



REENTRY COUNCIL OF THE CITY
& COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

DIRECT SERVICES
HOUSING WORKGROUP

Housing Needs of Justice Involved Adults

Acknowledgements

About the Reentry Council

The purpose of the Reentry Council of the City & County of San Francisco is to coordinate local efforts to support adults exiting San Francisco County Jail, San Francisco juvenile justice out-of-home placements, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation facilities, and the United States Federal Bureau of Prison facilities.

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Introduction

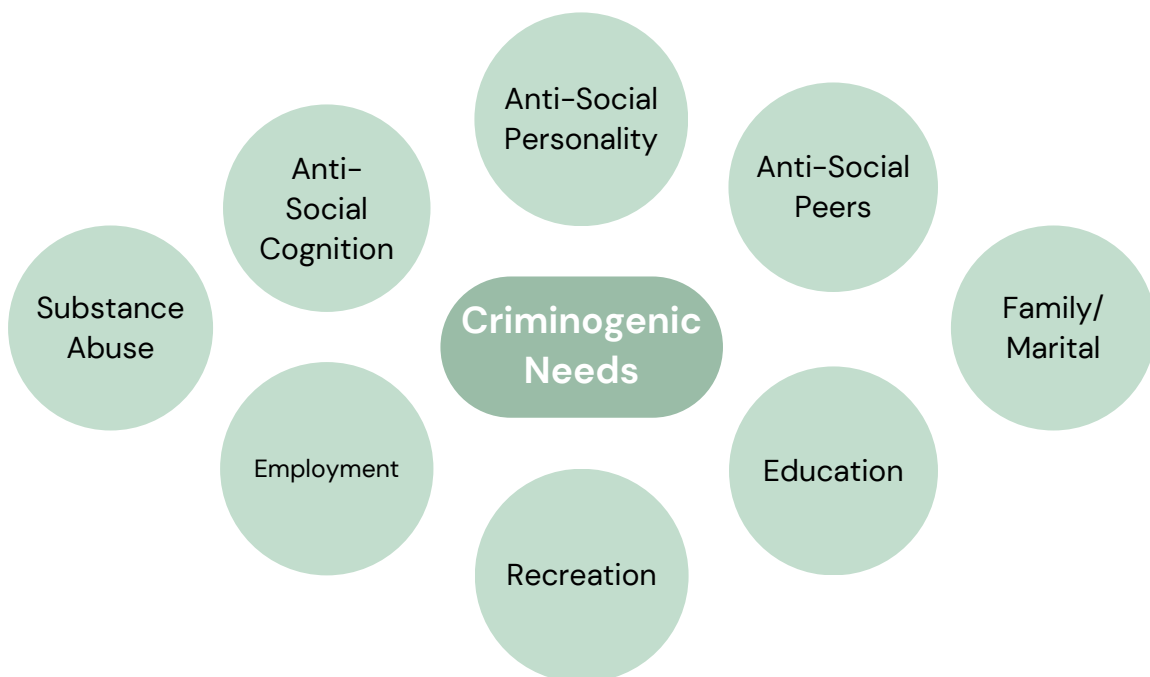
This exploratory research project focuses on the housing needs of justice involved adults in San Francisco. It was planned, implemented, and led by individuals who have experienced the challenges of addiction, homelessness, and justice system involvement, and was secondarily supported by researchers. This project was participatory in both its methodological approach and its ideological perspective and making it a report written with an authenticity often absent from research projects.

It's hard to imagine a stable life without a place to call home. This basic necessity is often an obstacle in the life of justice involved adults. Nationally, people who are formerly incarcerated are almost 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than the general public¹. Homelessness is more than the mere absence of a place to live for justice involved people, it is yet another obstacle to addressing specific criminogenic needs (Figure 1), or dynamic factors directly related to criminal activity and recidivism.

San Francisco's justice involved population face unique hurdles – navigating conditions of release, terms of parole or probation, the cost of housing, open air drug markets, and broken systems which arguably perpetuate incarceration and homelessness. The City is facing unprecedented levels of homelessness and fatal overdoses. Health and homeless advocates have doubled down on a one-size fits all approach, but it is critical to enlarge the solution space and ensure that the holistic needs of system impacted addicts are met.

This research project seeks to understand the housing needs of justice involved adults in San Francisco, the myriad challenges they face, and potential drivers of housing instability. In this report, we provide the first estimate of homelessness among this population and provide a platform of recommendations to improve their housing outcomes.

Figure 1: Criminogenic Needs



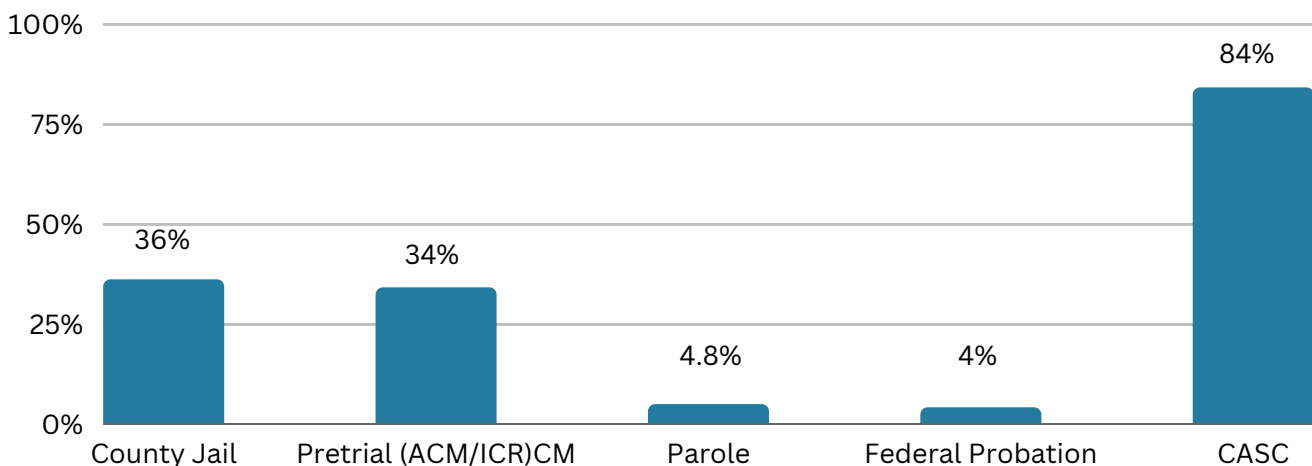


Homelessness & the Justice System

Understanding the scale at which homelessness and San Francisco's justice system intersect is a starting point to identifying solutions to address the daily challenges facing justice involved individuals. There is often overlap between the justice system and homelessness, as many unhoused individuals are more visible to law enforcement. In San Francisco's 2022 Point in Time Count, 23% of people experiencing homelessness reported that they had spent at least one night behind bars in the previous 12 months, while 13% reported being on probation or parole². The involvement of unhoused individuals in the justice system can create a cycle in which homelessness and criminal justice involvement reinforce each other.

The local criminal justice landscape includes people in the San Francisco County Jail, and those on local, state and federal monitoring or supervision (e.g., pretrial release, probation, and parole). Each population can differ in their distinct needs, challenges and access to resources. Figure 2 displays the reported percentages of unhoused individuals across San Francisco's justice system.

Figure 2: Homeless Data Reported by SF Justice Partners as of November 2023



San Francisco has been pioneering criminal justice reform for decades, sentencing less people to state prison than all but one other California county³. After years of steady decline, San Francisco's average daily jail count in 2022 was 804 inmates a day⁴. Despite these shifts, the system remains disproportionately comprised of people of color and is the primary healthcare provider to San Francisco's mentally ill. With a median jail stay of 3.79 days, people are cycling between the jail and the streets often with little to no intervention to address their criminogenic needs⁵.

Addressing San Francisco's public safety, homeless and drug crisis is at the forefront of our future, recognizing the drivers of the City's conditions are beyond just the shortage of affordable housing.

THE BILLIE HOLIDAY CENTER

The Billie Holiday Center (BHC) is San Francisco's Reentry Navigation Center for justice involved adults. Between February 2022 and August 2022, 166 participants completed a program survey.



93%

Struggled with addiction before entering the BHC



47%

Struggled with addiction for more than 15 years



Diving Deep

Methodology & Design

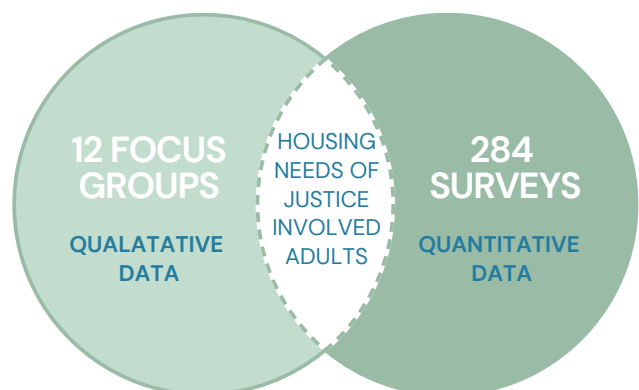
Individuals transitioning from incarceration back into the community often experience challenges with housing instability. This exploratory research project examines an array of challenges justice involved adults experience pre and post release, including housing instability and behavioral health challenges. The target population for this research is adults on local, state or federal monitoring or supervision (e.g. pretrial release, probation, and parole) and other formerly incarcerated residents of San Francisco.

The goal of this study is to explore the relationship between housing instability and incarceration. This study utilizes a participatory research approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the housing needs of justice involved adults.

Focus Groups: Twelve structured focus groups were conducted with the target population: adults on local, state, or federal monitoring or supervision (e.g., pretrial release, probation, and parole) and other formerly incarcerated residents of San Francisco. The focus groups were designed to gather qualitative data on homelessness, housing instability, barriers to reentry, and access to services. Focus group participants were identified randomly from local programs and were asked open and close ended questions. A total of 87 people participated in the focus groups, which took place between February 2021 and October 2022. Participant feedback was transcribed and analyzed through manual and inductive coding to measure the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of justice involved adults.

Housing Needs Survey: Individuals who have experienced the challenges of addiction, homelessness, and justice system involvement developed the Housing Needs of Justice Involved Adults (HNJIA) survey to learn about the characteristics and trajectory of San Franciscans involved in the justice system. This survey captures quantitative data on justice system involvement, housing situation, access and barriers to transitional and permanent housing, behavioral health characteristics, housing needs and solutions. The survey was widely circulated among city and nonprofit partners, particularly those who exclusively serve justice involved adults. Surveys were available online and in paper format in Spanish and in English.

Figure 3: Report Methodology



Results

The qualitative and quantitative findings are summarized below.

Voices from the Reentry Community

Qualitatively, the research identified recurrent themes amongst the 12 semi-structured focus groups. Participants provided rich insights into their reentry challenges and their efforts spent rebuilding their lives and finding a place to live. They also offered feedback to improve housing and other reentry related services.

The most salient themes which emerged from the focus groups were:

1) The Impact of Addiction

Participants described harmful experiences related to drug use and addiction. This theme resonated across gender, age, race and all types of justice involvement.

2) Financial Instability

Participants described experiencing financial instability both prior to and after incarceration.

3) Reentry Planning & Hopelessness

Participants reported the lack of reentry planning hindered their success and ability to transition from incarceration to the community.

Participants reported losing hope after repeated failed attempts to successfully reintegrate back into the community.

FOCUS GROUPS

Over the course of more than a year, justice involved adults shared their stories around incarceration and housing.

87

Focus Group
Participants

22

Hours

12

Focus Groups

Represented Populations:

Pretrial, Probation, Parole, Federal
Probation, Formerly Incarcerated

Theme: The Impact of Addiction

The relationship between homelessness, drug use, and crime is complex. The most prevalent theme among all focus group participants was the impact of addiction. This resonates across gender, age, race and all types of justice involvement. Participants described harmful experiences and outcomes directly related to drug use and addiction.

A majority of focus group participants cited drug use as having detrimental effects on their physical, mental, spiritual, and financial health. Additionally there were concerns of learning disabilities, emotional immaturity and the inability to develop or maintain healthy relationships.

....As my addiction to heroin thrived, it took an emotional toll on my relationships. I disconnected from my family and friends. I lost my job and my apartment...Heroin consumed my life.

Drug use leading to incarceration: Participants shared experiences of homelessness and survival on the streets, from stealing to violent crimes. They reported incarceration was often a direct result of the crimes committed to support their drug habit. High risk behaviors such as theft, extortion, drug dealing, prostitution, and violence became part of their daily lives. Some focus group participants reported viewing incarceration as a necessary intervention because it disrupted their drug use, while others felt that incarceration was a missed opportunity to access treatment and connect with ongoing services in the community.

Drug use leading to homelessness: The link between addiction and homelessness was a subtheme that surfaced across all focus groups. Focus group participants felt addiction was the leading cause of their homelessness and described the despair and turmoil addiction had on their lives, from job loss to strained relationships, ultimately resulting in housing instability. The cycle of drug use, crime, incarceration and release to the streets perpetuated homelessness. Many relayed that in the height of their addiction they prioritized drug use over responsibilities such as getting a job and paying rent. Many came to a point in which they felt apathetic toward life and used drugs as a way to escape the feeling that nothing mattered.

....my addiction to oxycodone damaged my relationship with my wife and children. I began shooting heroin and smoking fentanyl. My wife gave me an ultimatum – go to treatment or get out. I had to choose between my family and drugs – I chose drugs.

Theme: Financial Instability

Race, poverty, incarceration and inequality are inextricably linked. Focus group participants described experiencing financial instability both prior to and after incarceration. Participants reported living on the streets, couch surfing and program hopping prior to their most recent incarceration. They also described how their struggle with addiction impacted their financial stability.

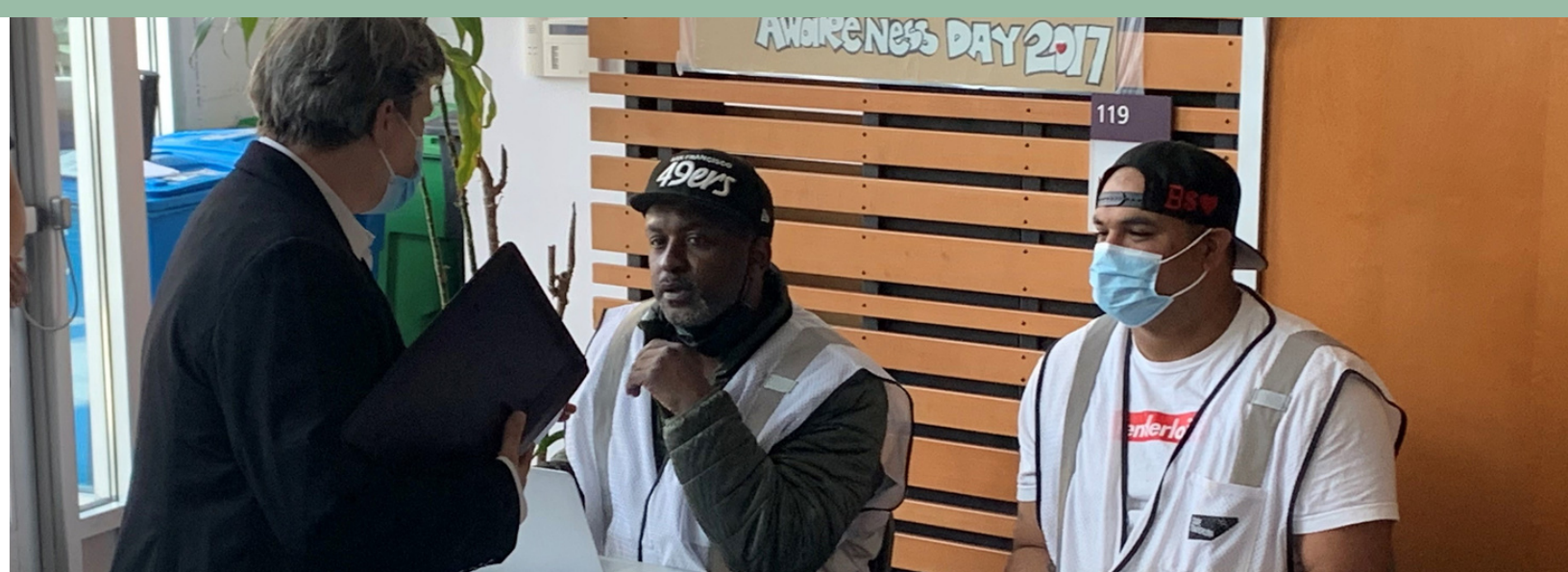
The financial outlook of justice involved adults is often bleak even when behavioral health challenges are addressed. "Starting from nothing", was a shared subtheme of focus group

participants who described the arduous journey of building a stable foundation after incarceration. Upon release, many had little to no financial resources and felt unprepared to enter the workforce.

Participants shared that poverty was a generational issue and all they have known. They described the complexity of poverty which impacted their access to education, job opportunities, housing, and healthcare. Not only did they face significant challenges meeting their basic needs and achieving a decent quality of life, they felt discriminated against because they were poor. Additionally, they had mixed opinions on their priorities, often uncertain if they should focus on recovery or getting a job.

...I couldn't keep a job in my addiction and it caused conflict with every aspect of my life.

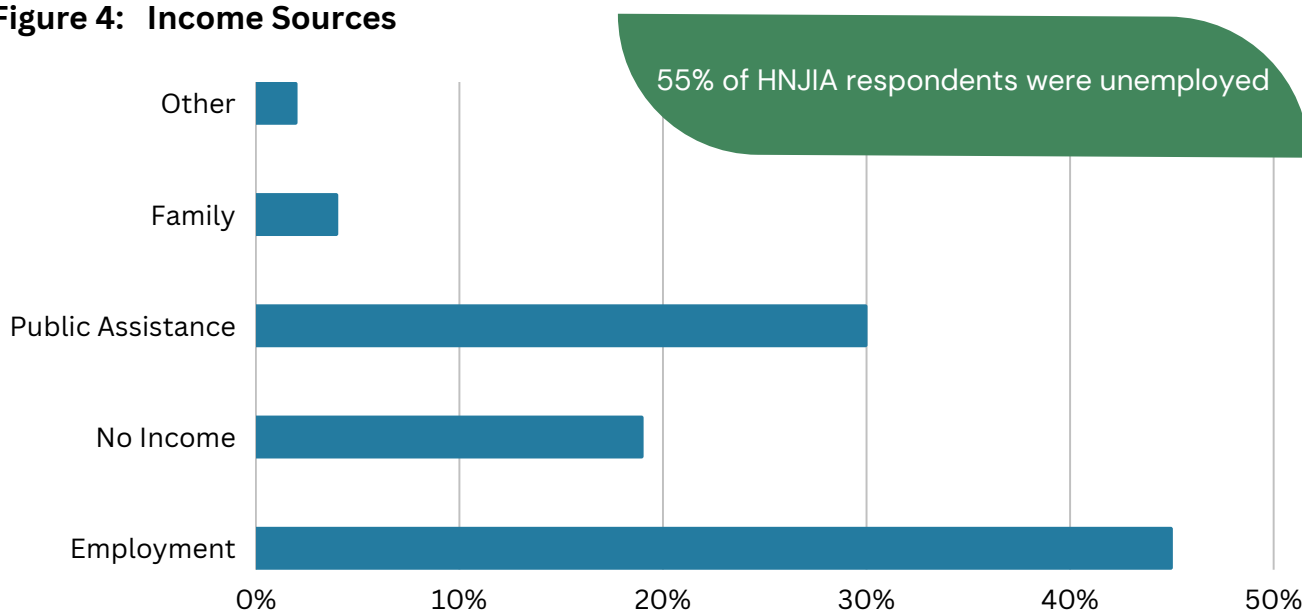
...I have been in the system for twenty-seven years. Prison didn't prepare me for life on the outside. I didn't know how to pay bills, apply for jobs, housing or healthcare. When I got out I didn't have anything and I didn't know where to start.





...the cost of living and rent in San Francisco is crazy! Even if I could find a place I could afford, I don't know if they'd accept me with my credit and background.

Figure 4: Income Sources



While the San Francisco Bay Area has a thriving economy, entry into meaningful and well-paying employment with a criminal record is difficult. Working multiple low paying jobs was a common reality for many focus groups participants. They shared the difficult experience of finding an apartment, or any place to live, in one of the most expensive rental markets in the nation was a challenge for everyone. In a City where the median rent for a 1 bedroom apartment is \$3000 per month, participants expressed they were priced out of the rental market⁶. Their housing efforts were further complicated by their lack of credit history caused by incarceration.

...finding a place that will take a convicted felon with evictions and bad credit is difficult. I've applied for several places and continued to get denied. I'm working three jobs and can't find a place to live!

Theme: Reentry Planning & Hopelessness

Reentry preparation and planning was a recurrent theme among focus groups. Reentry planning refers to the process of preparing individuals who are returning to society after a period of incarceration. This process typically involves a range of services and support, including housing, employment, education, and mental health care, to help individuals successfully transition back into their communities and reduce the risk of recidivism. Participants attributed their housing instability to the lack of reentry planning while incarcerated, with many commenting on the need for more in custody programming and preparation. Most did not know where they were going to live upon release.

Participants considered reentry planning critical to their success. Feeling unprepared to reenter the community, they expressed gratitude that they were placed in transitional housing or drug treatment programs, citing that these opportunities provided the structure and community they needed to be successful. Others shared plans that never materialized which they attributed to the lack of support from correctional staff, social workers, and other professionals.

...You know what it's like when they let you out. "Here you go and have a nice day", and then that's it. You walk out of that jail and you look around and you have nowhere to go. It's a shitty feeling.



...Reentry needs to start while you're in prison. You need programs that help you deal with whatever issues you're dealing with and be able to gain the skills you need to be able to take care of yourself. When you are released you need a program that actually helps you instead of just providing a room for you.



..... I feel like I can't succeed, like everything is stacked against me. I came out with nothing and I don't have family. I've never had a real job. I have to find a place to live, but I don't know where to start. I don't have a bank account, credit, and I definitely don't have money for a deposit.

It was common for participants who to express a sense of hopelessness or despair about their future, particularly for those who had been in prison or jail for a long period of time and were disconnected from family, friends, or their community. Although similar, two distinct feelings emerged repeatedly throughout the focus groups – hopelessness and learned helplessness.

Hopelessness, the feeling that nothing could be done to make a situation better, was often associated with despair. Participants shared their feelings of hopelessness and frustration to live a “normal” life. Helplessness, the feeling of being powerless to improve a situation, surfaced as participants shared their struggle to find housing and stay out of prison. Most participants experienced repeated failed attempts to improve their life after incarceration. Repeated failures reinforced a feeling of helplessness, leading them to stop trying to improve thier lives, even when opportunities to do so became available.

.....I would try not using and stay on my meds, but it never lasted. I didn't know how to stay clean. Living on the streets is hard and drugs made it easier. I always ended up going back to jail. Things didn't change until I went to a program and stopped using. It hasn't always been great or easy, but I have been out for over a year and a half now. I'm learning new things and I feel like I have a chance.

Quantitative Analysis – Reentry Experience by the Numbers

Quantitatively, the research produced data which supports the rich qualitative analysis and provides insight into an array of obstacles that negatively impacted the lives of justice involved adults and their inability to obtain housing in San Francisco. In an effort to truly understand their housing needs, the researchers targeted marginalized groups of unstably housed individuals who resided in shelters, navigation centers, transitional housing, drug treatment, and those engaged in mental health services. A total of 284 survey responses were received. Respondents to the Housing Needs of Justice Involved Adults (HNJIA) survey overwhelmingly reported challenges with housing instability at each interval through their interaction with the criminal justice system.

The HNJIA survey collected descriptive statistics which include respondent demographics, behavioral health challenges, the impact of incarceration, as well access and barriers to transitional and permanent housing. The data is a small window into the lives of justice involved adults in San Francisco, and underscores the importance of critical analysis, in-depth review, and enlarging the solution space.

Figure 5: Housing Instability Before, After, and at the Time of Survey

HOUSING INSTABILITY & THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Unstably housed includes those residing in emergency shelters, transitional housing, staying with family and friends, treatment programs or places not meant for habitation. HNJIA survey respondents reported:



76%

Were unstably housed prior to their most recent incarceration



47%

Did not know where they were going to live upon release.



96%

Were unstably housed upon release



73%

Were unstably housed at the time of the HNJIA survey

Demographics

The largest demographic of respondents to the HNJIA survey were Black (46%), making up nearly half of those who participated in the survey. This was followed by LatinX (18%) and White (16%). While the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54, 29% of those who participated were between the ages of 25 and 34.

Figure 6: Race/Ethnicity

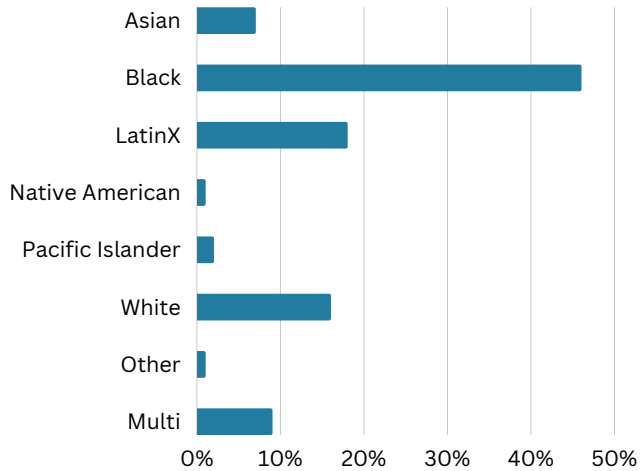
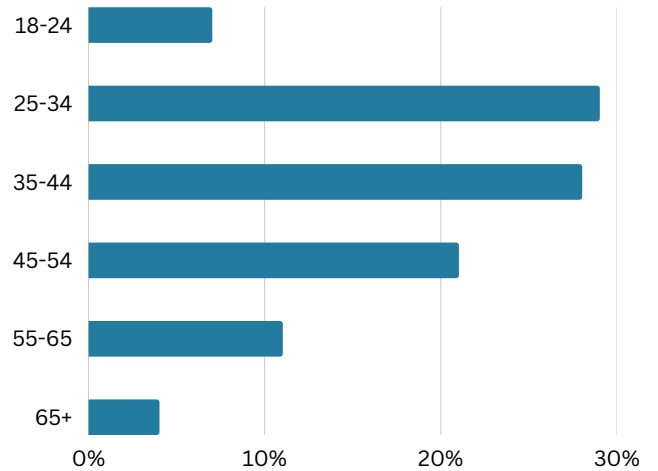


Figure 7: Age



The majority of respondents were either under the supervision of the San Francisco Adult Probation Department or state parole (60%). While females make up 10% of all inmates nationally, 26% of respondents were female.

Figure 8: Gender

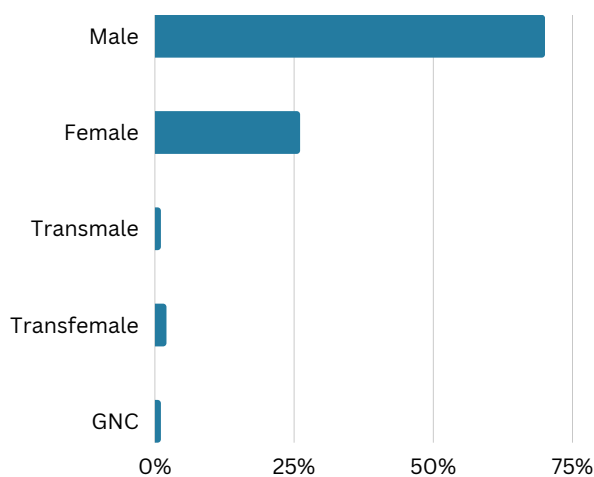
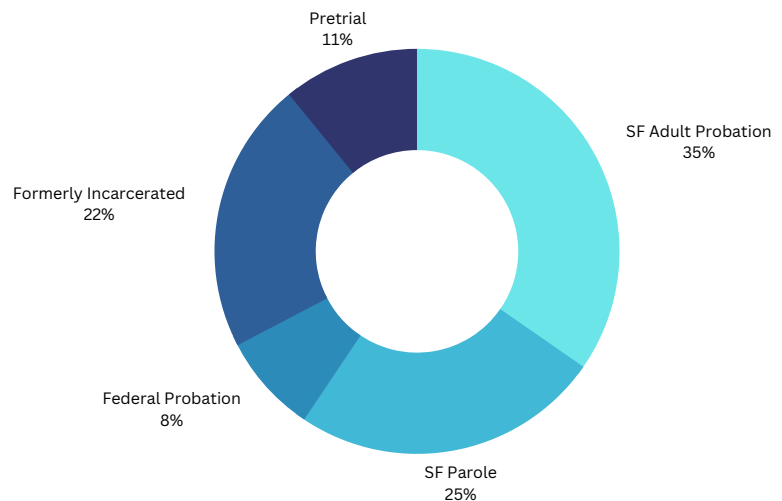


Figure 9: Justice Involvement Type



Behavioral Health

Justice-involved adults in San Francisco often have significant behavioral health challenges that are not being adequately addressed. Some of the most prevalent conditions include Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders, Mood Disorders, Substance Use Disorders, and complex trauma. There is growing recognition that many justice-involved adults have behavioral health needs that contribute to their involvement in the criminal justice system, and addressing these needs can be an important part of helping them successfully reintegrate into their communities.

People with behavioral health challenges make up approximately one-third of California's jail and prison population, have a high prevalence of incarceration, and elevated risk of experiencing street homelessness or being unstably housed⁷. At any given time, approximately 35-40% of San Francisco jail inmates are under the care of Jail Behavioral Health Services and approximately 15% are treated for mental illness⁸.

Mental illness is a significant contributor to homelessness. Many individuals experiencing homelessness have a mental health condition, and these conditions can make it difficult for them to maintain stable housing. Additionally, the stress and trauma of homelessness can exacerbate existing mental health conditions. Respondents to the HNJA survey reported complex behavioral health challenges, 56% self-reported a mental health diagnosis, while 80% of those with a mental health diagnosis report having 2 or more diagnoses. Drug addiction was rampant among the HNJA survey respondents with 74% reporting a history of addiction and 81% reported drugs and alcohol led to their most recent incarceration.



Figure 10: Behavioral Health Challenges

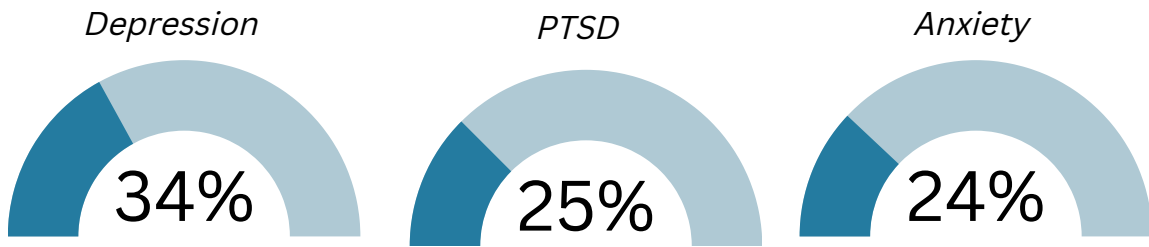
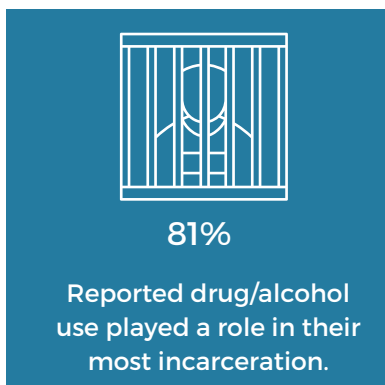
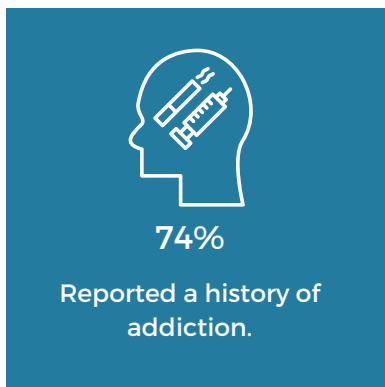


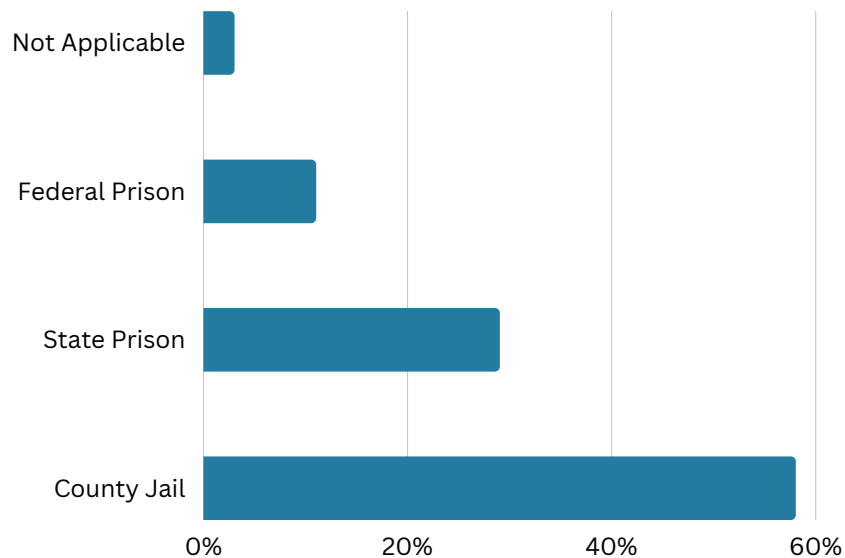
Figure 11: Substance Use Experience



Incarceration

Incarceration can have a number of negative effects on an individual, including housing instability. National research suggests that up to 15% of incarcerated people experience homelessness in the year before admission to prison. Research continues to highlight a strong link between incarceration and homelessness. A 2018 report by the Prison Policy Initiative found “that formerly incarcerated people are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public”⁹. Locally, the HNJIA survey found that 76% of respondents were unstably housed prior to their most recent incarceration and 47% reported that they did not know where they were going to live upon release from their most recent incarceration.

Figure 12: Location of Recent Incarceration



10

Average number of times respondents had been to jail.

**9.2
YEARS**

Average length of time respondents had been incarcerated during their life.

1.5

Average number of times respondents had been to prison.

Barriers to Housing

HNJIA respondents faced several barriers to access transitional and permanent housing. While housing instability may be linked to structural inequalities such as race and poverty, barriers to access basic stabilizing factors such as housing are exacerbated for justice involved individuals, particularly in San Francisco. The cost of rent is among the highest in the United States. Landlords and property managers may view formerly incarcerated people as high-risk tenants due to their criminal history. Additionally, in California, people on probation or parole are required to live in the county where they are being supervised. Financial insecurity, rising rent, poor credit, criminal history, and substance use were among the leading barriers identified by survey respondents.

At the time of the HNJIA survey 73% of respondents were unstably housed. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that the cost of housing was the largest barrier, followed by lack of income and criminal history, with 16% of respondents reporting that they had been denied housing because of their criminal record.

Respondents reported receiving an array of supportive services while being unstably housed including temporary stays in shelters, navigation centers, and transitional housing programs, and rental assistance. Respondents noted ongoing challenges with accessing housing through San Francisco’s Homeless Response System – Coordinated Entry. While only 44% of survey respondents received a housing assessment through Coordinated Entry, only 7% were offered permanent housing.

Figure 13: Housing Barriers

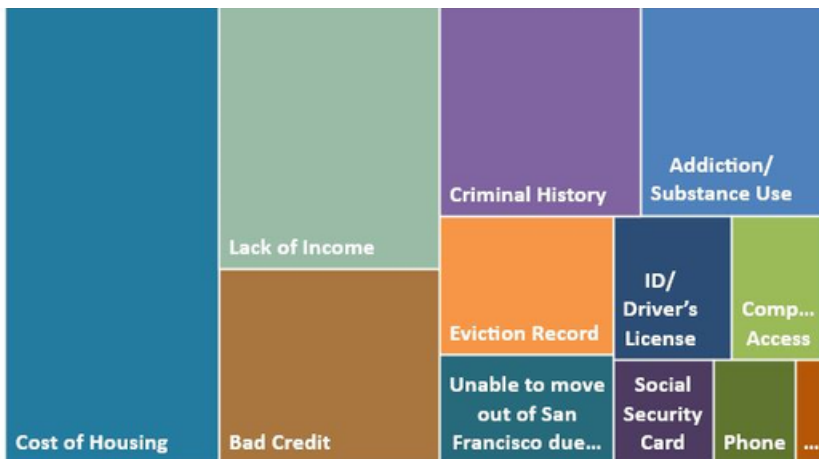
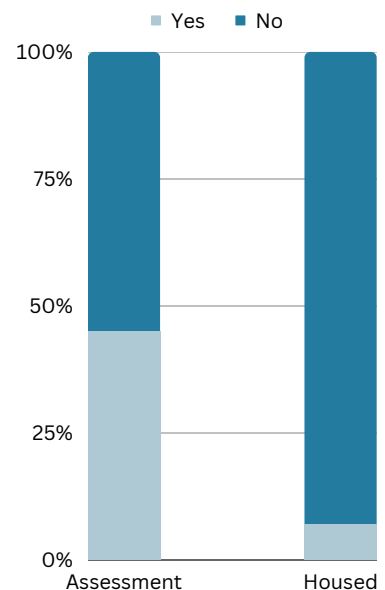


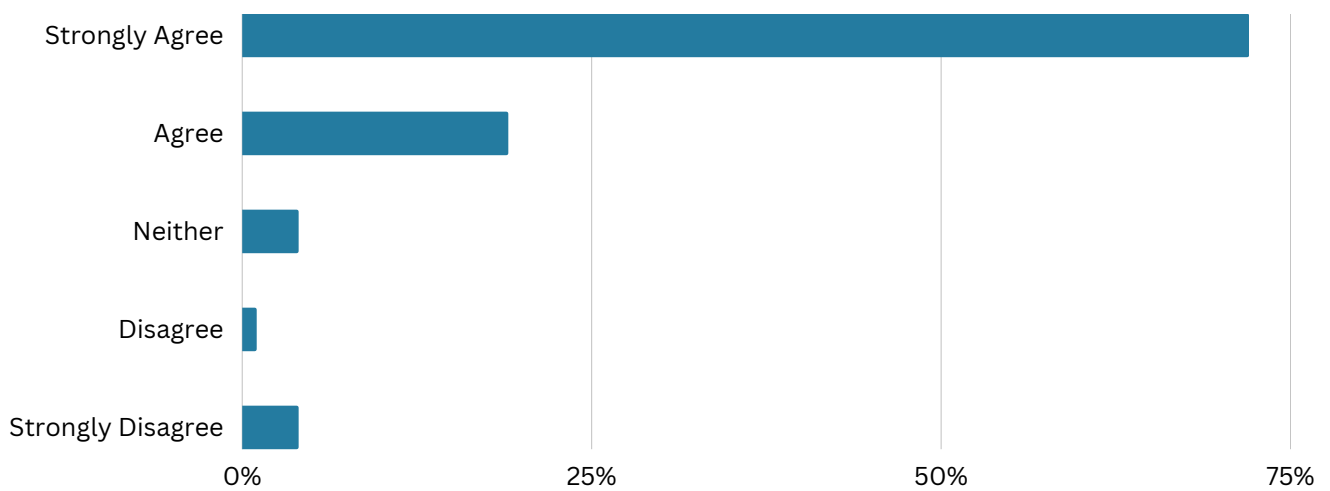
Figure 14: Coordinated Entry Outcomes



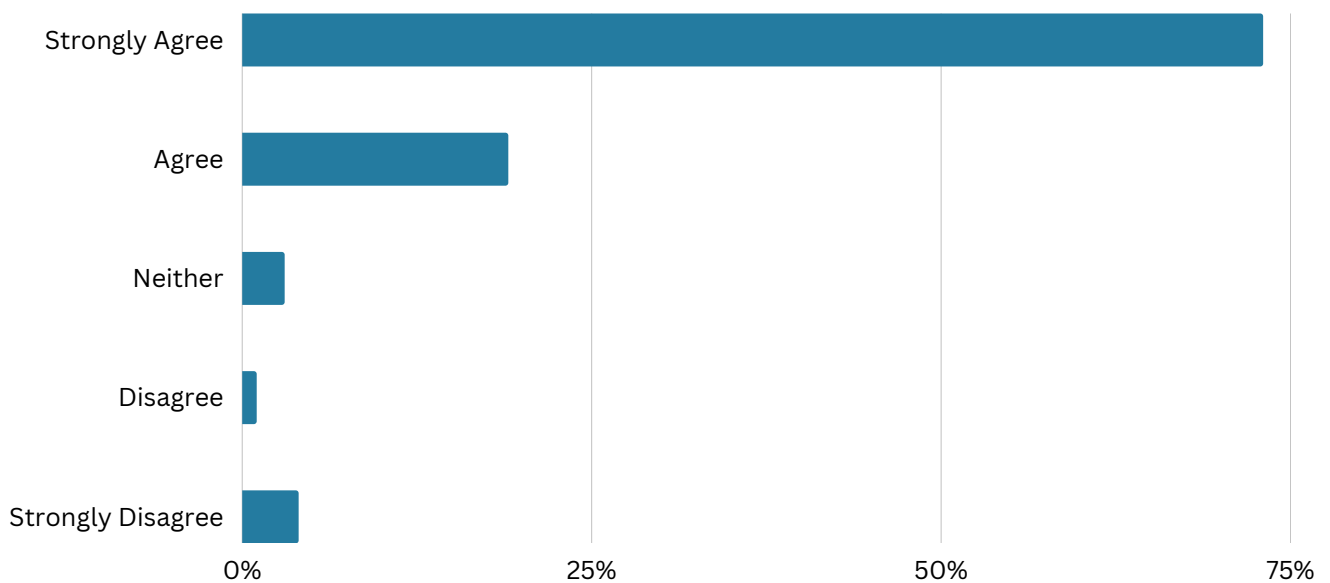
Likert Scale Responses

The HNJA survey included three Likert Scale questions designed to measure the attitudes and beliefs of respondents. Overwhelmingly, respondents support the City and County of San Francisco funding a 24/7 stabilization center, long term transitional housing, and a shallow rental subsidy program, which are all designed to support the needs of justice involved adults.

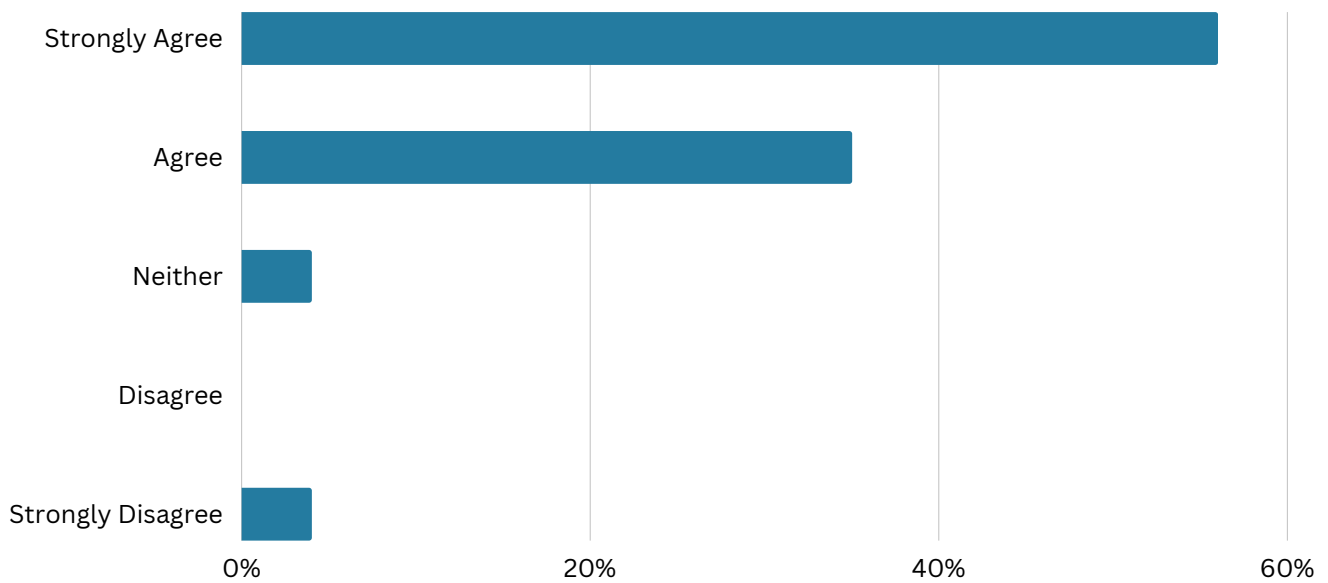
Is there a need for a 24/7 stabilization center for unhoused justice involved people exiting from jail/prison?



Is there a need for long term transitional housing (1-3 years) for justice involved people?



Would justice involved adults benefit from a rental subsidy lasting 6 months to 3 years?



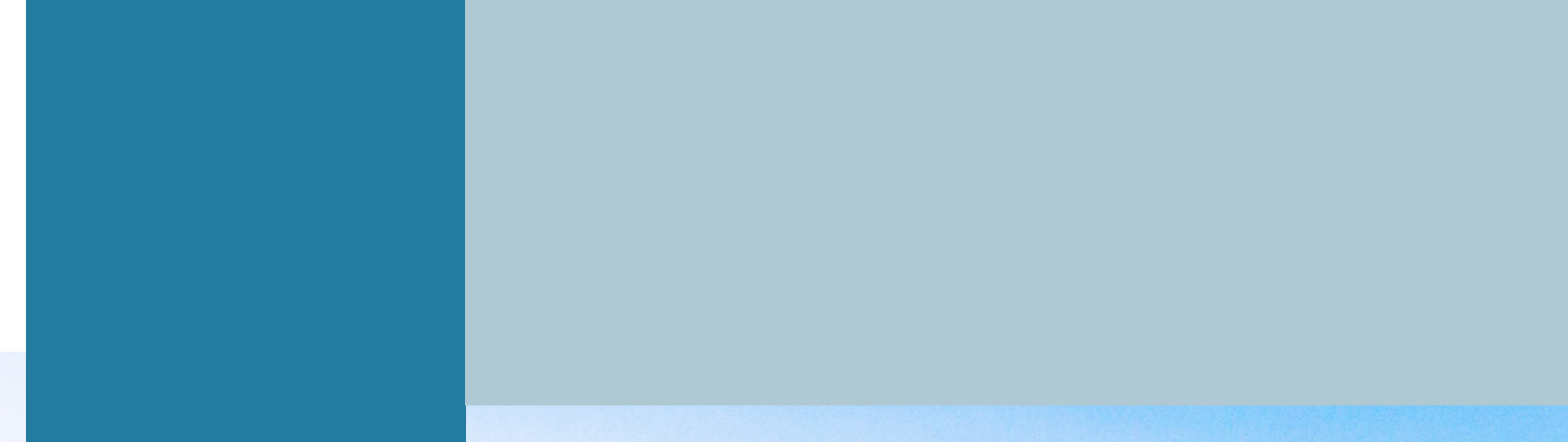
Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics is the branch of statistics that deals with making inferences about a population based on sample data. There are two main types of inferential statistics: point estimation and hypothesis testing. The HNJA used sample data to test a hypothesis about a population parameter.

Hypothesis Testing	
Test the association between Justice Involvement and Current Housing Situation	
Null Hypothesis	Hypothesis
There is not a correlation between Justice Involvement and Current Living Situation	There is a correlation between Justice Involvement and Current Living Situation

The analysis of the HNJA research found a statistically significant association between type of justice involvement and current living situation. While the sample of people Released Pretrial was small (n=23), 96% of respondents were currently unstably housed.

Justice Involvement	Unstably Housed	Stably Housed
Federal Probation	53%	47%
Formerly Incarcerated	62%	38%
Parole SF	69%	30%
Probation SF	80%	20%
Released Pretrial	96%	4%
Total	73%	27%



Recommendations

Shared Goal to Address Housing Needs

Tailoring housing solutions for justice-involved individuals requires collaboration between stakeholders. A unified goal of promoting permanent exits from the justice system and securing housing can better support individuals in living healthy and productive lives.

Expand the Framework: Moving Beyond Housing First & Harm Reduction

A one size fits all approach is not working in San Francisco. By enlarging and enhancing the solution space, we create a continuum of temporary and permanent housing opportunities for those who are unstably housed.

Build a Recovery System of Care (RSC)

A RSC is a coordinated network of community-based services that is person-centered and uses a strength based approach to achieve freedom from addiction and improve health, wellness, and quality of life. The City should address substance use through a "system of care," which includes an array of resources and operates through multiple modalities. The RSC includes a range of opportunities from treatment on demand, therapeutic residences, and extended recovery (long term transitional housing) to achieve a healthy, drug free life.

Fund a Stabilization Center

San Francisco needs a 24/7 stabilization center where people can immediately have refuge from the streets. A 75 unit drug and alcohol free program would serve as an entry point into services.

Increase Financial Literacy

To enhance housing stability, incorporate financial literacy, counseling, and coaching into reentry housing programs. Financial health is vital for justice-involved adults to secure permanent housing and achieve self-sufficiency. Integrate credit building and savings initiatives along with financial education to ensure long-term success.

Bolster Transitional Housing

Transitional housing is crucial for developing life skills needed for independence. Justice-involved adults deserve access to tailored transitional housing, regardless of their monitoring or supervision type. Increasing bed capacity and allowing 1-3 year stays can aid in successful reentry. Graduates of transitional housing should be prioritized for permanent housing.

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