



Reentry Readiness

PbS Data Snapshot: Perspectives on Reentry During the Pandemic
April 2022

One of the first responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by juvenile justice agencies was intensified efforts to reduce the number of young people in residential facilities where close living quarters made social distancing difficult, potentially aiding in the spread of the virus. Judges, court staff and attorneys worked on the front end of the system to keep young people out of residential placements while state agency, facility and community staff and attorneys worked at the deep end to move young people out of residential placements. The average daily population in detention (short-term pre-adjudication placements) and correction (post-adjudication treatment) centers remains lower than before the pandemic. However, while the population in detention centers fell dramatically and quickly but have been slowly increasing again, correction facilities have seen a continued steady decrease in an average daily population of 51 young people in April 2020 to 36 in October 2021.

Curious about the impact of the efforts to move young people out of residential care, the Performance-based Standards (PbS) Learning Institute looked at more than 6,000 survey responses from young people leaving facilities from April 2020 to October 2021. Research and experience have shown that young people with the best chances for successful reentry (meaning both discontinuing unlawful behavior and realizing positive life outcomes) are both prepared and ready and asking them is the best way to find out.

The PbS survey is based on recent reentry and adolescent development research, including the [PbS Reentry Measurement Standards](#) project which identifies basic necessities, skills, resources, supports, connections and attitudes that are most likely to help young people develop into purposeful, productive citizens. In this PbS Data Snapshot, we share young people's responses to some of the questions that helped increase our understanding of the pandemic's impacts. These responses highlight issues that need to be addressed to overcome the many challenges posed by the pandemic and racial violence so that young people are better for their juvenile justice experience, and we move toward a more equitable world.

Where did young people go when they left facilities?

Most of the young people who left facilities went to live with their families but there were signs of housing instability.

Shortly before a young person is released from a residential placement, PbS facilities ask them to complete the [PbS Reentry Survey](#), using a handheld kiosk to enter their responses directly or completing a paper form. Most young people, but not all, said that they knew where they were going when they left the facility (87%) both at the beginning of the pandemic and in October 2021. More than 80% consistently said they were going "to be sleeping most of the time" with

their families. As recommended by homelessness experts working toward understanding housing stability, the PbS Reentry Survey asks young people to indicate all the possible places they will be sleeping most of the time. There was a slight increase in both the number of young people who said they would be sleeping most of the time at a program or a facility (up to 9% in October 2021) and at transitional housing (up to 7% in October 2021), from 8% and 6%, respectively, in April 2020.

As the pandemic progressed, slightly fewer said they would be sleeping most of the time at home with their families (from 84% down to a low of 81% in April 2021) and slightly more (1-2%) said they would be sleeping most of the time with their significant other, couch surfing, sleeping outdoors, in a car, in transitional housing or at a residential program or facility. Of the young people who said they would sleep most of the time at home with their families, almost half also listed a second and sometimes third additional place they would sleep in October 2021, a slight increase from April 2020.

What did young people have with them?

More young people left with or had easy access to their medical records, immunization records and prescriptions but fewer had social security cards and birth certificates.

The survey presents young people with a list of documents often required to attend school, obtain employment and secure housing. The survey asks young people to review the list and indicate all that they have in their possession or can easily access. The pandemic appears to have increased their availability and access to health-related documents, e.g., medical records, immunization records and prescriptions, yet made it more difficult to access birth

certificates and social security cards. About 5% fewer young people said they had access to their social security card, and 3% fewer said they had access to their birth certificates. The percent who said they had access to a valid ID increased to 67% in October 2021.

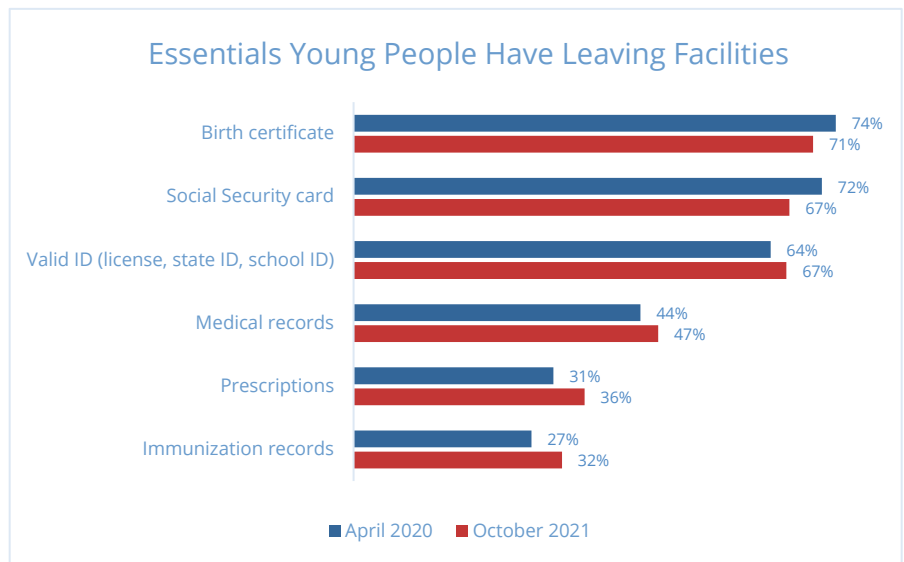


Figure 1: Compares responses from young people in April 2020 and in October 2021 about which essential documentation they have or can access.

What were young people thinking and feeling?

Responses showed a decrease in young people’s feelings of readiness and optimism about the future.

Resiliency, overall life satisfaction, having a good education and job, positive relationships and being able to realize individual potential increases the likelihood that a young person will be successful when they leave the juvenile justice system. Responses to the PbS Reentry Survey in October 2021 showed fewer young people agreed strongly that they

were confident they could achieve their reentry goals or that they were ready to get a job and had the supports they need to be successful than in April 2020. Additionally, the responses indicated that hope and resiliency waned. Fewer young people felt strongly that their lives had purpose or that they had meaningful goals they wanted to accomplish. Fewer said when things didn’t go their way, they were good at finding ways to make things better and that they had some control over their lives. Without feeling hopeful about possibilities for the future, it’s easy to see why too many young people return to the juvenile justice system.

What can we do?

Advances made in juvenile justice to integrate positive youth development research into daily practices are dependent on staff and relationships among staff, the young people and their families. They all need our support, compassion and gratitude.

While not included in this PbS Data Snapshot, it is important to remember that staff working at the facilities have also been impacted by the pandemic and racial violence. They have been showing up for young people. They worry about their health, their families’ health and the health of the young people they serve. Staff shortages are plaguing agencies across the country. We need to work together to move forward.

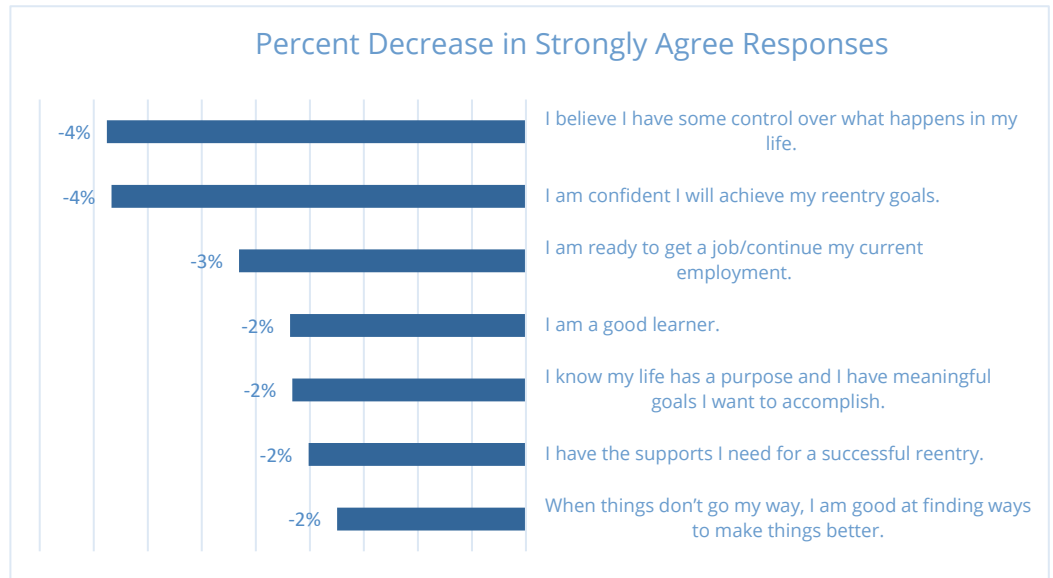


Figure 2: While overall agreement represented by “strongly agree” and “agree” responses remained similar for questions about reentry readiness between April 2020 and October 2021, this table shows the percent decrease in “strongly agree” responses from young people.