

To: The Child Welfare Council Members

From: The Youth Justice Committee

Date: March 5, 2025

Background

The Stepping Home Model was presented to the Child Welfare Council (CWC) on September 4, 2024. This model, based on scholarly reviews of published research, establishes a framework, best practices, and a series of elements to serve as California's policy goals regarding care of youth committed to Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTFs) in the state's juvenile legal system, and the services and supports to make possible transitions from SYTFs to Less Restrictive Programs (LRPs) as provided for in the legislation that realigned responsibility for these youth from the state corrections department to county probation.

To reiterate, the model adopted by the Youth Justice Committee and OYCR comprises the following key elements:

1. SYTFs and LRPs must protect youth from harm and abuse by promoting cultures and environments of dignity and respect.
2. Youth facing potential commitment to SYTFs should receive professional neuro-psychological assessments to identify underlying trauma, developmental needs, behavioral health needs, and unmet social needs, coupled with targeted healing, trauma-informed and therapeutic interventions by qualified personnel.
3. Informed by assessment, each youth's case plan should be developed utilizing family and community support teams and include full access to restorative health care.
4. Informed by assessment and the youth's whole person care plan, access must be provided to behavioral health services as needed, administered with fidelity to quality, dose, and duration.
5. Restorative justice programming must be provided that promotes youth accountability for offenses and builds positive relationships and behavior, including victim awareness and personal insight.
6. Cohort support and programming that connects youth to others going through similar transitions, providing motivation through peer support, and exposing youth to pro-social experiences.
7. Strength based, healthy living and support activities for positive youth development, including opportunities for healing and spirituality, quality and age-appropriate education, outdoor and leisure time, and opportunity to move from the facility to the community to attend school, work, and family and community events.
8. Use of trusted/credible messengers with lived experience to help the youth engage with staff and programs, and to help them express their needs.

9. Pre-release engagement with community-based health organizations and resources that address the social determinants of health through CalAIM and Enhanced Care Management services provided by trusted community resources to ensure continuity of care and access to needed community services including housing.
10. Transitions to community and home living that include comprehensive wraparound services such as supported living programs, basic income assistance, continuing behavioral health support, education and vocational placements, and transportation support.

The research that supports the model, and its sources, is included in the issue briefs shared with the CWC and available for further review below:

- [OYCR-UCLA Brief – Stepping Home Elements – Restorative Justice](#)
- [OYCR-UCLA Stepping Home Elements – Credible Messengers](#)
- [OYCR-UCLA Stepping Home Elements – Trauma-Informed Care](#)
- [OYCR-UCLA Stepping Home Elements – Reentry](#)
- [OYCR-UCLA Stepping Home Elements – Positive Youth Development](#)
- [OYCR-UCLA Stepping Home Elements – Less Restrictive Programs](#)
- [OYCR – UCLA Practice Guidelines for Treating Behavioral Health Disorders in SYTFs and Other Facilities](#)

Request

The Youth Justice Committee requests that the CWC adopt the Stepping Home Model and Elements as the standard of care and services to be pursued for youth committed to SYTFs and embarking on transitions to LRPs and upon their return to community living.

Next Steps

If adopted by the Council, the next stage in the development of the model will be preparation of action and implementation guides for each of the elements, as well as development of implementation assessment instruments that can be used by county probation leadership, staff and affected youth, as well as by external stakeholders to determine progress towards fulfilling these best practices.

Such guides and assessment instruments are essential considering the highly decentralized structure of Juvenile Probation in California. While probation facilities are subject to Title 15 and Title 24 regulations, these regulations serve as minimum health and safety requirements, not as guidance for fulfilling the goals of the transition from a strictly correctional model to a behavioral health-based youth justice model in the state. As Governor Newsom said when the Legislature enacted SB 823, “The system should be about helping kids imagine and pursue new lives ... unpack trauma and adverse experiences.”

While all parts of the youth justice system in California embrace these goals, understanding all the elements will vary from situation to situation, and it will be of great value to all the stakeholders to be able to implement and assess our state’s progress using common language and common measures.