

## **Spotlight: San Francisco Juvenile Collaborative Re-entry Unit (JCRU)**

The San Francisco Juvenile Collaborative Re-entry Unit (JCRU) serves all youth who have received an [out-of-home placement](#) or ranch order through the delinquency court. JCRU supports youth referred to the Collaborative Re-entry Court by providing assessments, strategic case planning and management, juvenile supervision, and intensive therapy and aftercare. Unique to the Collaborative Re-entry Court is that re-entry planning starts at the beginning of a youth's probation term, not towards the end as they near the time for release.

The Juvenile Collaborative Re-entry Unit evolved out of an earlier partnership, formed in 2009 as a result of funding from the [federal Second Chance Act](#) National Demonstration Project. With the early collaboration successfully reporting a 29% improvement in recidivism rates for participating youth within the first three years,<sup>1</sup> JCRU was formed in 2012 by re-aligning existing team partnerships into a formalized Unit within the probation department in order to extend services to more probation youth. Through this expansion, JCRU serves up to 150 youth annually.

Collaboration is the linchpin for improving outcomes for probation youth as they step down from congregate care. JCRU's strong partnership includes the San Francisco County Juvenile Probation Department, San Francisco Superior Court, San Francisco Public Defender's Office, and the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ), a community-based organization that coordinates aftercare services. The expanded JCRU now includes youth represented by conflict panel and private attorneys (not just the Public Defender, as was the initial focus) and youth committed to the Log Cabin Ranch who are stepping down to a community-based setting. In the critical hours right before youth exit a secure facility such as juvenile hall or ranch, JCRU works with county administrators to reactivate [Medi-Cal](#) for any youth whose benefits were suspended due to being placed in a secure facility.

Since the 2009 federal Second Chance Act Re-entry Grant that launched JCRU, additional funding sources that have helped JCRU evolve to where it is today. The federal [Juvenile Accountability Block Grant \(JABG\)](#) funded a full-time public defender to be a Placement and Education Attorney (PEA) for all JCRU youth represented by the Public Defender's Office. This vital position works closely with youth to develop personalized re-entry plans and with the probation department to ensure youth receive the most appropriate placement to meet their individual needs, leading to fewer out-of-home placements, fewer placement runaways and failures, and quicker completion of probation terms. Though the grant funding for this position has since ended, the Public Defender's Office has absorbed this cost to continue the services provided by the PEA. In 2015, JCRU completed its grant-funded implementation and reported successful outcomes.

Though the grants that formed JCRU have ended, the Unit continues to be funded through each partner agency's operating budget. JCRU has also been supported by a portion of the local violence prevention and intervention funding pooled from the Mayor's Office of Community Investment and San Francisco Department of Children Youth and Families. Ongoing support for youth in placement comes from the [federal Title IV-E Waiver](#)

[Demonstration Project. Medi-Cal EPSDT](#) covers funding for health, mental health, substance abuse, and other services.

Part of JCRU's success is that it operates from the premise that if you can take a kid on the verge of serious criminality and give them the resources they need, they can change the direction of their lives. To create more strategic re-entry for youth, JCRU looks at alternatives to sending them to a long-term program or back into an unsafe or unstable home. For instance, if a youth is a gang member, JCRU will place them in a different neighborhood. If a youth's parent is a substance abuser, JCRU will avoid placing that youth back in that home and look for other permanent connections. If a young woman is a [victim of trafficking](#), JCRU will not place her back in similar vulnerable situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, *Juvenile Collaborative Re-entry Unit*, <http://www.cjcj.org/Direct-services/Juvenile-Collaborative-Reentry-Unit.html>.