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# Implementation Study Findings: Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board Program

Jill Y. Richter, PhD; Jasmine Olivier-McGregor, PhD; Derrick Franke, MA; Vivie Satorsky, JD/LMSW; Candace Hester, PhD; Melissa Yisak, MA; and Mahrusah Zahin, MPA

## Executive Summary

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform’s (NICJR) Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB) presents a culturally and developmentally responsive point-of-arrest restorative diversion program that seeks to reimagine the partnership between the justice system—including police—and the communities in Oakland, California. NOAB diverts young people at the point of arrest and offers them the opportunity to participate in community-based and strengths-based diversion services.

With funding from the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) Equity Initiative, AIR is partnering with NICJR to conduct a formative mixed methods, 4-year evaluation of NOAB’s program implementation and outcomes and a quasi-experimental study of program impacts. In Year 2 of the study, AIR examined the following research questions for the implementation study of the NOAB program:

1. How are NOAB’s core components implemented?
2. How do young people, family members, police, and community members perceive the impact of NOAB?

AIR conducted interviews with 26 NOAB staff and partners (i.e., board members, police partners, and community-based providers) in 2023 and 2024, and 15 young people and family members in 2023. We also conducted three observations of NOAB conferences and two pre/post board conference interviews in 2023 and 2024. This brief includes preliminary findings from Years 1 and 2 of the implementation study.

## Key Takeaways

### Referrals

- The current referral process varies in its alignment with the intended process.
- NOAB staff and police partners thought the referral process was going well.

### Intake/Assessment and Initial Meeting

- The intake/assessment and initial meeting typically aligns with the intended process.
- Most NOAB staff, young people, and family members reported satisfaction with the intake/assessment and initial meeting.

## Board Conference

- The NOAB board conference typically aligns with the intended process.
- Board members and family members generally felt prepared to participate in the board conference.
- Most of the young people who participated in an interview reported they did not have a conference or did not remember having one.
- Board members and family members believed the board conference was helpful for young people and families.
- Some board members shared that they are interested in following up with young people after the conference.

## The Individualized Achievement Plan (IAP)

- The current IAP development process typically aligns with the intended process.
- NOAB staff shared that they believe the IAP development process is working well.
- Young people and family members were highly satisfied with the IAP.

## Ongoing Coaching

- The current coaching process typically aligns with the intended process.
- NOAB staff reported several benefits to NOAB life coaching, including empowering young people to believe that they are capable of making the right decisions and advocating for themselves.
- While NOAB staff had mostly positive perceptions of NOAB life coaching, they reported some challenges in getting some young people and their families to buy into the program.
- Most young people and family members found NOAB coaching to be helpful.
- Young people and family members had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of and relationships with NOAB staff.
- Young people and family members reported some areas where NOAB coaching could be improved.

## Community-Based Program Participation

- Community-based programming typically aligns with the intended process.
- Community-based providers generally reported positive experiences engaging with NOAB staff and young people.
- Community-based providers also reported several perceived benefits of the NOAB program for young people and their families.
- Community-based providers shared both successes and challenges with the implementation of their programming.

- Most young people and family members reported satisfaction with their participation in community-based programming.

### **NOAB Program Graduation**

- The current graduation process is not always aligned with the intended process.
- Most young people and family members reported that they understood the NOAB graduation requirements and felt supported by NOAB staff in meeting those requirements.

### **Overall Perceptions of NOAB**

- NOAB staff, board members, police partners, community providers, young people, and family members shared several successful elements of NOAB:
  - NOAB staff developed supportive, reliable relationships with young people and their families.
  - NOAB staff provided supports for young people and families that addressed their multifaceted needs.
  - NOAB staff and board members believe NOAB helped to improve outcomes for young people and their families.
- Young people and family members described a few challenges they encountered during their participation with the NOAB program, such as wanting to talk with their NOAB life coach more often and struggling with the time commitment required of the program.

### **Overall Perceptions of Community Safety, Juvenile Justice, and Policing**

- NOAB staff, board members, community-based providers, and family members agreed that NOAB helps make the community safer.
- NOAB staff, board members, community-based providers, police partners, young people, and families were mixed on whether they believed NOAB changed their feelings about the juvenile justice system and policing.

### **Recommendations**

- Enhance NOAB program awareness among justice officials, young people, and families.
- Increase alignment of board conferences with evidence-based practices.
- Hire and train NOAB staff to provide additional supports to young people and their families.
- Continue to build out the case management database.

# Introduction

Concentrated crime and violence pose an inequitable burden of risk for young people within low-income communities of color. Traditional justice system responses exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities for youth along all system contact points (Strang & Braithwaite, 2017; Travis & Visher, 2005; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). For example, in 2019, Black youth were twice as likely to be arrested and six times as likely to be detained than White peers, nine times more likely to be arrested and 17 times more likely to be detained than Asian peers, and three times more likely to be detained than Hispanic peers (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019).<sup>1</sup> Identifying and scaling up interventions that reduce justice system involvement can reduce these inequities.

Restorative diversion practices provide young people with an ecosystem of developmentally appropriate and culturally affirming supports as an alternative to traditional justice system practices (Cantor & Osher, 2021; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Jagers et al., 2019). While most juvenile justice interventions focus on punishing or treating offenders, restorative practices strive to repair harm by involving the wider community to provide support for the young person and hold them accountable for their behavior (Development Services Group, 2021). Evidence suggests that community-based restorative diversion practices offer promising approaches to redirecting youth misbehavior by centering youth development and promotive relationships (Cauffman et al., 2018; Dahlberg & Krug, 2006; Scott & Steinberg, 2010; Wilson & Hoge, 2013; Zimring & Tanenhaus, 2014). In doing so, community-based restorative diversion practices can lower victimization and assault injuries (Heinze et al., 2016; Wilson & Hoge, 2013). While this research shows promise, it also suggests that many restorative programs show disproportionately positive impacts for White youth (Wilson & Hoge, 2013; Wilson et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2016). The research also suggests that many restorative programs have limited guidance on how to sustainably employ culturally relevant, community-centered approaches (Janzer, 2022).

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform’s (NICJR) Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB) presents a culturally and developmentally responsive point-of-arrest restorative diversion program that seeks to re-imagine the partnership between the justice system—including police—and the communities in Oakland, California. NOAB diverts young people at the point of arrest and offers them the opportunity to participate in community-based and strengths-based diversion services.

As part of our endeavor to create a culturally responsive and contextually relevant evaluation, we created a community advisory board, made up of people with lived experiences within the justice systems in Oakland to help guide our work in the community. We define a community advisory board as a group of community members with relevant life experience and/or whose lives have been—or will be—directly affected by a study, initiative, program, or focal system who may act as co-conspirators, advisors, thought partners, and champions.

With funding from the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) Equity Initiative, AIR is partnering with NICJR to conduct a formative mixed methods, 4-year evaluation of NOAB’s program implementation and

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<sup>1</sup> Arrest rates for Hispanic youth were missing.

outcomes and a quasi-experimental study of program impacts. This brief includes preliminary findings from Year 2 of the implementation study. In this brief, we describe the following:

- Background on developmental and restorative approaches;
- A description of the NOAB program components;
- An overview of our evaluation methods;
- Preliminary findings on NOAB program implementation and the perceptions of NOAB staff, partners, young people, and family members;
- Limitations of our preliminary findings; and
- Recommendations for NOAB.

Taken together, the findings in this brief indicate promise for NOAB’s capacity to infuse foundational principles of youth development and restorative practices into the experiences of young people who come into contact with justice officials. Based on the results of this study, we recommend four strategies to strengthen program implementation:

1. Enhance NOAB program awareness among justice officials, young people, and families.
2. Increase alignment of board conferences with evidence-based practices.
3. Hire and train NOAB staff to provide additional supports to young people and their families.
4. Continue to build out the case management database.

## Background on Developmental and Restorative Approaches

Adolescence is a developmentally rich period for young people ages 10–25 that should be full of opportunities and experiences for young people to learn and grow (NASEM, 2019). During adolescence, young people explore their environments and take risks; develop their identity and values; develop interests, passions, and goals; deepen relationships; and build cognitive, social, and emotional skills for adulthood (NASEM, 2019; UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent, 2023). Essentially, adolescence is a time of promise, where young people forge a sense of who they are and who they aspire to be (UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent, 2023). Recent research has called for programs, policies, and systems that align with the science of adolescent development by providing optimal, developmentally appropriate, and equitable opportunities for young people to learn and grow (NASEM, 2019; UCLA Center for the Development Adolescent, 2023).

However, the U.S. justice system traditionally has employed punitive policies and practices that fail to consider the developmental context of young people (Cavanagh, 2022). Evidence suggests that punitive

strategies—such as the adultification of youth in the justice system<sup>2</sup> and out-of-home placements<sup>3</sup>—can have deleterious effects on young people’s psychosocial and socio-emotional development (Cauffman & Steinberg, 2012), mental health (Fagan, 2008), and educational outcomes (Schwartz, 2001). Punitive strategies not only increase young people’s likelihood of recidivism (Bishop et al., 1996; Fagan, 2008; Redding, 2008) and victimization (Austin et al., 2000; Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 1997) but also may have adverse effects on their transition into adulthood (Steinberg, 2009).

For decades, scholars have called for approaches to justice that promote positive youth development and respond to wrongdoing in a culturally responsive manner (e.g., Zehr, 1990). NOAB’s model responds to this call in key ways.

Additionally, public officials in the justice system (e.g., police, prosecutors, and probation officers) have a broad range of discretion in deciding the extent of a young person’s contact with the justice system across its touchpoints including arrest, referral, intake, detention, transfer, adjudication, and disposition (Steinberg, 2009). However, the options available at each decision point become more limited the deeper a young person moves into the system. For example, (in many jurisdictions) a district attorney may have the power to choose to accept, divert, or dismiss a case. Depending on jurisdiction and state statute, however, they may or may not have discretion over who gets transferred to adult court. The research indicates that to lessen the harms of traditional justice system responses and to support youth in their pathways to thriving, public officials in the justice system must consider youth developmental context throughout the decision-making process (Schwartz, 2001).

NOAB was conceived as a *restorative* alternative to the traditional juvenile justice process. As a philosophy, restorative approaches empower the communities most affected by crime to resolve conflict themselves instead of relying on disconnected systems. In practice, this is achieved through restorative *models* like community conferencing—facilitated dialogues between the young person who caused harm, their supporters, and those who were directly or indirectly affected by the offense. Though various models of restorative justice dialogues exist, they share several procedural elements in common (Wilson et al., 2017):

- **Informal/Non-adversarial Nature.** For an intervention to be restorative, it should not be tied to formal juvenile legal system processes.
- **Emphasis on Community Involvement.** According to restorative principles, those who have been most affected by the incident (e.g., the young person, their families, the victim, and affected community members) are better able than juvenile justice practitioners to elicit accountability and provide support.
- **Decision Making by Consensus.** Unlike traditional justice models wherein practitioners alone decide punishments, restorative models empower a wider network of partners to collectively determine what needs to happen to repair harm and meet the needs of those affected.

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<sup>2</sup> *Adultification* refers to the transfer of juvenile justice youth to adult court through judicial waivers and/or youth incarceration in adult institutions (Merlo & Benekos, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Out-of-home placements might include punitive programs, such as boot camps and maximum security juvenile detention centers (Steinberg, 2009).

As such, a trained restorative justice facilitator serves not as a mediator, playing a direct role in determining outcomes, but as a neutral third party guiding participants toward their own resolution. In addition to repairing harm, these dialogues are designed to build empathy, strengthen relationships, uncover the root causes of harmful behavior, and identify the supports a young person needs to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Commonly, restorative justice dialogues focus on *past* (what happened and how people were affected), *present* (how people feel now), and *future* (what needs to happen moving forward) (Wachtel et al., 2012). In addition, board conferences are by nature culturally responsive because they remove the conflict from traditional justice settings and give it back to the community for resolution. Approaches originating *from* and requested *by* community members themselves better attend to the needs of the community and those involved in the conflict.

## Intended NOAB Program Model

NICJR began implementation of the NOAB program in 2020. Rooted in restorative principles, NOAB recognizes that our response to individual wrongdoing should not only address the immediate act but also contribute to the young person’s overall development, well-being, and growth. NOAB also recognizes that traditional punitive approaches often stunt a young person’s development through separation, isolation, and stigmatization. Therefore, NOAB implements strengths-based restorative approaches that build youth development through inclusion, community, and reintegration.

From the initial referral to graduation, NOAB incorporates many core elements of restorative processes (noted in the program components listed in Exhibit 1). Based on the data we have collected, these program components do not necessarily follow a sequential order, and not all young people participate in each step. NOAB adapts the process as necessary to leverage the assets and address the specific needs of young people and their family participants.

- **Referral.** Police officers use criteria to determine whether the young person who was arrested should be referred to NOAB. As designed, referral at the point of arrest shifts responsibility away from the juvenile legal system toward a more restorative, informal process.
- **Intake/Assessment and Initial Meeting.** NOAB staff meet with the young person and their family member to assess the young person’s (and their family’s) risk and needs. Instead of asking, *What punishment does the young person deserve?* (punitive), NOAB asks, *What **needs** do the young person and their community have?* (restorative).
- **NOAB Conference.** The young person, family member, NOAB staff, and board members from the community meet to discuss the offense, its impact, and what the young person needs to move forward. Conferences emphasize personal accountability and community support—two pillars of restorative approaches—and strengthening relationships between the young person and their family.

- **Individualized Achievement Plan (IAP).** NOAB staff work with the young person and family member to develop a plan that helps the young person set goals. NOAB staff also refer the young person to community-based programming.
- **Ongoing Coaching.** The young person receives ongoing support from a NOAB staff member, including life coaching and mentorship.
- **Community-Based Programming.** The young person participates in programming as outlined in their IAP (e.g., mentoring, education and work-based pathway opportunities, supports based on individual needs).
- **Graduation.** The young person completes NOAB program requirements within 6–9 months and exits the program. Graduation reflects the reintegration ceremony, a concluding ritual common to many restorative approaches.

### Exhibit 1. NOAB Program Components



Referral



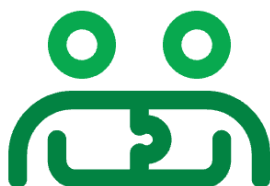
Intake Assessment and Initial Conference



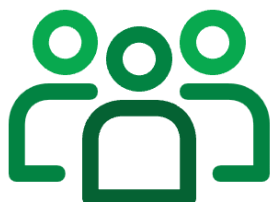
NOAB Conference



Individualized Achievement Plan



Ongoing Coaching



Community-Based Program Participation



Graduation

## Our Methods

AIR partnered with NICJR and NOAB to examine the following research questions for the implementation study of the NOAB program:

1. How are NOAB's core components implemented?
2. How do young people, family members, police, and community members perceive the impact of NOAB?



**NOAB Staff and Partner Interviews.** AIR conducted interviews with NOAB staff, board members, community partners, and police partners about their experiences with and perceptions of the NOAB program. We conducted 12 interviews in 2023 and another 14 interviews in 2024, for a total of 26 interviews between March 2023 and April 2024. Exhibit 2 provides an overview of the number of interview participants by respondent group and year.

**Exhibit 2. Interview Participants**

Respondent group	2023	2024	Total
Board Members	4	5	9
Community Partners	6	3	9
Police Partners	1	3	4
NOAB Staff	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>

**Interviews With Young People and Family Members.** In partnership with NOAB staff, AIR identified young people who were current or previous participants and family members of current or previous participants (i.e., parents, caregivers) to share their experiences with and perceptions of the Oakland NOAB program. Eight young people and seven family members participated in interviews between June and September 2023. Exhibit 3 indicates when interview participants were enrolled in the NOAB program, ranging from 2020 to present day. The majority of young people (n = 5) and family members (n = 6) who participated in interviews were former participants.

**Exhibit 3. Interview Participants’ Program Completion Year**

Program completion year	Young people	Family members
2020	2	3
2021	1	1
2022	1	1
2023	1	1
Ongoing	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

**Conference Observations and Post-Conference Interviews.** AIR team members observed three young people’s conferences (one in 2023 and two in 2024) and conducted post-conference interviews with two young people (one in 2023 and one in 2024). AIR created the observation tool by conducting a scan of literature that examined community conferences and restorative processes. From the results of our

literature scan, we compiled common themes and indicators that occurred in restorative practice conferences across various sources (e.g., Bazemore & Umbriet, 1997; Bohmert et al., 2016; Hipple et al., 2015; McCold & Wachtel 2003; Restorative Justice Exchange, 2022). We sought input from certified restorative justice practitioners to draft a list of qualitative probes, which we paired with the indicators from the literature to create our observation protocol.

## What We Learned

In this section, we highlight what we learned about each of the NOAB program components from our interviews with NOAB staff, board members, community partners, young people, and family members, as well as the NOAB conferences we observed. We also summarize young people's and family members' perceptions of the NOAB program, community safety, and the juvenile justice system.

### Referrals to NOAB

#### Key Takeaways

NOAB staff, police partners, youth, and family members shared their perceptions on and experiences with the NOAB referral process. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- The current referral process varies in its alignment with the intended process.
- NOAB staff and police partners thought the referral process was going well.

**The current referral process varies in its alignment with the intended process.** NOAB staff shared that the referral process is designed so that the Oakland Police Department (OPD) may divert young people to NOAB who are arrested for nonviolent felonies at the point of arrest. Instead of entering the court system, young people have the option to participate in NOAB. However, NOAB staff and police partners shared that point-of-arrest diversion of young people is not always possible, police partners do not always follow the eligibility criteria, and some young people and families do not understand that participation is a choice.

**NOAB staff and police partners shared that point-of-arrest diversion of young people is not always possible.** NOAB staff and police partners shared two reasons for why this is the case. First, the patrol officers who arrest young people are not responsible for making referrals to NOAB. Since patrol officers are not ultimately the ones reviewing criteria and making decisions about referrals to NOAB, they also have limited awareness and/or understanding of the NOAB program.

Interviews with young people and family members corroborated this finding. They shared that they first heard about NOAB *after* they had already attended court. NOAB staff, rather than police, called young people and told them about the program. Most young people and family members did not mention NOAB by name but referred to the specific NOAB staff member they heard from. Fewer young people learned about NOAB from a police officer, probation officer, attorney, or someone else they interacted with at court.

Second, police partners shared that OPD’s internal process does not provide adequate time or staffing to ensure young people can be identified as eligible for NOAB. Typically, it is one staff person’s job to review the list of arrests and determine whether any youth are eligible for NOAB. Once paperwork is filed, the case often moves to another staff member or department, making it difficult for one police officer to follow a particular case. As a result, the young person may already be on probation or have met with an attorney or public defender when referred to NOAB. One police partner shared,

*“Officers in the field, patrol officers, they’re not asking them, ‘Hey, this is another option. Instead of going to Juvenile Hall, would you like to participate in this program?’... I don’t believe [the] majority of patrol are familiar with the diversion program. And to be honest, I don’t even know if they necessarily believe in it. I mean, police officers are typically, I mean, ‘Commit crimes, you go to jail’ kind of mindset. Not necessarily to divert them out a jail and try to seek some type of help for them so they don’t go back.”*

– Police partner

*“The paperwork just comes in slow... Sometimes the paperwork is already submitted to the DAs for charging, so when we try to refer someone, they’re like, ‘Oh, this case is already submitted for charging.’ So that’s been a bump in the road that we’re dealing with and trying to figure out.”*

**NOAB staff and police partners also acknowledge bandwidth issues as a challenge for effectively following the process for referrals.** NOAB staff noted that, generally, police officers follow the appropriate process for referrals, but staff turnover in OPD creates opportunities for inconsistencies in application of the criteria. Police officers shared that they believe they can refer youth who commit non-violent crimes, typically a first or second misdemeanor or felony where there is an identifiable victim. They shared that the criteria were easy to follow but also indicated that they generally refer youth to NOAB and allow NOAB to make the determination of whether the youth meet the criteria to participate. Police partners also shared that they would like to increase referrals to NOAB but are not sure about the capacity of NOAB to serve all potentially eligible young people. One police partner shared, “Theoretically, if we were just to do full open taps of every juvenile that’s offended, we could be doing five referrals a week for every week.”

**Young people and family members reported mixed feelings on whether they felt they had the choice to participate in NOAB.** Some young people and family members said that because alternatives to the justice system are so limited, they did not feel they had a real choice to participate in NOAB if they did not want to enter the juvenile justice system. One young person said,

*“I don’t think there was actually an option. I think that was my only option to do that, to do the program. Yeah. But they did tell me before, I think, that finishing the program would take the charge off of my record if I completed the whole program.”*

Similarly, a family member said, “That wasn’t really explained to me that [NOAB] was an option... I just couldn’t see myself just saying I wouldn’t take the program and I would like her to go to the system with everything.”

For those who understood participation to be their choice, they saw the opportunity as a second chance. One young person shared,

*“I felt like if I didn’t decide to do the program, I felt like I would put myself [at] a bigger risk and ending up deeper into the system or just having a bad record in general.”*

**Overall, NOAB staff and police partners reported that they thought the referral process was going well.**

NOAB staff cited that they continue to receive referrals from OPD. Police partners felt the same since they noted they do not receive many follow-up questions from NOAB. Additionally, police partners described a positive relationship with NOAB staff, citing them as easy to work with and responsive.

*“They’re [NOAB staff] very professional, very friendly, very, very dedicated to their work. So it’s been an extremely positive experience. We’re also able to be very candid with our experiences and their experiences, and I’d say it’s a rather good relationship.”*

– Police partner

## **Intake/Assessment and Initial Meeting**

### **Key Takeaways**

NOAB staff, young people, and families shared their perceptions of and experiences with the intake/assessment and initial meeting. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- The intake/assessment and initial meeting typically aligns with the intended process.
- Most NOAB staff, young people, and family members reported satisfaction with the intake/assessment and initial meeting.

**The current intake/assessment and initial meeting typically align with the intended process.** NOAB staff shared that they first meet with young people and family members in their home to conduct an intake assessment, where NOAB staff:

- Describe the program, including the program’s benefits and services NOAB offers, and the requirements for completing the program;
- Discuss the young person’s and family members’ feelings about the incident that led to their referral to NOAB;
- Ask the young person and family members to share what their goals and priorities are for their participation in NOAB;
- Assess the young person’s and family members’ needs (e.g., education, employment, mental health counseling, life coaching/mentoring, and financial and government assistance); and
- Ask a series of questions to develop an IAP tailored to the short and long-term goals, priorities, and needs of the young person and their family members.

NOAB staff shared that the initial meeting typically takes about 75 minutes, and afterwards, the young person receives a \$50 stipend for their time.

**Most NOAB staff, young people, and family members reported satisfaction with intake/assessment and initial meeting.** NOAB staff shared that the intake/assessment and initial meetings typically go well because they approach the intake meeting with high sensitivity and make it clear that they are not representatives of the police, probation, or other touchpoints within the Oakland criminal legal system.

*“It works pretty well. Once you get a feel for the client and what they’re going through, it is a lot of trauma. You got to figure out what the trauma is, and then you got to triage the trauma. So in that intake evaluation, that’s what you’re doing. You’re getting an assessment on exactly how much damage is done, and if you can fix the damage, or at least stop some of the bleeding.”*

– NOAB staff

Young people and family members felt very positive about their initial interactions with NOAB staff. They reported that the NOAB staff they connected with explained clearly what the program entails, the NOAB staff member’s role in the program, and how NOAB staff would support them.

Young people and family members noted that their initial meeting with NOAB staff made them feel “excited,” “comfortable,” and “understood.” They described the NOAB program as “different than other programs” because the focus is primarily on providing young people with supports and services tailored to their goals and priorities. For instance, one young person reported that NOAB staff “wanted to know how [they] could help me [and] what [they] could recommend for me to help me with my school and work, or whatever could help my family.” Young people and family members described NOAB staff as “respectful,” “down to earth,” “awesome,” and “cool.” For some young people, this initial meeting represented a second chance and a preferred alternative to being in the criminal legal system. Several young people reported satisfaction with learning that the program centers on the needs of young people. According to one young person, in describing the NOAB program, a staff member explained, “I work with you. I don’t work with your family members. I don’t work with the court. I’m just for you.”

*“I thought that [the initial meeting] was good because it wasn’t something for the court. It wasn’t something for my parents. It was something for me, which felt good.”*

– Young person

## NOAB Conference

### Key Takeaways

NOAB staff, board members, young people, and family members shared their perceptions of and experiences with NOAB board conferences. Key takeaways from interviews and observations include the following:

- Board members and family members generally felt prepared to participate in the board conference.
- Most of the young people who participated in an interview reported they did not have a conference or did not remember having one.
- The NOAB board conference typically aligns with the intended process.
- Board members and family members believed the board conference was helpful for young people and families.
- Some board members shared that they are interested in following up with young people after the conference.

#### **Board members and family members generally felt prepared to participate in the board conference.**

Before the board conference, the conference facilitator (a NOAB staff member) begins by preparing the young person and their family for what to expect during the conference. The facilitator also prepares board members, sharing information from the police report and the IAP in advance.

**Board members reported that they felt adequately prepared for the conference.** Board members shared that they received information from NOAB prior to the meeting—such as how or why the young person was referred to NOAB, details about NOAB’s interaction with the young person and their family so far, and proposed supports and services. Board members then joined the board conference meeting early, where they received additional information about the young person, such as insight on family dynamics. They were also able to ask the NOAB conference facilitator any questions they had.

**Family members also felt prepared for the conference.** Family members shared that they met with NOAB staff ahead of time to learn more about who would be present at the board meeting and what would be discussed. For example, one family member shared, “We talked about [it], so I kind of expected for whatever came up to talk about, and just try to support [child] and keeping her going on a good path that she’s going.”

**Most of the young people who participated in an interview reported they did not have a conference or did not remember having one.** This may be because most young people were former program participants and may have had trouble with recall as a result. One of the young people who did recall their conference shared, “I’m pretty sure I was a little nervous at first, just because I didn’t know the other people in the meeting. But once I sat down and talked to them, I was comfortable.”

**The NOAB board conference typically aligns with the intended process.** In our observations, the board conference began with introductions. Then the facilitator described the purpose of the conference and reminded participants of the confidential nature of the conference. The facilitator began by asking the

young person to describe the incident that led to the referral and what led up to the incident. Usually, the facilitator also asked the young person to talk about how they thought their family was affected by their decisions. Then the board members were invited to share their perspectives and ask questions, offering support and holding the young person accountable for their actions.

***The conference facilitator created a safe space for everyone to share.*** Board members spoke highly of NOAB staff members' facilitation skills and their ability to build rapport with youth and families. They also highlighted the safe space they collectively create for youth and families as an element of the board conference that works particularly well. NOAB staff who facilitated board meetings also stressed the importance of creating a safe space for the young person. They described contributing to this by sharing their own experiences and monitoring the young person's body language. One NOAB staff explained, "I think the reason why ... it goes well is, one, it's not court. I tried to set the environment and set up the space so ... it does not feel like that. It feels like a safer space. Even physically, we're situated in a circle opposed to adults standing on one side of the room and the young person on the other."

Reinforcing the interview findings, in all three board conference observations, the facilitator worked to create a safe and respectful conference environment by reminding participants in the beginning that the conversation was not meant to judge the young person and that everything said in the conference was confidential and would not be shared, for instance, with the police department or probation. Using our observation protocol, we documented high levels of indicators of respect from the board members, such as deep listening, non-judgmental language, empathy, and, in particular, separating the *deed* from the *doer*. After hearing a young person describe a particularly troubling period in their life, a board member empathized, "We all have periods of darkness, I think the beautiful thing is when you come out on the other side there's opportunity for fresh air and joy. We're not who we are without the darkness." Often, shows of respect like this seemed to help the young person open up and become more comfortable.

***Young people, family members, and board members all had a chance to contribute during their conference.***

In the conferences we observed, young people described the incident that led to their referral to NOAB. Family members shared how they felt about the incident. Board members provided input that showed support to young people while holding them accountable. For example, one board member stated, "You're here because of your decisions. You're here to be accountable. The A in NOAB is accountability. Wisdom is understanding that the mistakes we make is an opportunity."

*"I think it [board conference] helps parents relax a little bit more, because there's support, because sometimes as a parent, you feel like you're the only one who's dealing with the problem... And so having that support from the NOAB staff and board members, I feel it just offers a lot to the family and the parents."*

– Board member

In one conference, the young person explained that they spent most of their time at home taking care of their younger siblings and had not been exposed to positive hobbies. After explaining that they loved being in nature and always wanted to learn how to garden, a board member invited the young person to visit a farm that they owned and offered to help them enroll in a gardening apprenticeship program.

**Board members and family members believed the board conference was helpful for young people and families.** Many board members are from similar communities or backgrounds or have similar experiences to the youth and families and believe this is essential to their role and relationships in the conference. For example, one board member shared, “My role is also [to] provide an inspiration. I know things may look dark for you right now, but I’m someone who survived ... they see someone who has been in their current experience right now, their current situation, when they’re able to meet someone who also been there and can demonstrate that you can get beyond that.”

Family members shared the most helpful part of the conference was learning more about the supports NOAB could provide for both the young person and their family. They also shared that they were grateful their child was referred to NOAB and appreciative that the gravity of the incident was discussed in board conferences. One family member shared, “When [my child] got referred I was glad. I asked (facilitator) to reassure my daughter that she still needs to follow the rules and understand the seriousness of this. I’m thankful for the program. I didn’t want her going through the system.”

“At that moment, I felt better. Feeling like maybe we have a chance to actually get a little bit of help at the time.”

– Family member

**Some board members shared that they are interested in following up with young people after the conference.** For example, one board member mentioned that meeting more frequently with the young person might help to counteract negative influences in the young person’s life. Another board member shared, “If there’s anything that I can actually get more involved with that youth instead of just a referral or information ... I like to come to let the kid know he has people that supports him.” Two board members mentioned wanting to know what happens to young people after the conference, including short-term outcomes like program completion and longer term outcomes (e.g., recidivism).

## The IAP

### Key Takeaways

NOAB staff, board members, young people, and their family members shared their perceptions of and experiences with the development of the IAP. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- The current IAP development process typically aligns with the intended process.
- NOAB staff shared that they believe the IAP development process is working well.
- Young people and family members were highly satisfied with the IAP.

**The current IAP development process typically aligns with the intended process.** NOAB staff shared that they work with young people and their family members to develop an IAP to help them achieve their expressed goals and priorities. As part of the IAP, NOAB staff identify services, supports, and opportunities to meet the needs of young people and family members.

NOAB staff, young people, and families shared that they are all involved in developing the IAP. A NOAB staff member emphasized that young people have agency in the IAP development process and that the IAP can be updated if the young person’s goals and priorities change over time. Young people and family members



typically hold separate conversations with NOAB staff regarding the IAP. Several family members mentioned that their role in the conversations was to fill in gaps in information so NOAB staff have fuller context when finalizing the IAP with the young person.

**NOAB staff shared that they believe the IAP development process is working well.** One success they cited was that the IAP focuses on attainable goals and gives structured activities for the young person to reach those goals reasonably. One NOAB staff explained:

*“You give the young person a list of activities and you try to figure out what they’re capable of doing. You don’t want to give them too much so that they feel discouraged, but you set some guidelines: accountability guidelines, grade standards, attendance standards, behavioral standards - things of that nature...You try to give them those references and just hold them accountable to their chosen activities so that they can be productive citizens.”*

Some NOAB staff believe that family member involvement in the IAP process is essential to young people reaching their intended goals. NOAB staff further reported that success is also contingent upon the skills of the assigned NOAB life coach and how well the life coach identifies with the young person. The life coach must be able to navigate when a young person displays aggressive behavior or when a young person is not willing to open up. If the life coach is able to work through the issues and connect with the young person, the IAP process is more likely to succeed.

*“I just liked that they took both of our options of her goals and put them together. I was satisfied with it, because they took into consideration everything that she asked for in her goals. They’re not just setting goals for her as in what they want her to do. They’re giving her and me a chance to put in our own input of goals that will work and that we want for her or she wants for herself.”*

– Family member

**Young people and family members were highly satisfied with the IAP.** They appreciated that NOAB staff worked to find programs based on young people’s expressed goals and priorities. Some young people and family members mentioned specific community-based provider referrals included in their IAP, such as receiving employment training through the Youth Employment Partnership. Young people and family members also highlighted the importance of counseling supports, which help address the mental and emotional

needs of young people, such as managing anxiety. Additionally, family members expressed appreciation that NOAB staff created a safe space for their young person. One family member stated,

*“I was just 100 with [NOAB staff] because I might have said things that [young person] didn’t say, but [Allen] wouldn’t go back behind my back and say, ‘Well, your papa said this, and your papa said that.’ I just wanted to just be on [the same] page with [NOAB staff] and [as] accurate as possible to where [young person] can get what she needed.”*

*“It [the IAP] serves as a life map and the young person and it’s all volunteer based, meaning that the young person is subscribing themselves to whatever sort of services that they need. My job is to lay out and explain to them what the certain various opportunities that they have. It empowers the young person when they’re able to make their own decisions around what their short-term goals and midterm goals are going to look like.”*

– NOAB staff

There were also a few cases in which the young person preferred to take ownership of the IAP, so family involvement in the IAP was nonexistent or decreased over time. A few young people did not recall having an IAP, which could be because of the amount of time that had passed since they participated in the program.

Some young people and family members could not recall details of the components in which they participated, likely because of the amount of time that had passed since they participated in the program.

## Ongoing Coaching

### Key Takeaways

NOAB staff, community-based providers, young people, and families shared their perceptions of and experiences with ongoing coaching from NOAB. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- The current coaching process typically aligns with the intended process.
- NOAB staff reported several benefits to NOAB life coaching, including empowering young people to believe that they are capable of making the right decisions and advocating for themselves.
- While NOAB staff had mostly positive perceptions of NOAB life coaching, they reported some challenges in getting some young people and their families to buy into the program.
- Most young people and family members found NOAB coaching to be helpful.
- Young people and family members had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of and relationships with NOAB staff.
- Young people and family members reported some areas where NOAB coaching could be improved.

**The current coaching process typically aligns with the intended process.** NOAB staff described the current coaching process. They shared that the NOAB program provides life coaching and mentoring supports to young people and their families. Each NOAB program participant is assigned a life coach (a NOAB staff member) who identifies the needs and priorities of the young person and their families to develop an IAP, which is used to inform case management and referrals to community-based providers. NOAB staff shared that life coaches undergo a series of training during onboarding, with refresher training every few months. Within the first 3 months of program enrollment, NOAB life coaches meet with program participants in person 3 days a week to “develop relationships before [they] get into case management.” Following the initial 3 months, meeting frequency shifts to one to two times a week in person with text and phone call communication in the interim. NOAB staff shared that life coaches are provided a company credit card to take program participants into the Oakland community for lunch and other social activities, which helps to create “a safe space for [young people] to talk about their challenges.”

**NOAB staff reported several benefits to NOAB life coaching.** For example, NOAB staff shared that in their coaching, they try to empower young people to believe that they are capable of making the right decisions and to advocate for themselves. Additionally, NOAB staff cited building strong relationships with NOAB young people and their families as integral to the success of the NOAB program. Building strong relationships with young people and their families has not only helped to identify and address short-term and long-term needs, but also to keep young people and their families safe, especially in cases where they are at high risk of violent victimization.

**While NOAB staff had mostly positive perceptions of NOAB life coaching, they reported some challenges in getting some young people and their families to buy into the program.** One NOAB staff reported that while the life coaches “are well-intentioned” in their efforts to regularly engage with young people and their families, “some parents don’t like if [the] life coaches are relentlessly pursuing them” and find it “overbearing.” Another NOAB staff member mentioned that at times, young people do not “have [a] support system” or are in challenging household environments that are not conducive to active youth engagement in the NOAB program.

*“I believe in the life coaching model a lot. I think it’s really key to a lot of [young people’s] successes. I can’t stress the relationship part enough. There are conversations that the youth can have with us that they can’t have with their parents, or we’re able to help restore those relationships. I feel like this program has made so much impact on so many lives. It has saved lives on a number of occasions. It’s really given people hope that things that they’ve been through weren’t in vain.”*

– NOAB staff

**Most young people and family members found NOAB coaching to be helpful.** The supports provided by NOAB staff helped young people and family members to address their various needs, goals, and priorities. For example, one family member who had a difficult time getting her child to attend school described how NOAB staff not only helped her child get to school but also offered to help with school supplies and clothes. Likewise, a young person described how NOAB staff helped them get rideshare services to get home from school. Additionally, one family member reported receiving employment support from NOAB staff when she was unemployed. NOAB staff also provided financial support (e.g., gift cards) to help pay for household needs or young people’s personal needs.

**Young people and family members had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of and relationships with NOAB staff.** Young people and family members described NOAB staff as caring, attentive, patient, down to earth, and straightforward. Many family members viewed NOAB staff as role models and noted positive changes in their children after they received ongoing coaching. One family member described how NOAB staff were able to “make [their daughter] feel comfortable and open up to some things, [whereas] in the past, she’d just shut down.” Another family member described a NOAB staff member as a mentor who helps keep her child “out of the streets.” While her child reportedly didn’t “want to deal with” staff in past

*“I think it was helpful to have someone [NOAB staff] to make goals with ... and then have [them] help me with accountability and be there as a source of accountability for all those goals we made together.”*

– Young person

programs, “he never complained about [NOAB staff].” In describing their relationship with NOAB staff as “pretty good” and built on “mutual respect,” one young person expressed appreciation for the way that NOAB staff “put an effort into trying to connect and get onto the level of [the] age group” that he worked with.

**Young people and family members reported some areas where NOAB coaching could be improved.** One family member reported that it would sometimes “take a little long” to receive a response to messages but understood that this was likely because the staff “deal[t] with a lot of kids.” In addition, one young person respondent found it difficult to attend in-person meetings and “had to get used to” the regular check-ins with NOAB staff. Taken together, these examples suggest that young people and their family members may

have varying preferences and needs that require flexibility in contact methods (e.g., in person, call, text, email) and meeting cadence (weekly, biweekly, monthly).

## Community Program Participation

### Key Takeaways

NOAB staff, community-based providers, young people, and families shared their perceptions of and experiences with community-based program participation. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- Community-based programming typically aligns with the intended process.
- Community-based providers generally reported positive experiences engaging with NOAB staff and young people.
- Community-based providers also reported several perceived benefits of the NOAB program for young people and their families.
- Community-based providers shared both successes and challenges with the implementation of their programming.
- Most young people and family members reported satisfaction with their participation in community-based programming.

**The current process for community-based programming typically aligns with the intended process.** NOAB staff shared that the program partners with several community-based organizations to provide NOAB participants with education, life coaching/mentoring, employment, family services, transportation, housing, and mental health and counseling supports tailored to their needs and priorities. NOAB community-based providers include Youth Employment Program, California Youth Outreach, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice, Carl B. Moteyer Center for Family Counseling, and Fresh Lifelines for Youth. NOAB staff reported that they refer NOAB participants to community-based supports based on their individual needs (as indicated in the IAP). Community-based providers shared that once they receive and process the referral, they conduct an intake process and enroll the young person into the program.

**Community-based providers shared successes with the implementation of their programming.** Several community-based providers shared that they also provide life coaching (in addition to the life coaching provided by NOAB), and they highlighted the role that consistent and intentional coaching and mentoring plays in the success of NOAB young people. For example, a community-based provider described how hiring life coaches who come from the same neighborhoods as young people fosters strong connections and creates a stable environment for young people to “have a

*“Our model is really based [on] establishing transformative relationships with young people. At the end of the day, it’s hard for folks to engage in a program [and] to really think about their lives, their decisions, and the forces that are affecting their lives when all they really know is day to day survival. So when we’re able to address some of those critical needs, that takes that edge off where they can focus on themselves and their goals. [This] also deepens the [young person’s] relationship [with their] life coach [and] encourages positive outcomes because as much as we don’t want to just be transactional, at times, a financial burden is really the barrier [to] somebody engaging in a program or even committing further crimes and recidivating.”*

– Community-based provider

caring and trustful adult that [they] can call in a time of crisis.” Consistent mentorship was considered a core component to successful community-based programming.

**Community-based providers also reported several perceived benefits of the NOAB program for young people and their families.** Among these include diverting young people from the criminal legal system, helping young people to achieve their goals, improving academic performance, strengthening family relationships, and creating systems of support. For example, one community-based provider shared,

*“I think it gives them, number one, a network of support, which I think is really helpful, especially if you are having police encounters and if a young person doesn't really know how to navigate that... It can further prevent the school to prison pipeline, which a lot of our young people are being funneled into the school to prison pipeline. So it's a way for them to be able to stay healthy, productive, and thrive.”*

**While community-based providers reported several successes with the implementation of community-based programming for NOAB young people, they also reported challenges.** Community-based providers reported varying frequencies of communication with NOAB staff ranging from once a week to every other month. Communication fluctuates depending on whether there are active referrals at a given point in time.

In some instances, limited referrals of NOAB young people to community-based programming impeded service provision. For example, one provider shared how they went from engaging with NOAB staff “three or four times out the week” to not “receiving a referral in a while.” On the other hand, NOAB staff reported lack of provider capacity as a challenge to referring young people to community-based programming, especially for organizations that are predominantly hybrid and/or not taking new clients.

Additionally, some community-based providers cited lack of consistency in NOAB young people’s program attendance as a barrier to service delivery. In describing the inconsistent program attendance, one provider stated:

*“[Some NOAB young people] treat us like a drop-in program. Of course, NOAB would always tell them, ‘Oh, you should go through this program. It's really great.’ But [young people] still have the choice on whether they want to do it. Like a real job, [you have to] show consistency [and] be here on time. Sometimes, NOAB participants felt like they didn't really need to [attend] so they would come when they were told to come, [if] they [were] going to get incentives that day, or [if] their case manager was going to meet them [at our center] for a check. But then we wouldn't see them [again] for weeks.”*

One community-based provider reported that in some cases, the lack of buy-in among young people and their families is because of crisis situations, such as lack of basic necessities and threats to their safety, stating:

*“Ultimately it's the buy-in part. For one, [young people and their families] may not recognize that it's a good thing for them. It's like you're forcing something on [them]. A lot of them talk about basically just paying for basic life necessities and how can you help*

*me with that? If a [young person] and [their] family are targeted, [there are] many times that we need to remove them from the threat within the city to get them somewhere far but not out of state. And that's a whole thing around resources too 'cause it's very expensive renting hotels and getting them places where that's a safe place for them to be."*

As indicated, crisis situations can pose a challenge to service provision, especially when they require extensive financial resources that might exceed the capacity of what the community-based provider is able to offer. Additionally, some young people and family members were referred to community-based programs through NOAB staff, while other young people and family members were also referred to community-based supports through probation and the courts. One family member reported that her son was involved in up to 10 community programs at once as a term of his probation, which became overwhelming. This suggests that young people who are on probation may be required to engage with additional community-based programs beyond the supports and services received through the NOAB program, making it more difficult for those young people to consistently participate in NOAB referred programs.

**Most young people and family members reported satisfaction with their participation in community-based programming.** They shared positive perceptions of the community-based programs with which they engaged. For example, one young person described how community-based family supports helped him and his mother to “have a better connection and stronger relationship.” They stated, “The family counseling [helped] me and my mom to actually get an understanding and talk without us arguing or interrupting each other.” In addition, one family member whose son is a student athlete described how community-based wellness supports helped her son “stay fit” and “kept him motivated” after surgery. Another young person reported that participating in different community-based programs has helped him to “release stress” and to “control [his] emotions.”

*“I worked with [staff from Youth Employment Partnership] for maybe almost three to four years, I think. They really helped me with actually getting through with my work and maturing and actually working hard, I guess. [They] really helped me with my financial problems. [They] helped me understand how to cash out my paychecks and what I do and how to sign them.”*

– Young person

Some young people and family members had positive relationships with the staff with whom they interacted through community-based programs. For instance, one young person described community-based staff as more like family than a mentor. They stated,

*“When I was working with her, it didn't feel like she was a mentor. It felt like she was an auntie. I could talk to her. She understood. They talk as if you were close enough with them. They would try to make you feel like you could be close enough to talk to them and stuff like that.”*

Another young person reported that the staff with whom he engaged in an employment support program “still helped [him] with other jobs” after he was no longer enrolled in the program. Having program staff

who young people felt “really cared” about them seemed integral to their perceptions of and experiences with community-based programs.

## NOAB Program Graduation

### Key Takeaways

NOAB staff, young people, and family members shared their perceptions of and experiences with NOAB program graduation. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- The current graduation process sometimes aligns with the intended process.
- Most young people and family members reported that they understood the NOAB graduation requirements and felt supported by NOAB staff in meeting those requirements.
- Young people and family members said the consequences for incompleteness were somewhat unclear.

**The current graduation process sometimes aligns with the intended process.** NOAB staff shared that participants typically stay in the NOAB program longer than proposed in the intended program model (i.e., 1 year vs. 6–9 months). They reported that while young people typically graduate from the NOAB program within a year, the length of program participation may vary based on young people’s progress in meeting their goals and priorities to avoid recidivating.

**Most young people and family members reported that they understood the NOAB graduation requirements and felt supported by NOAB staff in meeting those requirements.** Young people and family members said that NOAB staff made the graduation requirements clear to them, including the consequences of not completing the program, though many could not recall the details of the information shared with them. Those who could remember pointed to regular meetings with NOAB staff, regular attendance at school, meeting goals, and staying out of trouble as requirements.

*“Because of the need... with my family, they’ve chosen to stay on. In other words, what I understand about this program is that they stay on as long as there’s a need, and I like that. There is no projected end date for this. I think they more or less deal with it, like, where there’s a need. Now is not a good idea to exit... I think the projected goal here is for him to graduate [from] high school, of course, and also before that time to get a job.”*

– Family member

**Young people and family members said the consequences for incompleteness were somewhat unclear.** Some young people and family members assumed that non-participation would result in probation, juvenile hall, or some other court process. However, young people and family members said they felt supported in meeting NOAB graduation requirements. One parent expressed appreciation that the NOAB structure was flexible and that it kept the young person in the program if there was a need to stay on, regardless of formal completion of requirements.

## Overall Perceptions of NOAB

### Key Takeaways

NOAB staff, board members, police partners, community-based providers, young people, and family members shared their overall perceptions of the NOAB program, including program benefits and potential areas for improvement. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- NOAB staff, board members, police partners, community providers, young people, and family members shared several successful elements of NOAB:
  - NOAB staff developed supportive, reliable relationships with young people and their families.
  - NOAB staff provided supports for young people and families that addressed their multifaceted needs.
  - NOAB staff and board members believe NOAB helped to improve outcomes for young people and their families.
- Young people and family members described a few challenges they encountered during their participation with the NOAB program, such as wanting to talk with their NOAB life coach more often and struggling with the time commitment required of the program.

**NOAB staff, board members, police partners, community providers, young people, and family members shared several successful elements of NOAB that benefited young people and families**, including the development of supportive and reliable relationships; provision of supports and connections to other services; and improved outcomes.

#### ***NOAB staff developed supportive, reliable relationships with young people and their families.***

Young people and family members cited the relationship they had with their NOAB staff as the main success of their program. One family member shared, “We connected to the right person, the right program, and everybody that was involved. We connected and had to do our part, had to do our work... To me, I felt like this was our last chance. It was the last chance, but it turned out to be the best.”

*“They [NOAB] do a great job of welcoming families, making a space where they feel accepted, where they feel respected, and a space where they get the support that they need for basic needs, food, clothing, and shelter. They get the support they need when they attend court and just need someone that understands the justice system at their side.”*

– Board member

Some family members shared that despite their children not being in the program anymore, they still feel supported by NOAB. One young person said, “Still, to this day, they still try to help my family and do what they can. I would say that I moved on to doing other opportunities, but even though I still did, they still try to do what they can. They still haven’t forgotten about us after all these years.”

***NOAB staff provided supports for young people and families that addressed their multifaceted needs.*** For example, a young person shared that NOAB showed them how to get a bank account, the difference between a credit and a debit card, and how to start saving money. One family member shared that NOAB helped her find transportation for her son for school and offered help with school supplies and clothes.



Another family member reported,

*“It just made me feel kind of good, because I see now that [there] is still help out here. Because at first, I was feeling like [there] wasn’t none because me or him wasn’t getting that type of support... That’s why I like [their] program too, because they [are there] for the kids and the family members.”*

One young person mentioned that NOAB connected them to a job, while another said they were able to learn more about financial literacy. Lastly, young people and family members said that NOAB helped them improve educational outcomes by providing support for schoolwork.

***NOAB staff and board members believe NOAB helped to improve outcomes for young people and their families and that NOAB can potentially reduce recidivism.*** One board member shared,

*“I think it gives them a second chance at, really, their teenage years. Because in the past, we’ve had kids robbing stores and doing stuff that they weren’t supposed to be doing. But instead of just locking them away and being like, ‘Oh, you’re going to go to jail, now you’re on probation,’ I think NOAB was like, ‘Well, let’s figure out why they’re doing that. Let’s figure out what they were doing, actually.’ And maybe it’s the reason behind it. Maybe they needed clothes. And comes to find out majority of NOAB’s kids were doing things because they needed the stuff that they were doing. They needed clothes or they needed the money, or they needed the food that they were stealing. So I think it really sets them on a better path for the resources that they feel like they’re missing out on.”*

Young people and family members also spoke to how NOAB helped them avoid further justice involvement. Many young people and family members saw NOAB as a second or even last chance to put young people on a positive path. Family members described how NOAB helped them navigate the court system and how it showed their children that other positive options exist. One family member shared,

*“It’s helped me learn that not everything’s about, I guess, physical violence. It showed me that there’s also second opportunities in life, but you have to learn how to take risks.”*

– Young person

*“For them to say, ‘Hey, instead of taking them to juvenile hall, we’re going to put them in the program,’ I was like, ‘Okay.’ That was good for me... Because I don’t want my son in juvenile hall, you know what I’m saying? I don’t want him being on probation. And even though he got himself in the situation, I just didn’t want to see that life for him.”*

Additionally, young people and family members reported that they believed that the NOAB program improved youth and family outcomes, such as increasing young people’s confidence and building their skills. Family members, in particular, shared the changes they observed in their child. For example, one family member highlighted,

*“It has helped her a lot to the point to where... she speak[s] out more, her confidence is, like, she want[s] to go to school, she want[s] to work... Yeah, I mean a whole lot has changed. I mean a whole persona. Her outlook on life is different now.”*

**Some young people and family members described a few challenges they encountered during their participation with the NOAB program.** One young person and one family member mentioned in particular that they would have liked to talk with their NOAB life coach even more often than they did but understood that they were not the only people their assigned staff were supporting. Two young people and one family member mentioned that it was difficult to stick to the time commitment. One family member mentioned services that they would have liked to have been connected to, such as a job or group therapy.

## **Overall Perceptions of Community Safety, Juvenile Justice, and Policing**

### **Key Takeaways**

NOAB staff, board members, police partners, community-based providers, young people, and their families shared whether and how their perceptions of the juvenile justice system and community safety have changed as a result of their participation in the NOAB program. Key takeaways from interviews include the following:

- NOAB staff, board members, community-based providers, and family members agreed that NOAB helps make the community safer.
- NOAB staff, board members, community-based providers, police partners, young people, and families expressed mixed opinions on whether they believed NOAB changed their feelings about the juvenile justice system and policing.

**NOAB staff, board members, community-based providers, and family members agreed that NOAB helps make the community safer.** NOAB staff, board members, and community-based providers highlighted that helping a young person helps the broader community. One board member shared, “This is how we help the community. Anytime we can be part of the process of disrupting that pipeline to incarceration, number one, it helps the young person. Number two, it helps the community because then that mean this person will no longer be engaged in criminal activity.”

Family members said they believe NOAB has a positive impact on community safety, noting that the NOAB program can provide young people with a positive relationship with another adult and an alternative to the juvenile justice system. For example, one family member explained, “[NOAB is] keeping these kids out of trouble and showing them different...They’re perfect for that. I think they’ll work for the community, if more people will get involved with them and get to know who they are.”

*“I think it’s a good program to keep the kids from out the juvenile system. It keeps them from being afraid of feeling like they have to run or be on the streets because they don’t want to deal with the court system. The program is good for the kids to make them feel safe and that they can stay at home or they don’t have to go to court.”*

– Family member

**NOAB staff, board members, community-based providers, police partners, young people, and families expressed mixed opinions on whether they believed NOAB changed their feelings about the juvenile**

**justice system and policing.** Generally, NOAB staff, board members, and community-based providers reported that NOAB has not changed their perceptions of the juvenile justice system or their feelings toward the police, as many of them have been involved in similar work for a long time and have long-held opinions.

Police partners reported that while NOAB did not change their approach to policing, it reaffirmed their approach. They believed their goals align with the NOAB program’s mission to “make the city the best place that it can be for the folks that live here,” even though they go about it in different ways. They shared that they believe everyone deserves a second chance, and people have the power to change.

*“I mean, I’m not perfect. I’ve changed. And that’s ultimately how I’ve always viewed policing, like just because a person has been arrested, that doesn’t mean they can’t change. I mean, everyone deserves a second chance.”*

– Police partner

Young people and family members reported mixed feelings on whether participation in NOAB changed their perceptions on the juvenile justice system or police, with most expressing appreciation that NOAB felt like a second chance. One young person shared,

*“I guess it did help because even after what happened, they still didn’t just go like, ‘Oh, we’re just going to arrest somebody.’ Or, whatever that people think they’re just going to do. They just helped me with a different opportunity instead of putting a juvenile in juvenile hall.”*

*“I don’t think this program changed my mind on any of it. I think it was just a helpful resource to have throughout all of it.”*

– Family member

A few young people and family members were not sure whether the program changed their feelings about the juvenile justice system because they were unfamiliar with the juvenile justice system or had not thought about it before.

## Limitations

To better understand the successes of and challenges to the implementation of the NOAB program, we conducted interviews with NOAB staff, board members, community-based providers, police partners, young people, and their family members from 2023 to 2024. Interview findings provide critical insight into how young people, families, NOAB staff, and partners experience and perceive the program. We acknowledge, however, that there were some limitations to our implementation evaluation. First, the sample size for our NOAB conference observations was small ( $n = 3$ ), which suggests that our observations may not be representative of all conferences. Similarly, the sample sizes for interviews with young people and family members were relatively small (eight youth and seven family members) and most of the young people and family members interviewed were former NOAB participants from 1–3 years prior. This might have made it difficult for the former participants and family members to recall specific experiences and perceptions. In future rounds of interviews in summer 2024 and 2025, we will prioritize current program participants and their families to better understand how program participants and their families experience

and perceive the program. Expanding our pool of interview participants will enable us to build a more balanced and representative sample. We will also consider broadening our NOAB staff and partner groups to include educational administrators who aim to provide diversion services in the school setting as well as the police staff who are responsible for making referrals to NOAB.

Additionally, while the AIR evaluation team had access to NOAB program administrative data, some data points that are important for understanding implementation are unavailable or incomplete. For example, the current data do not allow us to understand participants' actual engagement in NOAB (e.g., whether they have participated in a board conference, how often they meet with their life coach, whether they are attending community-based programs consistently). Additionally, we do not have data on program completion and outcomes, such as graduation date, length of time in program, and whether the charge was dropped by OPD. This impeded our ability to assess program referral, attendance, and completion rates. We also did not have access to IAPs for three of the young people we interviewed, which made it more difficult to probe on specific services or supports the young people might have received. We are working with NICJR to learn more about the different data systems in place to ensure we have what we need for future rounds of data collection.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Exhibit 4. Summary of Recommendations to Enhance NOAB Program



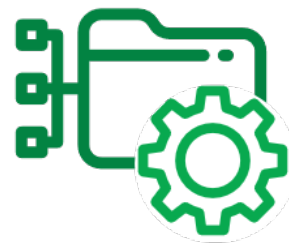
Enhance NOAB Program Awareness Among Justice Officials, Young People, and Families



Increase Alignment of Board Conferences With Evidence-Based Practices



Hire and Train NOAB Staff to Provide Additional Supports to Young People and Their Families



Continue to Build Out the Case Management Database

### ***Enhance NOAB Program Awareness Among Justice Officials, Young People, and Families***

According to the young people and family members interviewed, they most often hear about NOAB directly from NOAB rather than from a police officer, probation officer, public defender, or some other person within the juvenile justice system. Because of limited program awareness among justice officials and high rates of turnover and bandwidth issues within OPD, point-of-arrest diversion of young people is not always possible. Instead, some young people are already on probation or have met with an attorney or public defender at the point of referral to NOAB.

NOAB should continue to strengthen relations with the OPD and the Alameda District Attorney's Office to enhance justice officials' awareness of NOAB program eligibility criteria to support point-of-arrest diversion and to avoid further justice system involvement. Enhancing program awareness could bolster the OPD's capacity to not only increase referrals and point-of-arrest diversion, but also to provide young people and their family members with accurate and consistent information about the NOAB program prior to the intake process. NOAB is actively seeking to enhance program awareness by delivering monthly presentations on the NOAB program at police patrol roll call meetings. NOAB might consider delivering quarterly presentations to OPD officers and leadership to embed program awareness at the leadership level to mitigate the potential effects of staff turnover. NOAB might consider communicating weekly with the OPD referral point(s)-of-contact to follow up on eligible cases and to ensure that eligible cases are referred within a reasonable timeframe following arrest to avoid further system contact.

NOAB also might consider providing more information to young people and family members so that they understand the various program components and can better advocate for themselves as they navigate the NOAB program. Doing so places the young people and family members as the experts of their own lived experiences and can ensure they are equitable partners in shaping the supports and services they receive (Head, 2011; Ishimaru, 2019).

### ***Increase Alignment of Board Conferences with Evidence-Based Practices***

We recommend incorporating more evidence-based practices into the board conferences as follows:

**Increase emphasis on accountability.** During the NOAB conference, we observed a high level of support offered by both the family and board members. Young people also took accountability for their actions—for example, the young people described the incident and took responsibility—but to a lesser extent. To increase the level of accountability, NOAB might consider the following:

- **Prioritize incorporating victim impact.** We understand that direct victims of the young persons' offenses are invited to participate in board conferences but, to date, none have volunteered. NOAB may consider alternative approaches to engaging victims in the process; this could include training in how to effectively engage crime victims in restorative processes, or offering victims the opportunity to share written impact statements that can be read during the board conference. NOAB could also look to other organizations that partner with surrogate victims or victim impact panels in lieu of the direct victim.
- **Add accountability-based prompts for the young person.** In addition to asking the young person to describe the incident, the facilitator might pose questions that specifically address accountability. For instance: Who do you think was affected by your actions? How do you think they were affected? Board members, too, could be asked similar prompts like: How do you feel when incidents like this occur in your neighborhood?

**Discuss/amend IAPs during board conference.** In traditional family group and community conferencing models, conferences conclude with the creation of a contract or an agreement between the participants containing a plan to repair the harm caused by the incident (Bazemore & Umbriet, 1997). Although the NOAB conferences do not include traditional victim participation as noted above, community members do

provide feedback and support to the young person. The IAP created by NOAB prior to the conference has many similar features to the contracts created in traditional conference models, as they incorporate input from the family and young person as to what may be helpful for the young person moving forward (Bazemore & Umbriet, 1997). This process could be deepened by keeping the IAP in draft form until the conference and asking the board for their input. This would enhance community engagement by allowing board members to provide their own suggestions for ways the young person could repair harm and to offer ongoing support to ensure the IAP is completed.

**Create opportunities for board members to stay connected with young people after the conference.**

NOAB is currently exploring opportunities for board members to stay connected with young people after the conference by holding follow-up conferences. NOAB could support board members' continued engagement with young people following the conference by creating opportunities to connect in person (e.g., social outings) and/or virtually (e.g., text, phone call, video call, email) depending on the young person's communication preferences. More formally, NOAB might consider scheduling quarterly check-ins between board members and NOAB participants to discuss progress toward the goals and priorities outlined in their IAPs and to identify areas where board members might be able to provide additional supports.

**Hire and/or train a neutral conference facilitator.** Traditionally, in restorative conferences, the facilitator is a neutral party (Wachtel & Wachtel, 2012). The facilitator for each of the observed conferences was also the assigned life coach for the young people who participated in the conferences. Hiring staff trained in restorative conference facilitation could further support the neutrality of conferences in alignment with the evidence-based restorative practice literature. Alternatively, NOAB might also consider requiring all NOAB life coaches to receive restorative conference facilitation training and certification. Once the certification has occurred, NOAB can assign a facilitator who does not deliver ongoing coaching to the young person.

## ***Hire and Train NOAB Staff to Provide Additional Supports to Young People and Their Families***

Community-based providers, police partners, board members, and young people and their family members reported positive experiences engaging with NOAB staff. Many young people and family members see NOAB staff not only as mentors but also as family members who support the participant, the parent or caregiver, and the family as a whole. However, some community-based providers reported challenges in program attendance, which, in part, might be attributed to young people participating in multiple community-based programs at once.

Within the past year, NOAB hired an additional NOAB staff member to expand its capacity to provide ongoing coaching to young people and family members, increasing the total number of NOAB life coaches to three. While the hiring of an additional coach has bolstered the capacity of the NOAB program to provide ongoing coaching to additional young people, NICJR might consider hiring and/or training life coaches to support NOAB's capacity to provide direct service provision tailored to the needs of young people and their families, in addition to referring young people to community-based providers. For instance, hiring NOAB staff who are licensed therapists/counselors could support young people and their families with crisis,

mental health, and family counseling supports. Recent research from youth researchers highlights the varying needs of young people involved with the juvenile justice system, as well as their families, including mental health support, community and connection, and additional programming and resources (Lakai et al., 2024). In cases where young people are experiencing burnout from participating in several community-based programs at once, direct service provision through NOAB could support the streamlining of service provision and help to mitigate issues with program attendance.

### ***Continue to Build Out the Case Management Database***

NOAB is working on building out the case management database, Apricot, to further streamline the provision of supports and services. NOAB should continue to build out Apricot so that it includes more data on the program implementation and outcomes. For example, this might include creating the mechanisms and putting policies in place to ensure consistent and accurate tracking of the following:

- Referrals (e.g., referral date, source of referral, where participant is in juvenile justice process if involved);
- Intake and assessment (e.g., copy of IAP, date and location of initial meeting, recommended frequency of participation in NOAB life coaching and community-based provider programming);
- NOAB conference participation (e.g., date of preparation meeting and board conference, start and end time, attendees);
- Participation in NOAB life coaching (e.g., dates and notes from each meeting, progress toward goals);
- Community-based provider participation (e.g., start and end dates, attendance, program completion requirements);
- NOAB program graduation (e.g., date of graduation, attendees); and
- Other NOAB program outcomes (e.g., re-engagement in education, record expungement).

This database will allow NOAB to better identify program implementation successes and areas to improve. For example, more robust data may help NOAB understand which supports and services young people are most and least engaged with and to better assess why some programs receive fewer referrals than others. Further building out the database will also allow NOAB to begin tracking short-term and longer term outcomes for assessing and reporting program impact. NOAB might consider hiring a staff member dedicated to managing the database, ensuring data are accurate and complete, and identifying ways to update the database so it can collect information most important to NOAB for understanding program implementation and outcomes.

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Arlington, VA 22202-3289  
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