



LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC PLAN

JULY 2024

Table of Contents:

Section 1: Overview of DYD’s Strategic Plan	Page 2
A. Mission, Vision, & Values	Page 3
B. Snapshot of Los Angeles County’s Young People	Page 4
C. Keeping the Youth Justice Reimagined Vision Updated	Page 5
D. Key Elements of the Strategic Plan: North Stars and Guiding Directions	Page 6-7
Section 2: The Detailed Strategic Plan: Tactics, Strategies, and Vision for Youth Development in Los Angeles County Through 2030 & Beyond	TBD
Section 3: Assessment of What Comes Next	Page 8
Section 4: Appendix	TBD

Section 1: Overview of DYD’s Strategic Direction

Our Theory of Change:

The Los Angeles County Department of Youth Development (DYD) represents a historic investment in youth wellbeing and development. DYD’s theory of change is that when we invest in equity-centered, care-first approaches that help young people grow, we are making smart and sustainable investments in safer, healthier communities both now and in the future.

This theory of change involves prioritizing collaborative solutions to structural barriers that exclude underserved young people from opportunities and resources. Given Los Angeles County’s history as the largest incarcerator of young people in the nation, DYD’s charge includes a focus on addressing the harms of justice system involvement which disproportionately impact Black, indigenous, and other youth of color.

Although Los Angeles County has historically led the nation in youth incarceration, we now have the potential to lead in equitable investment in youth development, so that future generations are no longer systematically held back from being able to use their strengths to create a brighter future.

Guided by a Social-Ecological Approach:

DYD aims to improve the livelihood of young people through equitable access to youth development across Los Angeles County. To do so, DYD must take an intersectional, social-ecological approach to addressing barriers at multiple levels, working simultaneously to support high-quality service delivery, engage young people’s environment and community, and seek structural change.

Guided by the Department’s social-ecological approach to youth development, DYD has developed a Strategic Plan that includes concrete strategies and goals through 2030 with a through-line to the longer-term vision and systems-level evolution that serve as adaptable guiding North Stars for meaningful innovation and impact.

Understanding this Strategic Plan in Context:

DYD’s Strategic Plan is aligned with the 2024-2030 Los Angeles County Strategic Plan and Racial Equity Principles. In particular, DYD directly contributes to the County’s Board-Directed Priorities of *Care First, Jails Last* and *Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion*. DYD is one of two Departments created to explicitly address the County’s *Care First, Jails Last* priority and is vital to the County’s Racial Equity Strategic Goal No. 2 to *Reduce Adult First-Time Felony Convictions*.

More broadly, DYD’s Strategic Plan and collaboration with youth-serving agencies across the County has the long-term potential to improve all Board Priorities, including but not limited to *Homelessness, Justice Reform* and *Poverty Alleviation*. This claim is informed by a growing

Equitably Improving Youth Outcomes Requires a Social-Ecological Approach:



body of evidence that when young people thrive, communities as a whole are healthier, safer, and more sustainable. At the core of this Strategic Plan is the knowledge that it takes a village to raise a child.

DYD’s Strategic Plan has been informed by DYD’s first two years of implementation; research on best and promising practices in equitable youth development; and youth, community, and stakeholder engagement. This plan will be a living guide for DYD, one the Department will return to regularly and update at least every three to five years as the work towards long-term vision progresses.

A. Mission, Vision, and Values

In early 2024, DYD worked with staff and core partners to update the Department’s mission, vision, and values. These updated statements are outlined here to represent the Department’s explicit commitments to equity and anti-racism, intersectional and integrated approaches to youth development, and a long-term vision for sustainable structural change.

The Los Angeles County Code states that the purpose of DYD is to support the development of young people in Los Angeles County by coordinating and building capacity for a wide range of Youth Development services, opportunities, supports, and other efforts to the fullest extent permissible by law.

Given the disproportionate negative impact of system involvement on a young person’s development and outcomes throughout their lifetime—including barriers to education, employment, physical and mental health, social connections, and safety—DYD’s purpose also includes a focus on evidence-informed strategies that improve outcomes for youth who are impacted by the legal system.

“Policies that address structural racism and invest in youth health and social supports—instead of arresting youth—may reduce legal system involvement and improve population health by actualizing greater health equity.”

United States Youth Arrest and Health Across the Life Course: A Nationally Representative Longitudinal Study

Recognizing the outsized impact of youth justice system involvement on equitable access to youth development, DYD’s updated mission, vision, and values are as follows:

MISSION

DYD's mission is to be a catalyst for transformation by providing innovative pathways to youth development through intersectional, anti-racist, youth-centered strategies so that all young people can access resources that nurture their growth, wellbeing, and connection to community.

VISION

DYD envisions a flourishing youth development ecosystem that builds safer communities and eliminates youth incarceration by ensuring young people have the tools they need to thrive.

VALUES

- Youth and Community Empowerment
- Restorative Accountability *
- Anti-Violence *
- Anti-Racism
- Collaborative Solutions

*** A Note on Restorative Accountability and Anti-Violence:** Restorative Justice prioritizes healing and relationship-centered responses to wrongdoing that bring those who have harmed and those who have been harmed into processes that help the wrongdoer take accountability for their actions. Violence Prevention prioritizes practices that prevent all forms of violence by addressing root causes.

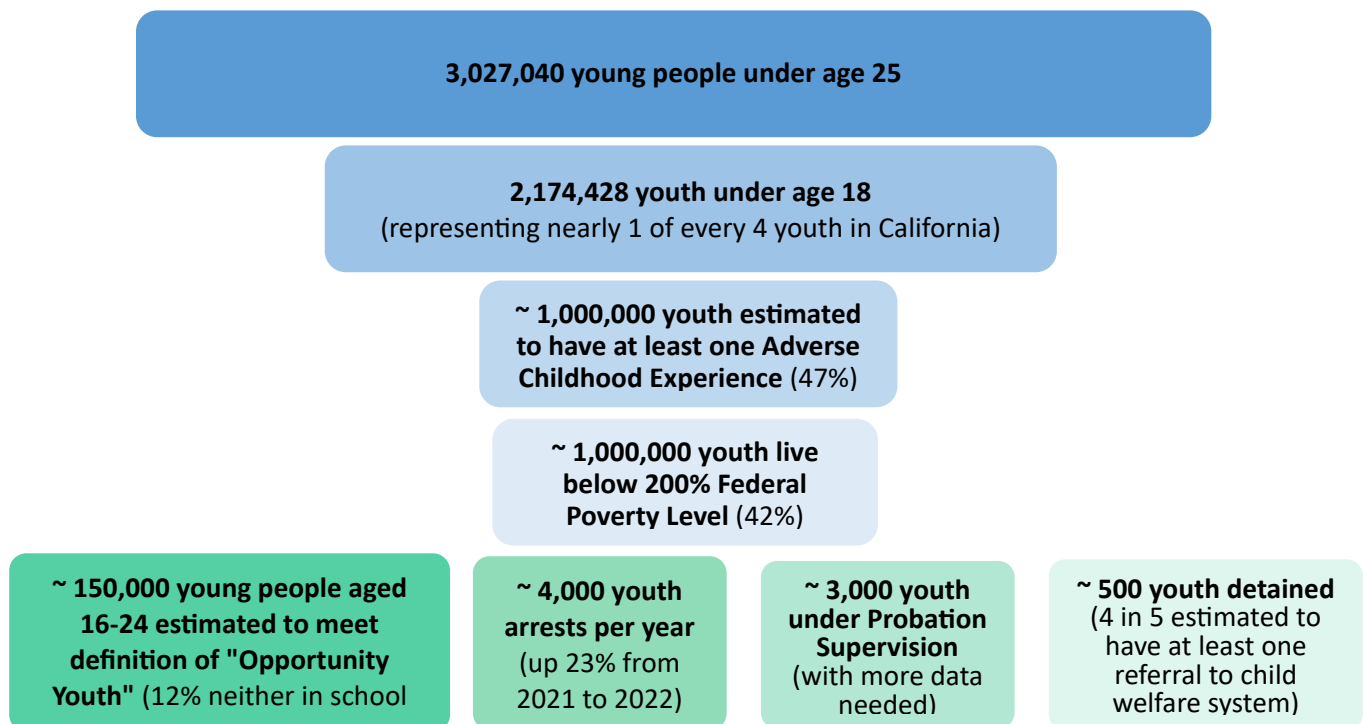
B. Snapshot of Los Angeles County's Young People

DYD applies an equity lens to prioritize youth development resources for young people who experience structural barriers to accessing youth development resources due to historic disinvestment and poverty, trauma, and systemic racism.

Applying an equity lens to data on young people in Los Angeles County helps us understand which populations of young people experience the highest structural barriers to accessing youth development opportunities. Although DYD's focus population generally includes all 3 million young people under the age of 25 in Los Angeles County, for example, we know that the nearly 1 million youth who live below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level are likely to have experienced the multi-generational impact of low access to youth development activities such as sports, art classes, or leadership development opportunities.

DYD does not assume we should operate alone in working to support these populations of young people who have intersecting experiences with other youth-serving systems in the County. Instead, DYD was created and is now uniquely positioned to work collaboratively to resolve gaps in availability of and access to the holistic continuum of youth development resources that all young people deserve.

Visualizing Data About Young People in Los Angeles County:



Why Include a Focus on Justice-Impacted Youth?

In Los Angeles County in particular, youth justice system involvement has an outsized impact on equity and wellbeing that follows young people throughout their lifetime and across generations, negatively impacting communities as a whole. Even a first-time arrest has serious negative impact on youth development and wellbeing, reducing health, educational, employment, and other outcomes. Recent longitudinal studies have shown that this impact is long-term and leads to reduced adult economic attainment, physical mental health, and even early mortality. Los Angeles County has historically been the largest incarcerator of youth in the U.S.

This type of negative impact therefore has a long history of disproportionate harm for Black, indigenous, and other youth of color in Los Angeles. Although Black youth represent only 7% of the total population of youth

under age 18, for example, they are approximately 40% of the population of youth impacted by the County’s youth justice system. The Children’s Data Network’s research on the intersection between the youth justice and child welfare systems shows that Black youth, and Black girls in particular, are also dramatically overrepresented in the population of “crossover youth” who are impacted by both the criminal legal system and the child welfare system.

As overall numbers of youth arrested and detained each year have decreased, this inequitable harm for Black, indigenous, and other youth of color has become even more severe. This unintended consequence of previous reform efforts highlights the need for a new and different solution that addresses the structural drivers and root causes of youth legal system involvement.

C. Keeping the Youth Justice Reimagined Vision Updated

In late 2019, the Board of Supervisors established a Youth Justice Work Group made up of a diverse group of young people, community members and advocates, and government partners charged with developing recommendations to address the negative and inequitable impact of youth justice system involvement. Citing extensive research and continuing harm, the Board requested a plan to transition youth justice functions from Probation to a new care-first system that would be meaningfully different in process and outcomes than the current system. In late 2020, the Board unanimously adopted the core vision and values of the Work Group’s report, titled “Youth Justice Reimagined” (YJR), but acknowledged that there were important budget, legal, and legislative analyses that would need to be completed to inform the Work Group’s phased recommendations.

The YJR vision includes a wide range of concepts to create an environment envisioned to allow Los Angeles County to safely and equitably transform its collective approach to youth justice system involvement. These concepts were intended to build on one another in phases over time and allow for flexibility as the landscape evolved. At its core, YJR is a vision about creating something new: building a transformative, care-first environment for the County’s young people that prioritizes structural investment in youth development as an effective and equitable solution to public safety.



The first of these recommendations was the July 2022 creation of a new Department of Youth Development (DYD) that would be responsible for overseeing long-term implementation of and updates to the YJR vision as the County continued to learn more about what was possible. Many of the individuals who contributed to the development of YJR continue to be close partners, have joined the DYD team, or are supporting the work as consultants to ensure continuity through the iterative process of bringing a complex vision to life.

DYD represents and manages a central investment in care-first youth development for Los Angeles County. The Department’s goal is therefore to create something new: a flourishing youth development ecosystem at a countywide scale. By focusing on prevention, healing-centered intervention, and reducing harm for young

people who are impacted by the justice system, we are working to address the root causes of justice system involvement for young people across the County.

Although most of the phased recommendations of YJR have moved forward with close alignment to what was envisioned in 2020, legal and legislative analysis later conducted by County Counsel revealed a legislative barrier to the recommended transition of functions from Probation to another agency by the initial estimate of 2025. Among other findings, this analysis found that functions under the jurisdiction of the Chief Probation Officer could not be transitioned without state legislative change pursuant to California Government Code Sections 27771 and 27773. While this analysis impacts the timing of the specific goal to transition functions, it does not prevent the County from moving the many other elements of YJR forward.

Summary of Progress Towards YJR Concepts Over Time:

YJR’s Major Categories of Phased Implementation	Status of YJR Phase 1: Anticipated 11/20 – 7/22	Status of YJR Phase 2: Anticipated 7/22 – 1/24	Notes on YJR Phase 3: Anticipated 1/24 – 7/25
Build Youth Development Infrastructure	DYD successfully launched in July 2022 ✓	Initial investments in Youth Development Networks complete as of mid-2024 ✓	Focus on expanding sustainable prevention infrastructure
Create Spaces for Shared Learning	Ongoing ✓	Ongoing ✓	Establish process for shared countywide priorities
Expand Diversion and Restorative Practices	Expansion took longer than anticipated but is now complete ✓	DYD continues to identify opportunities to increase equitable access ✓	Focus on increasing capacity for restorative practices to repair harm
Enhance Reentry and Support for System-Involved Youth *	Collaborative planning began as planned ✓	Initial investments in reentry continuum complete as of mid-2024 ✓	Focus on Safe Healing Centers and other alternatives to incarceration
Formalize Collaboration, Planning, & Oversight	Ongoing ✓	Ongoing ✓	Focus on sustainable countywide engagement

** Legislative analysis shifted the timeline of recommendations in this category related to transitioning functions under the jurisdiction of the Chief of Probation to another agency but did not impact other recommendations around establishing alternatives, increasing supportive services, and reducing the footprint of youth justice system involvement through prevention and decarceration.*

D. Key Elements of DYD’s Strategic Plan: Five Strategic Directions Over Time

DYD’s approach to strategic planning is inspired by a [futurist model](#) that reflects a combination of both shorter-term steps and strategies as well as longer-term visioning that guides evolution over time. DYD’s futurist Strategic Plan strives to plan for the kind of sustainable, structural innovation required to solve complex social problems. This enables planning towards long-term vision and impact while also accounting for the fact that shorter-term tactics and strategies necessarily involve more data, evidence, and certainty than long-term vision and systems-level evolution.

DYD’s Guiding North Stars:



DYD's Strategic Directions:



Summary of DYD's Strategic Directions Over Time:

Strategic Directions:	1-2 Years: Short-Term Tactics, 2025-2026	3-5 Years: Mid-Term Strategies, 2027-2029	>5 Years: Long-Term Vision, 2030+
1. Los Angeles County Becomes a Model for Equity-Centered Administration and Coordination of Youth Development Services.	Build administrative infrastructure and collaboration for equity, efficiency, and growth.	Refine systems, policies, and processes that support improved service delivery and expanded workforce.	DYD serves as a model for best practices in equity-centered governance.
2. Los Angeles County Achieves Shared Understanding and Policy Support for Effective Youth Development Practices.	Expand learning and narrative strategy to uplift importance of youth development.	Increase knowledge and support to improve youth development practices and policies across disciplines.	DYD resolves social and structural barriers to allow for sustainable positive impact.
3. All Young People Can Access a Local Youth Development Network for Resources They Need and Want.	Build strong pathways to youth development to fill existing gaps in access.	Expand youth development networks, including integrated services and navigation countywide.	All young people have access to a thriving youth development continuum.
4. All Young People Can Access Restorative Alternatives to Expulsion, Arrest, and Court.	Expand alternatives to expulsion and arrest, including restorative practices countywide.	Increase referrals so most legally eligible youth arrests are diverted and work to expand eligibility.	All young people have access to diversion and restorative practices that address root causes.
5. Community Wellbeing and Safety are Improved by Strategies that Reduce and Eliminate Youth Incarceration.	Expand strategies that reduce harm for justice-involved youth and build alternatives to incarceration.	Expand successful alternatives to youth incarceration countywide.	All young people have access to the community-based support they need to avoid incarceration.

Section 2: The Detailed Strategic Plan: Tactics, Strategies, and Vision for Youth Development in Los Angeles County Through 2030 & Beyond

[finalized through feedback]

Section 3: Assessment of What Comes Next

A. Strengths, Ways to Improve, Opportunities, Threats, and Priorities for Inclusion and Equity

This SWOT(IE) analysis, which adds an inclusion and equity lens, will be more fully explored in the final Strategic Plan but is included to provide an example of barriers and opportunities most likely to impact the success of DYD’s goals.

Strengths	Ways to Grow	Opportunities	Threats	Inclusion and Equity Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core values are aligned with evidence of promising practices and help the Department build meaningful trust with youth and partners DYD’s team and partnerships are strong and growing Quantitative and qualitative program results show that the Department’s youth development models are effective, equitable, replicable and cost saving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build sufficient administrative infrastructure along with limited overall staff capacity delays implementation Need for strategic education and training for staff and partners to deepen knowledge of best practices and equity Statutory barriers, including accessing multi-disciplinary team information Partner buy-in to lead efforts to support justice-involved youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen pathways for youth engagement, employment, and leadership Strengthen partnerships with allies at community, City, County, State, and National levels Advance narrative strategy and shared learning Continue to equitably shrink the footprint of youth justice system involvement Advance sustainable investment in communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of sufficient administrative infrastructure and limited staff capacity Lack of sustainable funding Lack of clarity and awareness of DYD’s role, vision, and added value Lack of connection to and acceptance by existing agencies and initiatives Shift in political will away from evidence-informed alternatives to youth justice system involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen structures and processes for youth and community participation and meaningful co-design Continue to improve and prioritize equity and inclusion based on regular and transparent data Continue to focus on structural and systemic equity

B. Next Steps

- A. Bring on a research consultant to refine an evidence-informed definition of “youth” for Los Angeles County, including a framework to identify priority populations for equity, that will be included here.
- B. Engage stakeholders, including youth and partners, through surveys and listening sessions to refine tactics, strategies, and long-term goals. Stakeholder engagement may include the following groups:
 - DYD Steering Committee
 - Surveys and Listening Sessions
 - Youth Commission Working Group
- C. This strategic plan is a living document. DYD will remain connected with the strategic plan and provide updates as needed by implementing the following feedback loop:
 1. Quarterly strategy check-in meetings between DYD’s Leadership Team and Branch Management,
 2. Strategic Plan activities integrated in DYD’s annual retreat for all staff,
 3. Opportunity for community and stakeholder connection at an annual DYD Steering Committee.