. One-third of students (33 percent) were between 15 and 18 years old. Eighteen percent were age 10 or younger (and likely attended the program at a library location). It should be noted that the data did not include the gender, race or ethnicity, or age of many program participants, which are labeled as “Unknown” in the table.

**Table 4.1. L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program Participant Characteristics  
(July 2022–October 2022)**

| <b>Participant Demographics</b> | <b>Participants<br/><i>N</i> = 97<br/>% (<i>n</i>)</b> |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Gender                          |                                                        |
| Female                          | 37.11 (36)                                             |
| Male                            | 43.30 (42)                                             |
| Unknown                         | 19.59 (19)                                             |
| Race or ethnicity               |                                                        |
| Black                           | 10.31 (10)                                             |
| Hispanic                        | 47.42 (46)                                             |
| Multiracial                     | 1.03 (1)                                               |
| Other                           | 13.40 (13)                                             |
| Unknown                         | 27.84 (27)                                             |
| Age                             |                                                        |
| 10 or younger                   | 17.53 (17)                                             |
| 11                              | 9.28 (9)                                               |
| 12                              | 6.19 (6)                                               |
| 13                              | 8.25 (8)                                               |
| 14                              | 7.22 (7)                                               |
| 15                              | 6.19 (6)                                               |
| 16                              | 4.12 (4)                                               |
| 17                              | 13.40 (13)                                             |
| 18                              | 9.28 (9)                                               |
| Unknown                         | 18.56 (18)                                             |

## Implementation Findings

Using our analysis of staff interviews, we identified several overarching themes related to implementation determinants across four CFIR domains: innovation, individuals, inner setting, and outer setting. Barriers and facilitators for each of the overarching themes are displayed in Table 4.2.

### Innovation

Interviewees described the cocreation of programming with youth and tailoring lessons to youth needs and interests as key facilitators to student engagement. One interviewee described the cocreation with youth as a “partnership between both of us.” Not only does cocreation help librarians develop

interesting and engaging programming for youth that connects to potential career paths, but it also helps build credibility and trust in the program by demonstrating that students' voices are heard and valued.

The cocreation process can help librarians develop appropriate lessons and align with what is being taught in class at their JDRC. The process entails directly asking youth about programming they would like, talking to local librarians and Probation Department staff about youth interests, and collecting surveys before and after each program to understand the youth's satisfaction with different types of programs. For example, some template lesson plans include art projects, which some youth found therapeutic, yet other youth perceived the activity to be too juvenile. Youth can also provide input into which performers they would like to see. For example, some youth expressed interest in drawing, which led staff to bring in a professional anime artist to lead an activity.

In developing and revamping programs, librarians use such resources as the Young Adult Library Services Association, Programs in a Box, YouTube, Pinterest, and templates that former program librarians created; however, staff noted that these templates can be outdated and rudimentary and can require significant updating to make them engaging and useful to youth. Although PowerPoint offers a visual element to librarians' presentation of a topic, one interviewee noted that successfully engaging youth with PowerPoint slides might be unrealistic, and the interviewee recommended that the program use more advanced technology.

Interviewees described the importance of the program connecting to the cultures and identities of students, as previously mentioned, and interviewees described inclusive cultural programming as a facilitator to student engagement. Librarians spoke of the importance of celebrating heritage or awareness months and connecting lessons to historical or social issues.

In some ways, the program is flexible in its ability to let librarians tailor programming to local needs. However, interviewees also described the need for more flexibility, specifically with the program's partnerships and in choosing locations to deliver the programming; some interviewees desired to serve more youth by delivering the program in more locations.

Although interviewees described the program's ability to benefit youth, they noted that the program's goals were not explicitly understood, which created confusion as to the programming's purpose and intended outcomes. One interviewee shared that better-defined goals could improve the program's implementation.

## Individuals

Low student attendance emerged as a barrier to implementation both at JDRCs and library locations. With regard to JDRCs, interviewees pointed to challenges in students' personal lives, such as unstable housing, poor school performance, and having children of their own, as contributing to school-attendance issues. The time of year also affects JDRC attendance. For example, attendance might be higher at the beginning of the school year in the fall, but by the springtime, when students might learn they are not graduating, they might no longer attend. On the other hand, attendance at JDRCs can drop when students return to their regular high schools, which is a positive change. Librarians described that the fluctuating attendance made it difficult to build relationships with youth.

With regard to library locations, interviewees also described difficulties with attendance, particularly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was described as an L.A. County Library system-wide issue because youth attendance across all libraries has decreased.

Collecting personal information from participants and families, which the Probation Department requires, was reported to be a barrier to participation. Interviewees noted that this practice was of particular concern among immigrant communities. However, staff said that individuals who question giving the requested information often still provided the personal details. Staff do not force participants to disclose this information and still allow people to participate, but librarians do not report these attendees to the Probation Department. It should be noted that there are ongoing efforts at the county level to address this issue.

One facilitator to program implementation is librarians' ability to build relationships and trust with youth, which made it more likely that youth would consistently attend, meaningfully engage with the material, and benefit from the lessons. To keep students engaged and motivated, it is important that staff are comfortable interacting with youth one on one, showing respect, building trust, and making youth feel safe and heard. As one interviewee shared, "I think having staff who come in and show, 'I care about you. I care about what you're learning and about what you're doing'—I think that's huge." Interviewees pointed to staff consistency as important for building those necessary relationships and that trust.

## Inner Setting

Interviewees reported that staffing choices were essential to successful client engagement and program implementation. When hiring librarians, the program has worked to find the "right fit," valuing applicants' backgrounds and their experience, passion, and ability to work with and effectively engage teenagers. Personal or family experience with the probation or justice system and being able to relate to students and be a "credible messenger" was also reported to be an asset. Moreover, it has been valuable to have staff who can speak Spanish because a large portion of probation-involved youth and families were reported to speak Spanish as their primary language. In general, hiring diverse staff who represent and reflect the youth facilitated implementation. As one interviewee noted,

I think making sure that the youth who are in our communities and in our libraries and in the JDRCs see themselves reflected somehow in the people that we're hiring—in the diversity of our staff, in their lived experiences—is really important so that they can see, "This is an option. I can be like this person, too."

Another facilitator to implementation has been support from colleagues. Interviewees described their team as supportive, particularly with lesson planning. One interviewee noted that each librarian has their unique strengths, such as one individual who is particularly strong with STEAM lessons and another individual who is particularly artistic. Librarians work together to develop lessons from which they can choose.

Local librarians (those not specifically involved with the program) are in charge of promoting events and play a key role in implementation. Local library engagement with the program can vary, depending on whether the location has a teen librarian (i.e., a librarian who works specifically with

teens) and whether incentives, such as food, free books, and other materials, are available. Interviewees noted that these factors promote greater youth attendance at library locations.

Other library resources have been important facilitators to program implementation. Because the program is part of the L.A. County Library, staff have access to a variety of free library resources that can benefit youth, and they also have access to L.A. County training resources for staff professional development. With regard to supplies, librarians described being resourceful and repurposing materials. Some interviewees reported a need for more resources, particularly food to enhance attendance, but also smarter purchases; for example, one interviewee noted that one large expensive project could be impactful rather than several smaller, cheaper projects.

## Outer Setting

Communication among program partners (i.e., the L.A. County Library, the Probation Department, and JDRC staff) is important for the program to run smoothly, but staff members described some opportunities to improve existing communication efforts. Interviewees noted that JDRC staff, including teachers and Probation Officers, play a key role in encouraging student engagement. Yet if communication with a teacher was lacking, or if librarians felt unwelcome in the classroom, then the program became difficult to implement. Staff reported that JDRC staff might not always know the purpose of the Probation Outreach Program, but once they developed a rapport with the program librarians, they became good partners.

There have also been challenges related to the perceived lack of communication with administrators, such as those at the Probation Department and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). One example of the lack of communication is that a JDRC closed in one region and the program was neither notified of the closure nor told how to redirect resources and reach youth in that community. Interviewees reported that many youth in that region were no longer being served. They also noted a slow turnaround time on various requests and suggested that a dedicated liaison between the libraries and other administrators could help to address these challenges.

With regard to the grant funding process, interviewees noted anxieties about the program's funding schedule and the potential for fluctuating funding. The program hires staff on yearlong contracts, which could create staffing uncertainties. The grant application process was also described as arduous, and some staff were unclear as to what activities the grant allows. For example, staff have looked to expand partnerships with other youth-serving organizations to reach more youth, but it was their understanding that partnerships with certain types of organizations (e.g., religious institutions) are not allowed with the existing funding. Staff also suggested that partnerships might also be limited if partner agencies cannot meet JJCPA's data-collection requirements.

L.A. County's large geography and the size of librarians' assigned regions can also be challenging for staff as they implement the program, both in terms of travel time but also in coordinating with local libraries and school districts to promote the program. The regions' large sizes also make it difficult to build relationships with staff and youth in a given region.

These and other external factors, such as whether the library is located near a school or public transportation, can play a role in whether youth visit a library. If students need volunteer hours (for

school or probation), then they might also visit libraries more frequently, which in turn increases attendance at Probation Outreach Program events.

**Table 4.2. Barriers to and Facilitators of the L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program Implementation**

| CFIR Domain   | Barriers                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Facilitators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Innovation    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear goals and mission</li> <li>• Inadequate lesson templates</li> </ul>                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cocreation of programming with youth</li> <li>• Development of inclusive cultural programming</li> <li>• Flexibility to tailor programming to youth's interests and needs</li> </ul>                                                                                       |
| Individuals   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low attendance because of personal lives and challenges and potential hesitation about providing information</li> <li>• Low teen attendance at libraries more broadly</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff skills to effectively engage and create relationships and trust with youth</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Inner setting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to make larger, more impactful purchases</li> <li>• Lack of flexibility in types of locations to deliver programming</li> </ul>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration between librarians</li> <li>• Hiring staff who represent and reflect youth served</li> <li>• Library and L.A. County resources and staff resourcefulness</li> <li>• Incentives for youth to attend, such as free food, books, and other materials</li> </ul> |
| Outer setting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor communication with the Probation Department</li> <li>• Inconsistent and arduous grant funding and reporting processes</li> <li>• Large geography of L.A. County</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with JDRC teachers and Probation Officers</li> <li>• Convenient library locations</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                 |

## Perceptions of Program Outcomes

We asked interviewees to report how well the program meets its goals. Interviewees perceived the program to be effective when they are able to get youth to attend. When youth attend, they reportedly provided positive feedback on postevent surveys at both library locations and JDRCs, which allowed staff to further tailor and enhance programming accordingly. Interviewees described JDRCs as particularly impactful spaces where librarians can build relationships with youth over time, giving librarians a greater ability to cocreate programming with youth. Certain programs, such as those that integrate the Adult 101 Life Skills curriculum, were also described to be impactful to youth, who found the programs to be interesting and personally beneficial. Other interviewees described the small one-on-one interactions as impactful, as well. For example, one staff member noted,

I think our successes are daily successes, if that makes sense. I think it's a day-to-day, like, oh, we had a good interaction with this one kid, he opened up to us about his interests, and then we designed a thing for him and then he got to be there when we

were doing this thing and it was really cool . . . So I don't know that we have a big overall success. I feel like we're pretty decent at meeting our deliverables. I feel like we do a good job of trying our best and putting in a huge effort every day to make this program a success and to meet the goals that we establish in the beginning [of the year]. But I think most of the successes are just little ones.

## Perceived Opportunities for Improvement

We asked interviewees to provide recommendations for program improvement. These opportunities focused on new venues to deliver the program and improved activities, promotion, and coordination with the Probation Department.

First, interviewees reported a need to reach more youth by delivering the program in additional venues, particularly because of the closure of one JDRC. Recommended venues included school settings, after-school programs, other alternative or continuation schools, and youth organizations, such as youth homeless shelters and Boys & Girls Clubs. Interviewees noted that serving more transition-aged youth and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, or another sexual or gender identity (LGBTQ+) youth would be particularly important.

Interviewees described a need for improvements to the programming itself. Although the program has a limited budget for supplies, recommendations included making bigger purchases, such as STEAM activity kits that include more-advanced technology or purchases that teach life skills, such as a driving simulator. Incentives, such as food, books, and backpacks, were also reported to improve engagement. One interviewee said,

We have to be willing to spend money and getting better things to show them [youth] what they can do with their time. I want them to show that there's something else out there besides what they've been doing, because I know you're not going to watch a PowerPoint presentation on budgeting and be like, "I want to be a banker." I think that some of the expectations for these PowerPoints are a little too high, to be honest with you. But showing them that there's something else out there they can do besides crime or there's other ways to accomplish their goals, that's what I would like to do.

Interviewees also desired funding for enhanced promotion and marketing efforts in addition to the existing L.A. County Library marketing tools. These outreach efforts were described as critical for strong attendance at library location programming in particular.

Finally, interviewees desired improved coordination with the Probation Department, requesting a dedicated liaison, an official form, or other way of streamlining requests and answering staff questions in a timely manner.

## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Staff provided meaningful insight into the Probation Outreach Program, the factors that influence its success, and the barriers that they and youth face in implementing the program. Implementation barriers and facilitators often centered around program attendance and student engagement, specifically around how to develop and tailor programs with and for youth and how to best coordinate

among partners and other agencies to serve more youth. For example, program cocreation with youth was described as essential to the program's effectiveness, as was the staff's ability to relate to and build relationships with youth. The program has thoughtfully hired staff who not only reflect the youth the program serves in terms of race or ethnicity, gender, and language but who are particularly effective at engaging youth. Interviewees emphasized the importance of the skills and personality needed to connect with the teen population. Youth faced barriers to participation because of their personal lives. Once meaningfully engaged in the lessons, youth were reported to benefit from the program. Additionally, themes emerged related to the process of implementing the JJCPA grant and coordinating with partners to bring in guest speakers and deliver programming in additional locations.

Using the evaluation findings, we developed the following recommendations for improved program implementation. As with the findings, we have organized recommendations by CFIR domain.

## Innovation

The recommendations in this section relate to the nature of the Probation Outreach Program itself and are considerations for the L.A. County Library in providing these services.

### Clarify Goals and Mission

Although staff perceived the program to be impactful to youth, the program's goals and mission were not explicitly detailed. A unifying mission and clearly defined goals are essential for any program implementation (Frieden, 2014). Educators often create goals for their students that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound—following the SMART framework (Poe et al., 2021). Clarifying goals can not only help the program staff do their jobs but also build buy-in from program partners, including JDRC teachers and local librarians. With a greater understanding of the program, these partners might be more likely to engage and promote the program.

### Enhance Programming Materials

For the program to effectively engage youth, materials should be up to date and age appropriate. As interviewees described, templates and prior materials required significant updates. It may be useful to strategize to make larger purchases that incorporate more-innovative and more-interactive materials, particularly those related to STEAM activities. The program should also ensure that new materials are adaptable and that staff continue to use the cocreation process they have already established, which can be an effective way of engaging and meeting the needs of the population being served (Sprague Martinez, Jones, and Connolly, 2020; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2023).

### Deliver Programming in Additional Venues to Reach and Serve More Youth

Because of the closure of one JDRC and interviewees' desire to serve more youth, adding venues to deliver programming could be particularly valuable. These might include venues that interviewees recommended, such as schools, nonprofits that serve youth, and homeless shelters that serve youth. As interviewees also noted, transition-aged and LGBTQ+ youth face an increased risk of justice system

involvement (Park and Courtney, 2022; Ramos, Barnert, and Bath, 2022), so it is particularly important to reach and serve these populations.

## Inner Setting

The recommendation in this section relates to the *inner setting*, which we have defined as elements relating to the L.A. County Library (e.g., staffing, infrastructure, resources, policies), although the recommendation also involves the potential for collaboration with outside entities, which also has ties to the outer setting (presented in the next section).

### Enhance Outreach and Incentives to Improve Attendance, Particularly for Library Locations

Youth face barriers in attending program events. Moreover, libraries were reported to have seen a drop in attendance following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For these reasons, the program should invest in or request additional funding for outreach and marketing efforts to enhance program awareness. Per interviewee recommendations, the program should invest in incentives, particularly food. Interviewees noted that free books, backpacks, and first aid kits have been successful at getting youth to attend events and learn from the program materials.

## Outer Setting

The recommendation in this section relates to the outer setting; that is, the broader community, policies, and external agencies (including the Probation Department) that influence implementation of the Probation Outreach Program. This recommendation would require the support of entities other than the library to implement.

### Improve Coordination and Communication Between Program Partners

Specifically, the program could improve coordination between program staff, local librarians, JDRC teachers, and Probation Department staff. Enhanced communication, particularly about the program's mission and goals, is necessary to build buy-in across agencies, given the key role that local librarians play in marketing the program and the role that JDRC teachers play in engaging students. Enhanced coordination and buy-in from the local librarians and JDRC teachers could help resolve this challenge. With regard to the Probation Department, interviewees described delays in responses and requested a dedicated liaison or a streamlined way for the program to receive necessary approvals.

# Department of Beaches & Harbors

## Russell Walker WATER Youth Program

The L.A. County DBH developed the Russell Walker WATER Youth Program to provide youth with recreational and educational opportunities, specifically related to ocean safety. Dedicated program lifeguards, who are also ocean lifeguards with the L.A. County Fire Department, deliver the programming during “Ocean Safety Days” and at summer camps. Program lifeguards provide ocean safety education while teaching new skills, such as kayaking, surfing, paddleboarding, sailing, and hiking.

Recreational opportunities might help prevent youth from becoming involved with the justice system. Prosocial behaviors, such as structured recreational activities, positive interactions with peers and adults, and an increased sense of self-worth by learning new skills, are associated with reduced justice system involvement (Development Services Group, Inc., 2015). Moreover, a systematic review of studies examining the social effects of outdoor sports found positive effects, not only on physical health but also on mental health, antisocial behavior, and crime reduction (Eigenschenk et al., 2019).

### Program Description

The WATER Youth Program was established by DBH in 1986 to provide youth, particularly youth of color in L.A., with access to the beach, beach-related recreational activities, and education on ocean safety. When L.A. County’s Ocean Lifeguard Division transferred to the L.A. County Fire Department, DBH continued to administer the program by reimbursing the Fire Department for lifeguard staffing hours. In February 2021, an L.A. County Board of Supervisors (BOS) motion authorized DBH to directly hire the lifeguard personnel needed to instruct the program. The intention was to expand the program to serve even more *at-promise youth*, described in the WATER Youth Program’s funding application as youth who live in “high-need” areas and, therefore, face increased risk of justice-system involvement (L.A. County DBH, 2021). The program is available to all youth in L.A. County; however, the program targets underserved communities, and JJCPA reimburses for probation-involved and, as of FY 2023–2024, at-promise youth who attend programming.

### Program Goals

Interviewees described the program’s existing goals as similar to those when the program was first established: to educate youth about ocean safety, offer recreational beach activities, and provide ocean-

related career opportunities. As one staff member shared, “Our priorities are safety first, education second, and fun third, and we always like to get to the fun aspect.” Interviewees noted that the program intends to serve youth who have had little or no exposure to the ocean, and the program aims for youth to return to public beaches with their families or to use similar community resources (e.g., City and County public pools).

## Staffing

The program includes one aquatics manager, one boating section head, one staff assistant, two lifeguard specialists, eight permanent ocean lifeguards, and ten recurrent ocean lifeguards. The aquatics manager, boating section head, and staff assistant provide management and administrative support, while the lifeguard specialists supervise in the field, and the lifeguards deliver the program.

## Program Services

Our interviews showed that the program offers a variety of activities through different formats. All programming provides similar services, including recreational activities (e.g., surfing, kayaking, swimming, stand-up paddleboarding) and ocean-safety education. For older youth (those in 6th through 12th grades), lifeguards discuss lifeguard career opportunities, teach them cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and demonstrate an ocean rescue.

Ocean Safety Days are one-day programs the program offers during the school year, and multiday programs are offered during school breaks (i.e., summer, winter, and spring breaks). Ocean Safety Days conducted on Saturdays are also open to family members, and these days are coined “Family Ocean Safety Days.” Multiday programs allow youth to participate in a broader variety of activities, such as hiking, touring lifeguard headquarters, or visiting an aquarium. Youth also have the chance to learn about additional ocean-related careers, such as careers with the U.S. Coast Guard, or an L.A. County department, such as DBH. The program also operates a Youth Sailing Camp that is available to all youth; however, staff noted that JJCPA-funded youth have yet to participate.

## Recruitment

Conversations with staff revealed that, although there is not a formal referral process, the aquatics manager leads recruitment through partnerships and outreach with schools, DCFS, the Probation Department, and CBOs. Staff noted that JJCPA-funded youth were primarily referred by DCFS and mostly attend the multiday programs, in part because summer camps are specifically offered to DCFS youth and winter and spring camps are offered to CBOs serving at-risk youth. The Probation Department also refers probation-involved youth; however, interviewees reported receiving few referrals from this source.

School groups from virtually all school districts in L.A. County attend Ocean Safety Days. To reach at-risk youth within school groups, the program has developed partnerships with schools in underserved communities and with continuation schools. The program also aims to ensure that schools participate from each district within L.A. County, and the program added a question to its

application to confirm whether school group participants are system-involved (i.e., probation-involved or foster care youth) to more consistently document these populations being served.

In addition to schools, the Probation Department, DCFS, and CBOs, the program works with BOS, members of which suggest youth groups and CBOs within their districts for program staff to invite to Family Ocean Safety Days and multiday programs.

Lifeguards provide transportation to school groups (from schools), DCFS youth, and certain other youth groups depending on their need and travel distance. Family Ocean Safety Day attendees, including family members, are provided with bus transportation. Probation-involved youth are typically provided with transportation from their home to the program site by their Probation Officer. To participate, youth must fill out and sign waivers and submit personal information, such as their name, gender, and age. The Youth Sailing Camp is the only program in which youth are required to formally enroll and pass a swim test to participate. As previously noted, JJCPA-funded youth are eligible but have yet to participate in the sailing camp.

## Youth Served by the WATER Youth Program

Estimates provided by staff suggest that approximately 4,500 to 5,000 youth participate in the WATER Youth Program each year. Up to 50 youth participate in Ocean Safety Days per day and up to ten youth participate in the Youth Sailing Camp per day. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 6,000 youth participated each year.

We had access to data on youth who the Probation Department referred to the WATER Youth Program in FY 2022–2023. In total, we had data on 17 unique referrals (see Table 5.1 for demographic information on these referrals). Most referred youth were male, and all were from the San Gabriel Valley in L.A. County, primarily the cities of El Monte and Pomona. We do not report actual numbers referred from each zip code because of low sample sizes and the potential to identify youth. However, additional demographic data were not available, and we did not have access to data about which youth actually enrolled in the program rather than those who were just referred to the program.<sup>3</sup> According to program leadership, in FY 2022–2023, the program served 363 at-promise youth; however, as previously mentioned, JJCPA did not fund at-promise youth until FY 2023–2024, when 667 such youth were served, and we were not given any additional data on these youth.

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<sup>3</sup> Staff informed us that in FY 2022–2023, 11 of the 17 referred youth enrolled in the program, although we were unable to confirm which of the 17 youth had enrolled, and we were unable to verify these numbers using the quantitative data that the Probation Department provided.

**Table 5.1. Characteristics of Probation Department Youth Referred to the WATER Youth Program (2022–2023)**

| <b>Demographic</b> | <b>Youth Referrals<br/>N = 17<br/>% (n)</b> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Gender             |                                             |
| Female             | 23.53 (4)                                   |
| Male               | 76.47 (13)                                  |

## Implementation Findings

Through interviews, we identified several implementation determinants across three CFIR domains: individuals, inner setting, and outer setting. Barriers and facilitators within each domain are displayed in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2. Barriers to and Facilitators of WATER Youth Program Implementation**

| <b>CFIR Domain</b> | <b>Barriers</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Facilitators</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Individuals        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low attendance among probation-involved youth</li> <li>• Youth’s fear of the water, little or no exposure to the beach, lack of bathing suit or towel, and body image concerns</li> <li>• Youth’s hesitation to sign waivers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not applicable</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Inner setting      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understaffing and staff burnout, staff injuries, and lack of full benefits (e.g., sick time), and arduous timecard procedures</li> <li>• Lack of staff diversity</li> </ul>                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff buy-in, commitment, and one-on-one time with youth to build trust, and staff who can work full time on the program</li> <li>• Strong communication between leadership and lifeguards</li> <li>• Age-appropriate and high-quality equipment</li> <li>• Transportation options</li> <li>• Translation of program materials into languages other than English and one Spanish-language program</li> </ul> |
| Outer setting      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large geography of L.A. County and long transit times</li> <li>• Slow ordering, field trip request, and hiring processes</li> </ul>                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment via partner organizations, including schools, DCFS, and youth-focused nonprofits</li> <li>• Beach ADA accessibility</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## Individuals

Interviewees described challenges with the recruitment and attendance of JJCPA-funded youth, particularly for probation-involved youth. As mentioned, the Probation Department refers few youth to the program. When youth do enroll, they might not always attend. Specifically, staff disclosed that among probation-involved and DCFS youth who enroll, about half generally attend the program. In the case of multiday camps, youth might also not attend for the whole length of the program. Interviewees described situations in which a Probation Officer arrived at a youth's home to transport them to the beach and the youth no longer wanted to participate because of illness or the weather. Given that there were so few probation-involved participants, the program expanded to at-promise youth in FY 2023–2024, and staff are working to expand programming to serve more JJCPA-funded youth through this new option.

When youth attend the programming, they are sometimes apprehensive to participate because of fear of the ocean, which the program is prepared to address. Conversations with staff revealed that participating youth typically have little or no previous exposure to the beach, can be nervous about getting into the water, and might not have swimsuits or towels. One staff member reported participant body-image concerns as well, particularly for girls in middle school who might not want to change into a wetsuit with a bathing suit on the beach:

We've had to deal with girls that have been really self-conscious about putting on a wetsuit. The girls put it on, I'll put one on. It's like, "Hey, we shouldn't be afraid of our bodies, because this is going to keep us warm out there and it's going to help us experience life. We can't just hide from life and not experience it." And 99 percent of the time, any child, any youth that was hesitant will end up completing the day in the water.

Surveys to assess youth satisfaction conducted before and after the program also presented some challenges because youth did not always want to complete a survey. Staff recognized the importance of program data and demonstrating the program's success so they continued to encourage youth to complete the survey.

## Inner Setting

Staff commitment to the program and their skills persistently emerged as facilitators to youth engagement and program implementation, highlighting the importance of building trust with youth to help them feel comfortable and overcome their fears. Examples of this trust building included staff working one on one with youth to, as one interviewee put it, "calm their fears, reassure them, take them baby step by baby step." Another interviewee provided a reason for the program using this kind of approach, stating that "kids are coming from backgrounds where [the ocean] is a very unfamiliar place for them, so we've got to gain their trust and have them feel secure in that we're going to protect them as well as teach them." The program's transition in 2021 from a partnership with the Fire Department to becoming completely assumed by DBH also reportedly helped strengthen communication between lifeguards and leadership because staff can now dedicate themselves to working full-time on the WATER Youth Program.

There were logistical and infrastructure facilitators as well. For instance, interviewees viewed access to age-appropriate beaches (e.g., beaches with low surf more suitable for younger youth) and high-quality equipment (e.g., kayaks, paddleboards) as helpful for carrying out the program. Furthermore, keeping the lesson-based portion of the program (e.g., ocean safety education) brief was found to be helpful for maintaining youth engagement and providing sufficient time for beach activities. Finally, as part of the program's implementation, lifeguards take on different roles during each program day to ensure that all staff members gain understanding on how to deliver each part of the program and learn best practices from one another.

In terms of barriers, several interviewees noted that the program was understaffed because of injuries or medical leave, and those who were implementing the program were more likely to experience burnout from being overworked. Since our interviews, program leadership informed us that the program was no longer understaffed. The lifeguards' roles were perceived by some to be prone to injury because of the job's physical demands (e.g., repetitive motions, lifting kids and equipment). One staff member noted difficulties with how lifeguards are required (per department policy) to physically check in and check out each day at the program's headquarters in one specific beach, requiring additional travel for those working at a different beach.

However, one interviewee mentioned that their commitment to the program's mission helps them work through the burnout, sharing that "the mission is strong, and whenever we get frustrated, we just look at what the mission is and we stay focused on that, and people pull through and do the right thing."

Given these challenges, at the time of the interviews, the program was recruiting additional ocean lifeguards from the Fire Department (which has its own, separate lifeguard personnel). WATER Youth Program staff ideas for this hiring process included hiring more Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) lifeguards to reflect the diverse populations of youth the program serves and working with swim or polo team coaches in disadvantaged areas to teach youth about the lifeguard profession. The latter suggestion included bringing these groups of youth to the beach once or twice a month for training sessions for the lifeguard test.

Interviewees also reported some recent (as of this writing) changes to ensure that all youth have equal access to the program. For non-English speaking families, staff translated waivers into several languages other than English (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Tagalog), and staff plan to translate the program's brochure in and hire translators for any applicable language for Family Ocean Safety Day programs. The program is also Americans with Disability Act (ADA) compliant; for example, the program has a van equipped with a chair lift, beach wheelchairs, and experienced staff who can assist students onto the sailboats. Finally, staff are prioritizing time for schools that have not participated in the program and are building relationships with CBOs to refer more at-risk youth.

## Outer Setting

With regard to external facilitators, interviewees described a variety of partnerships with government agencies and CBOs to recruit different groups of youth from across L.A. County. For example, the program works with BOS to identify at-risk youth and prioritize youth in underserved communities (e.g., low-income, lack access to the beach) in recruitment efforts.

The geographic size of L.A. County was described as a barrier to participation. For example, lifeguards must drive for a significant amount of time (e.g., four hours per day) to pick up and drop off youth. Long driving shifts reportedly affect youth as well and prevent them from spending more time at the beach.

Finally, system-level barriers affect program implementation. For example, one staff member said that the L.A. County hiring process takes a significant amount of time, and the program has to plan a year in advance to hire staff. It also takes time for L.A. County to approve orders (e.g., replacing equipment), and the LAUSD requires staff to submit a youth field trip request 30 days in advance for approval. If a school cancels the field trip less than 30 days before the program day, staff can generally, but might not always, get approval from another school on the waiting list.

## Perceptions of Program Outcomes

During interviews, most staff members held positive perceptions of the program and its impact on youth. Some youth might have concerns about the program when they arrive, as described previously; however, as youth build confidence throughout the day, they start to get in the water and participate in the activities. As one interviewee shared about one group,

Most of those kids are on probation and some of them have never been to the beach before, and they come down with attitudes and hardcore looks on their faces, and it's just nice to get them to a place where they can actually be kids . . . instead of having to pretend to be tough. Just watching how afraid they are when they first get down there and then, at the end of the day, we can't even get them out of the water.

DCFS youth might also be wary of lifeguards, but as one interviewee shared, “when they find out that we’re here just to help them and to teach them and to mentor them with no strings attached, it’s kind of a new experience for a lot of them. The families have expressed a lot of appreciation.” This staff member also noted that some DCFS youth who participated have returned to the program.

## Perceived Opportunities for Improvement

Staff members suggested that the program should receive increased funding to expand the program (e.g., increase the length of program days, the number of multiday programs, and the number of beach locations), hire more staff, increase salaries, purchase more equipment, and serve more youth. For example, one staff member said that they would like to provide beach towels for youth and give participants a backpack or frisbee after finishing the program rather than just giving them a shirt that they will grow out of. However, some staff reported an adequate level of resources and equipment needed to implement the program.

To increase the length of time spent at the beach, one interviewee proposed that lifeguards pick up youth at 8:30 a.m. and drop them off at 5:30 p.m. rather than at 2:00 p.m. (although, according to program leadership, it is not feasible for school groups to participate during these nonschool hours); the interviewee also recommended modifying the timesheet protocol. Other suggestions included making participation in the program a condition of completing probation or allowing participation in

the program to count toward community service requirements to increase participation among probation-involved youth.

## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The WATER Youth Program provides exposure to beach areas of L.A., ocean-safety training, and an introduction to ocean-related careers that might otherwise not be available to many system-involved or at-promise youth. Staff are dedicated to the program and its mission, and the program is in high demand among the general population, likely because of the staff's ability to provide engaging programming with high-quality equipment. As interviewees described, staff have experienced some barriers engaging probation-involved youth. Even when staff receive referrals for probation-involved youth, few of those youth attend the actual program. Although youth engagement has been less of an issue for at-promise and DCFS youth, there is still room for improvement to increase the number of justice-involved or at-promise youth served. These findings suggest that DBH leadership should strengthen their communication with Probation Officers and DCFS caseworkers to improve participation in the program. The program is hiring more staff, but another barrier to program implementation that staff discussed was understaffing. Despite the understaffing, staff still said that the program's primary facilitator was strong staff morale and commitment to the mission.

Using these findings, we developed the following recommendations and have organized them by CFIR domain.

### Innovation

The recommendations in this section relate to the nature of the WATER Youth Program itself and are considerations for DBH in providing these services.

#### Include a Community Service Element to Encourage Participation

Interviewees recommended that participation in the program be accepted as a form of community service for probation-involved youth to incentivize participation. The program could include community service elements, such as beach cleanups or assisting lifeguards with the program, thereby offering youth a more hands-on role that contributes to the local community.

### Inner Setting

The recommendations in this section relate to the *inner setting*, which we have defined as elements related to DBH (e.g., staffing, infrastructure, resources, and policies)—although they also involve the potential for collaboration with outside entities, which also has ties to the outer setting (presented in the next section).

## Improve Staff Diversity and Hiring Efforts

Because the WATER Youth Program aims to encourage youth from disadvantaged communities (which are often non-White communities) to consider ocean-related careers, enhancing staff representation would be an important way to support this goal. Across different sectors, when staff reflect the communities being served—such as in terms of race or ethnicity, gender, or language—it helps build trust among and leads to improved outcomes for students or clients (Gershenson et al., 2022; Lopez Vera et al., 2023). Along with plans to hire more lifeguards to prevent burnout and injuries and to serve more youth, the program should prioritize thoughtfully hiring lifeguard staff who reflect the youth served in the program.

## Consider Logistical Changes to Enhance Program Access

Interviewees noted a need for various logistical changes. For example, some youth might not own a swimsuit or towel. The program should consider investing in these supplies, particularly for probation-involved, DCFS, and other at-promise youth. Moreover, given youth concerns about changing into a wetsuit on the beach, the program could purchase tents for private changing spaces. Lastly, as the program looks to expand, DBH could consider offering the program at additional locations or times.

## Outer Setting

The recommendation in this section relates to the *outer setting*; that is, the broader community, policies, and external agencies (including the Probation Department) that influence the implementation of the WATER Youth Program. This recommendation would require the support of entities other than DBH to implement.

## Improve Partnerships to Increase Participation Among Probation-Involved Youth

As of this writing, the type of client the WATER Youth Program serves the most is youth from school groups who attend Ocean Safety Days. To increase JJCPA-funded youth participation, the program should strengthen communication and establish more relationships with other agencies and CBOs. In particular, improving relationships with the Probation Department and Probation Officers could help increase participation among probation-involved youth. Further coordination with DCFS caseworkers and CBO staff could enhance referrals and attendance, as well.

## Conclusion

This report presented results from an evaluation of JJCPA-funded programs located in three L.A. County departments that serve probation-involved and at-risk youth. In each of the report's chapters, we described the individual program's goals and implementation facilitators and barriers. Taken together, these programs share many characteristics. Each program aims to provide prosocial activities, link youth to resources, and prevent future justice system involvement. In the inner setting of these programs (i.e., DPH and contracted providers, the L.A. County Library, and DBH), dedicated, skilled staff work closely with youth to build trust and tailor programming to local needs. Externally, partnerships with schools; government agencies, such as DCFS; and CBOs were critical for referrals. These programs all faced challenges with attendance and aimed to increase referrals and recruitment of probation-involved youth. Some programs faced staffing challenges, slow hiring and approval processes, and billing issues.

Although sharing many goals and characteristics, the way each program accomplishes its goals varies. The DPH SAPC Youth Service programs or funding streams support substance use treatment providers in identifying youth who need treatment and in supplementing treatment with additional programming to keep youth engaged. The L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program provides access to library resources and programming on life skills and career development. Finally, the DBH WATER Youth Program provides ocean safety education and recreational opportunities.

In this chapter, we review the limitations of our evaluation and provide concluding thoughts related to the cross-program findings.

### Cross-Program Conclusions

For each program, we made recommendations to improve implementation, but common themes emerged across all three programs. Across these programs, the recommendations center on the following:

- **Improve access to and use of programs through enhanced outreach, partnerships, and incentives.** Each program faced challenges with attendance, particularly among probation-involved youth. Interviewees shared recommendations related primarily to the outer settings, but they also made recommendations for the programs' inner settings to enhance access to and use of the programs. These recommendations included improved outreach and partnerships to increase the number of referrals. Strengthening communication between the Probation Department and these programs could help with referrals from the Probation Department itself. Creating new partnerships with schools and CBOs could also be useful for referrals.

Finally, interviewees described the importance of incentives, such as community service credit, transportation, and food, for engaging youth in these programs.

- **Expand service offerings or enhance existing services.** In an effort to serve more youth, these programs could consider offering new services or enhancing existing services. For example, the DPH SAPC funds could support additional nontreatment services and field-based services to retain more youth in treatment. The L.A. County Library Probation Outreach Program could consider delivering the program in new venues and schools and making investments in more modern, age-appropriate materials. The WATER Youth Program could offer swimsuits, towels, and a private changing area and consider providing the program on additional days or at earlier and later times of the day.
- **Streamline L.A. County approval, billing, and hiring processes.** Each program faced outer-setting challenges in implementation, and we recommended that L.A. County streamline these processes. For example, DPH and the Probation Department should work to ensure YES funds are adequately used or allow maximum flexibility in using these funds. L.A. County Library and DBH staff noted delays in approval processes and hiring challenges, and we recommended a streamlined way for these programs to receive approvals and hire full-time, permanent staff positions.

By addressing challenges with implementation, these programs can further their missions and expand their influence on the lives of youth they serve.

Although the findings of this evaluation can help these JJCPA-funded programs consider improvements to program implementation, it is also important to interpret the findings in the context of our data limitations. First, as described in the “Methods” chapter, we were unable to collect data from youth and caregivers. However, the perspective of these groups is essential to a holistic understanding of the program implementation and outcomes, and future evaluations should aim to measure their experiences. For example, youth participants could share more detail about the barriers that they experience of engaging in services, and the youth likely have valuable insights into the ways that programming could be adjusted to better suit their needs.

Second, we were limited in the quantitative data available for this evaluation. The Probation Department has made several efforts over the past few years (as of this writing) to establish uniform reporting requirements for programs that receive JJCPA funding; however, some organizations still struggle with these requirements, and others (such as DPH) have experienced challenges as they attempt to fulfill these reporting requirements while also ensuring compliance with other policies (e.g., 42 CFR 2). Our team developed a toolkit to support JJCPA-funded programs collect data related to attendance and outcomes (Byeon, Whitaker, and Brooks Holliday, 2024); this toolkit may serve as a resource for any program and department that is looking to improve its data-collection efforts. The toolkit also contains a guide on how programs can begin collecting data on outcomes that are relevant to their specific programming (e.g., for Youth Substance Abuse services, the program can determine whether youth are experiencing reductions in substance use; for psychoeducational workshops funded through YES, whether youth are gaining knowledge related to the consequences of substance use; for the WATER Youth Program, whether youth indicate that participation has increased their knowledge of new career paths). These data could then be leveraged for future evaluations, whether they are evaluations conducted by the organizations themselves or by external evaluators.

# Abbreviations

|          |                                                                                                 |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ADA      | Americans with Disabilities Act                                                                 |
| ASAM     | American Society of Addiction Medicine                                                          |
| BOS      | Board of Supervisors                                                                            |
| CBO      | community-based organization                                                                    |
| CENS     | Client Engagement and Navigation Services                                                       |
| CFIR     | Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research                                              |
| COVID-19 | coronavirus disease 2019                                                                        |
| DBH      | Department of Beaches & Harbors                                                                 |
| DCFS     | Department of Children and Family Services                                                      |
| DMC      | Drug Medi-Cal                                                                                   |
| DPH      | Department of Public Health                                                                     |
| FY       | fiscal year                                                                                     |
| ISB      | Information System Bureau                                                                       |
| JDRC     | Juvenile Day Reporting Center                                                                   |
| JJCPA    | Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act                                                           |
| L.A.     | Los Angeles                                                                                     |
| LAUSD    | Los Angeles Unified School District                                                             |
| LGBTQ+   | lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, or another sexual or gender identity |
| SAPC     | Substance Abuse Prevention and Control                                                          |
| STEAM    | science, technology, engineering, art, and math                                                 |
| SUD      | substance use disorder                                                                          |
| WATER    | Water Awareness, Training, Education, and Recreation                                            |
| YES      | Youth Enhancement Services                                                                      |

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