

**Santa Cruz County Probation Department**

Juvenile  
Probation  
Division  
Annual  
Report

2024

Our **VISION** is a safe, equitable, and thriving community.

Our **MISSION** is to contribute to community well-being through positive engagement, connection to services, and support for those impacted by crime.

Prepared by  
Division  
Director Jose  
Flores

<b>Table of Contents</b>	
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	2-3
<b>Supervision Strategies</b> .....	3-5
<b>Juvenile Justice Reform</b> .....	5-6
<b>Legislative Reform and Programs</b> .....	6-11
<b>Line of Sight for the Future of the Work</b> .....	11-12

**Introduction:** The Juvenile Division administers a comprehensive array of services, including investigation, diversion, pre- and post-adjudication interventions, community supervision, and out-of-home supervision for referred youth. Additionally, the division oversees youth committed to Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTF) under SB 823, following the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Realignment. Through strategic collaboration with community partners, the division ensures the delivery of trauma-informed, culturally responsive support that prioritizes the well-being of youth and families while upholding public safety.

**Goals:** The Juvenile Division is committed to enhancing public safety by reducing recidivism through the development of life skills and competencies in youth and families. This mission is achieved through meaningful engagement and collaboration with families, youth, and community stakeholders. By delivering culturally responsive supervision and services, the division supports community safety and fulfills its vital role as entrusted by the court and juvenile justice partners.

The Juvenile Division utilizes the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM) to effectively engage youth and families. The ICPM serves as a comprehensive framework that outlines shared values, core components, and practice standards for professionals supporting California's children, youth, and families. Central to this model is Child and Family Teaming (CFT), a collaborative, team-based approach designed to achieve key objectives, including enhancing life skills, fostering family engagement, reducing recidivism, and mitigating victimization.

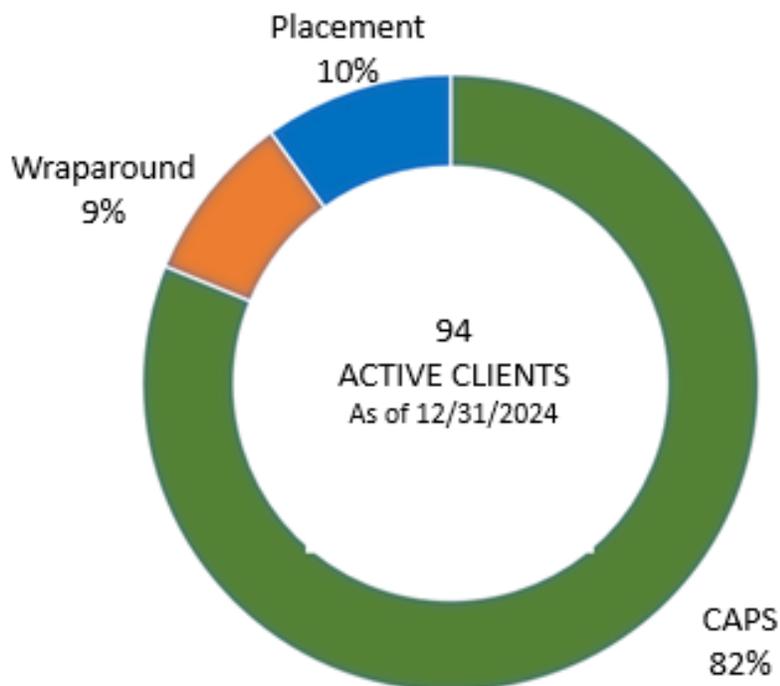
**ICPM Guiding Practice Principles:**

ICPM Values	ICPM Phases	ICPM Guiding Practice Principles
<p><b>Family-driven and Youth Guided:</b> Youth and family voices are solicited and respected.</p> <p><b>Community-Based:</b> Services are provided in the community.</p> <p><b>Culturally &amp; linguistically competent:</b> Services are provided in the family's primary language. While valuing traditions, values, and heritage as sources of strength.</p>	<p>Engagement, Assessment, and Team Preparation</p> <p>Initial Service Planning</p> <p>Monitoring and Adapting</p> <p>Transition</p>	<p><b>Family voice and choice-</b> Each family member's voice is important.</p> <p><b>Team-based-</b> Team consists of individuals agreed upon by the family.</p> <p><b>Natural supports-</b> Friends, neighbors, coworkers, church members, and others identified by family.</p> <p><b>Collaboration and integration-</b>Team shares responsibility in all aspects of plan development.</p> <p><b>Community-based-</b> Services and supports are accessible and available in the family's community.</p> <p><b>Culturally respectful-</b> Plan supports achievement of goals for change that integrates the youth and family's culture.</p> <p><b>Individualized-</b> Plan is built on strengths, needs, and interest of the family members.</p> <p><b>Strength-based-</b> Team will use family's skills, knowledge and build upon the initial Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment.</p> <p><b>Persistence-</b> The team never gives up on youth or families. When met with resistance, the team will revisit the plan to identify any revisions.</p> <p><b>Outcome-based-</b> Team tracks goals and progress in plan and adjust as needed.</p>

**Executive Summary**

In 2024, the department provided training on the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM) to community partners, emphasizing its ten principles for effective family and youth engagement. These efforts promote alignment, shared values, and meeting families where they are at, which further supports the rehabilitative process. The Juvenile Division continues to collaborate with system partners to identify and strengthen natural support systems early in the process. We recognize the importance family, mentors, and community connections are in supporting a youth and family’s success as they navigate the juvenile justice system.. Our youth-centered, trauma-informed approach continues to focus on fostering positive change and success for the families we serve. The Juvenile Division ensures effective supervision through a team of nine Deputy Probation Officers, guided by four Supervising Probation Officers.

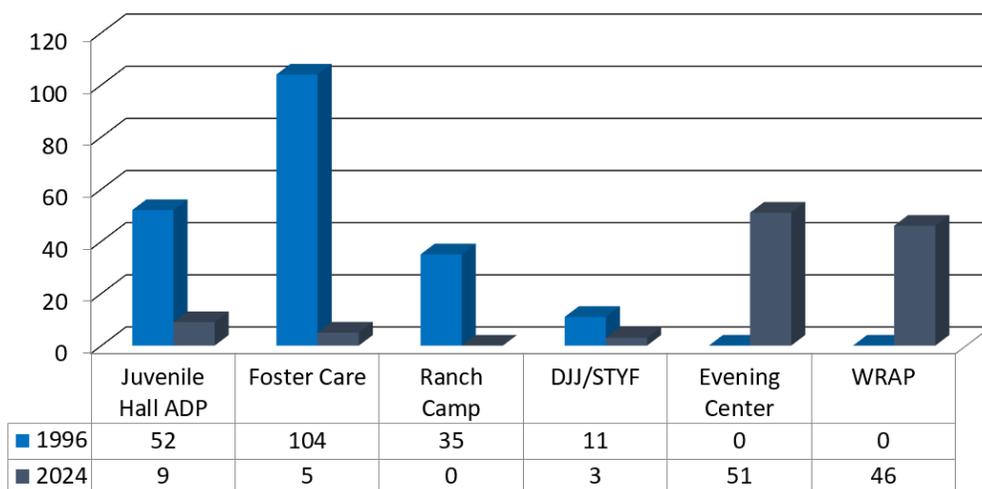
The following chart outlines caseload types and percentages in the Juvenile Division:



The Connecting and Promoting Success (CAPS) caseload, serving 82% of supervised youth, uses a youth-centered, needs-driven approach to support those on informal and formal probation, fostering connections and promoting success for youth and their families. The Wraparound caseloads specialize in family engagement and behavioral health services for youth at risk of out-of-home placement. These caseloads follow a team-based model involving a transitional specialist, a behavioral health clinician, and a probation officer. Placement caseloads support youth in settings such as Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs, Ranch Camps, or Secure Youth Treatment Facilities, with placement decisions made by Juvenile Probation and ordered by the Juvenile Justice Court. This unit also supports extended foster care youth (ages 18–21) who, despite receiving wraparound services, were removed from their homes due to significant behavioral and therapeutic needs.

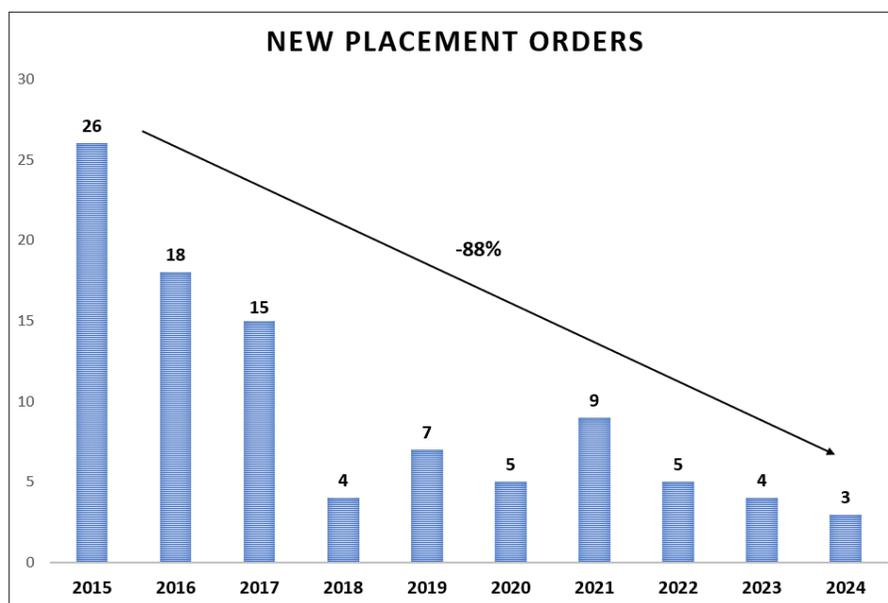
The chart below illustrates how the department’s continuum of services, in partnership with community collaborators, has successfully reduced out-of-home placements for youth under supervision, allowing them to remain in their homes. By leveraging intensive local programs and evidence-based practices, these initiatives effectively rehabilitate youth and families while yielding substantial community cost savings.

Reductions at all levels of Institutional care, while increasing capacity of community-based interventions....



In 2024, the Juvenile Division, in collaboration with court partners, successfully minimized new out-of-home placements, with only five placement orders issued, three of which were for new cases. New cases are defined as youth who are ordered into Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (formerly known as group homes). Supportive programming, such as the Luna Evening Center, established after 1996, and the development of the Luna Y Sol Familia Center, continue to provide critical support to youth and families in addressing their needs. The focus remains on the early identification of natural supports, beginning at the Intake Unit and continuing our continuum of services. Additionally, a strong emphasis on Probation diversion, coupled with active staff engagement with youth and families and strategic collaboration with community partners, remains essential in reducing out-of-home placements.

Probation staff facilitated 33 Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings in 2024, empowering youth and families along with their natural supports to play a more active role in case planning and probation strategies. These meetings bring together professionals from county agencies and community organizations to collaboratively address the needs of youth and families. As a result, overall placements have decreased by 88%, as illustrated in the graph below.



In 2024, the Juvenile Division continued to administer the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS) by initiating use of the JAIS Case Plan. In addition to identifying a youth’s level of risk to reoffend, the JAIS has three goals:

- To help probation officers quickly establish appropriate supervision strategies based on youth strengths and needs, anticipated behaviors and attitudes, and the reasons for behaviors and attitudes.
- To provide probation officers with effective strategies for addressing unmet needs before they escalate into law violations.
- To reduce recidivism, which is defined as any youth receiving a subsequent adjudication while on active supervision (which was 6% in 2024)

Juvenile Probation Supervisors and Juvenile Division Managers actively monitor the administration of the instrument to ensure inter-rater reliability. As a result, 86% of all cases requiring an initial assessment for moderate to high needs received a full JAIS evaluation. Furthermore, JAIS assessments are now integrated into court reports and case staffings to enhance case planning and decision-making.

### Juvenile Justice Reform

Since 1999, the Juvenile Division has been at the forefront of reducing juvenile detention, serving as a model site for the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s (AECF) Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). This initiative focuses on eliminating unnecessary detention, enhancing data-driven decision-making, streamlining court processes, establishing risk-based detention criteria, expanding community-based alternatives, improving confinement conditions, addressing youth disparities, and meeting the needs of specialized populations.

Our division has welcomed delegations from across the country and around the world to share our innovative and effective practices. In recognition of our leadership, we were honored with the National JDAI Distinguished System Leadership Award in 2019. In 2024, the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) further recognized our leadership with the inaugural Visionary Award, honoring the transformative work in the juvenile justice system which inspires a system that prioritizes healing of young people. Moving forward, the Probation Department remains

committed to implementing JDAI's core strategies and driving continued reform efforts in juvenile justice.

Probation continues to place a strong focus on diverting youth from the Juvenile Justice system through collaboration with law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations. Together, we are developing a community of practice dedicated to identifying and implementing early diversion initiatives that help reduce the need for detention.

In Fall 2024, staff, partners, youth and families with lived experience played a vital role in planning and designing the Juvenile Division's youth justice convening, *Transformations in Juvenile Justice: Reflecting on the Past and Shaping the Future*. The event featured distinguished leaders from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Office of Youth and Community Restoration, former probation leadership, and local system and community representatives. It provided a platform to reflect on 30 years of juvenile justice reform in Santa Cruz County while establishing a vision for the future.

Learning and discussion sessions were facilitated by staff, county and community partners. Youth and parents also actively participated in panel discussions and breakout sessions, sharing their experiences with the juvenile justice system. Their valuable insights offered justice professionals a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by system-impacted families and ways to enhance support for them.



### [Legislative Reform, and Programs](#)

Outlined below is an overview of recent legislative changes, programs and collaborative efforts the Juvenile Division and community partners are working on together to enhance services for youth and families:

#### **Senate Bill 823 – Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Realignment**

For nearly two decades, California has passed measures to reduce youth commitments to state juvenile and adult systems, focusing on alternatives to incarceration and expanding community-based options. As of June 30, 2023, all Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facilities were closed as a result of SB 823 which passed on September 30, 2020, shifting responsibility for managing youth under the jurisdiction of juvenile courts to local jurisdictions to develop Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTF). To accommodate returning youth, our department contracted with

Sonoma County Probation in 2021, with Merced County as a secondary option.

To support this transition, the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) was established in July 2021 within the California Health and Human Services Agency. OYCR develops reports on youth outcomes, identifies policy recommendations, disseminates best practices for rehabilitative services, and provides technical assistance for local youth diversion programs. Additionally, OYCR serves as an Ombudsperson, overseeing youth complaints in institutional settings.

### **Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)**

California Assembly Bill 153 (AB 153) authorized both federal Title IV-E and State Block Grant (SBG) expenditures for prevention services. In 2022, the County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department (HSD) Family and Children's Services (FCS), and Probation Department Leadership opted in a partnership, which is locally known as the Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP).

The CPP presents an unprecedented opportunity to move collectively “upstream,” focusing resources and efforts on children, youth, and families before they are involved with Child Welfare, Juvenile Probation, or other systems, and to greatly reduce negative outcomes for children, youth, and families through effective primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. The purpose of the project is to create a Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) that will be used as a countywide blueprint for building and enhancing a system of prevention programs, practices, and policies over the next five years.

Following state approval in June 2023, the CPP Cabinet continues to collaborate with community providers to develop community pathways that prevent system involvement. Evidence-based training, such as Motivational Interviewing, has been offered to community partners who support youth and their families. As the Cabinet moves forward, the focus in this stage of planning is on expanding prevention and diversion efforts, creating additional pathways to help youth and families avoid system involvement.

### **Secure Youth Treatment Facility (SYTF) Program**



In alignment with SB 823 and SB 92, which emphasize the importance of keeping justice-involved youth connected to their families and communities to support rehabilitation, the department received approval from the Board of Supervisors in October 2024 to establish a local Secure Youth Treatment Facility (SYTF). This decision follows collaborative partnerships with Sonoma County, which has provided housing support for our youth. The shift to a local SYTF will be pivotal in strengthening familial and community connections, ultimately enhancing rehabilitation and re-entry success.

Both the Juvenile and Adult Divisions have played a key role in the initial supervision of these young people to ensure a smooth transition back into the community. As the Juvenile Division has deepened its understanding of the needs of these young people and their families, the value

for continuity has become increasingly clear. Moving forward, the Juvenile Division will continue to build upon this foundation, further enhancing individualized success planning to foster their success.

### **Luna Evening Center (LEC)**

The Luna Evening Center (LEC) is a collaborative initiative involving Probation, community organizations, and county agencies, designed to support probation-involved youth while also serving as a key prevention and diversion effort. LEC assists youth facing challenges such as court compliance, substance use, and behavioral concerns by providing a structured, after-school environment where they engage in targeted interventions, develop decision-making skills, and receive individualized coaching to support positive life choices. As a short-term, community-based alternative to detention, LEC reduces reliance on Juvenile Hall and helps prevent deeper system involvement.

Operating Monday through Friday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., LEC provides participants with meals and transportation, ensuring safe pickup and return home. The program accommodates up to eight youth at a time and is facilitated by Probation and County Behavioral Health staff. In collaboration with the Luna Familia Center, LEC also provides youth and their families with essential tools and resources to strengthen family dynamics and promote long-term success. Services follow a structured weekly schedule, utilizing assessments and evidence-based practices to address each participant's specific needs.

### **Student Success Project – (SSP)**

In 2018, the Santa Cruz County Probation Department and the County Office of Education (COE) launched the Student Success Project (SSP) to enhance educational success and prevent justice system involvement among South County students. This innovative initiative prioritized social-emotional interventions, individualized student assessments, and targeted support services to foster engagement and achievement focused on increasing credit accruals, attendance and students being on track to graduate as well as decreasing suspensions and expulsions.

By 2019, the pilot program had demonstrated significant improvements in school retention and credit accumulation, expanding from its initial sites at Sequoia and Freedom to include the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD). With this expansion, three additional schools—Renaissance, New School, and Pajaro Valley High School—joined the initiative, supported by six dedicated probation officers trained in Motivational Interviewing and Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) to drive meaningful student progress.

From 2019 to 2022, the Justice Assistance Grant, supported collaboration with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, Community Action Board (CAB), and COE, provided critical funding, ensuring continuity even during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project adapted swiftly, delivering virtual and in-person services to meet the evolving needs of students and families.

Building on this success, a second round of Justice Assistance Grant funding in 2023 enabled the SSP to expand further, bringing its proven prevention and intervention strategies to Rolling Hills and E.A. Hall Middle Schools. Through ongoing partnerships with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office and CAB, SSP continues to empower students, strengthen communities, and

reduce justice system involvement through proactive engagement and support. The scaling of the SSP included the addition of two student support specialists dedicated to the middle school sites in partnership with CAB.

### **Luna Y Sol Familia Center and Youth and Family Advisory Council**

Since 2022, the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County has operated the Luna y Sol Familia Center, a comprehensive, one-stop service hub dedicated to supporting at-risk Latino youth and their families. This center fosters strong partnerships between community-based organizations (CBOs) and Probation, ensuring the delivery of trauma-informed, culturally responsive services. Strategically located in the heart of the community, the center provides a wide array of resources, including educational support, behavioral health connections, youth employment opportunities, and legal aid services.

The Luna y Sol Familia Center further enhances its support through culturally relevant programming, including *Cara y Corazón*, *Joven Noble*, and *Girasol*—initiatives developed by the National Compadres Network to promote cultural healing and address the diverse challenges faced by families. Over the past year, the Juvenile Division has deepened its collaboration with CAB to develop the Youth and Family Advisory Councils. These councils serve as a platform for individuals with lived experience in the juvenile justice system to share their insights and help shape policies and practices. Most importantly, the councils provide a safe space for youth and families to build leadership skills, engage in advocacy, and participate in community events.

### **Aztecas Youth Soccer Academy (Aztecas)**

Established in 2008, the Aztecas Soccer Program has grown into a cornerstone of prevention and diversion efforts, providing transformative opportunities for system-involved and at-risk youth. This highly regarded pro-social mentorship program is dedicated to reclaiming the lives of young people impacted by gangs, violence, poverty, and substance use. Aztecas serves both probation and non-probation youth, leveraging the power of soccer and community engagement to foster resilience, personal growth, and success.

A key component of the program is the Aztecas Clubhouse in Watsonville, a safe and supportive space where youth participate in structured, pro-social activities. The Clubhouse offers academic support, leadership development, health education, and advisory panels, while also engaging participants in community service initiatives. Recognizing the importance of holistic support, the program provides meals and snacks to ensure youth have the nutrition they need to thrive.

Aztecas extends its reach through an annual two-week soccer camp for youth aged 6-14. In 2024, the camp served 250 participants, with strong backing from community stakeholders and law enforcement partners. The program continues to expand through strategic grant funding and donations, reinforcing its commitment to youth engagement and community well-being.

By integrating prevention, intervention, and diversion strategies, the Aztecas Soccer Program remains a vital force in guiding young people toward academic achievement, leadership, and positive community involvement.



### Family Night: Strengthening Families Through Pro-Social Engagement

In response to the request from SSP families for prosocial activities in safe spaces, the department developed *Family Night* in 2021 which serves as a prevention and diversion program. The department has partnered with Santa Cruz County Community Action Board (CAB) to facilitate *Family Night* programming.

Family Night consists of two dynamic sessions: Paint/Activity Night, where families engage in creative expression and bonding through art, and Resource Night, where families select topics of interest to receive tailored information and support. Each session begins with a warm meal, ensuring a welcoming and nourishing environment for all participants.

In December, families gathered for a special holiday celebration featuring a live performance by Mariachi Ilusión, a talented youth mariachi band from Watsonville. This festive event underscored the program’s commitment to cultural enrichment and community engagement.

Held bi-monthly, Family Night has served over 80 families in the past year, reinforcing its role as a cornerstone of prevention and diversion efforts. By creating a safe and supportive space for families to connect, learn, and grow, the program continues to make a lasting impact in the community.



### EQUITY



In 2023, Santa Cruz County Probation applied for and was one of four national delegations selected to participate in AECF’s Applied Leadership Network (ALN). The ALN aims to enhance the skills of community and juvenile justice practitioners, fostering partnerships to drive justice reforms and system transformation.

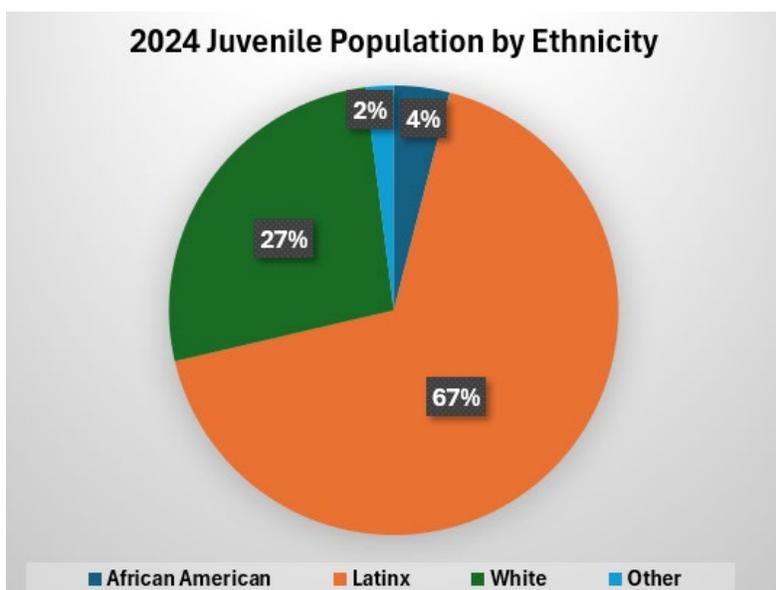
The Santa Cruz County delegation includes representatives from various disciplines, including

the Watsonville Police Department, Family and Children’s Services, United Way, Community Action Board, the Public Defender’s Office, and Probation. Together, the ALN team—alongside a dedicated local team—is focused on centering equity and collaborating with justice partners to expand diversion opportunities for Latinx youth, who are disproportionately overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. The Santa Cruz ALN team will complete the leadership program in March 2025

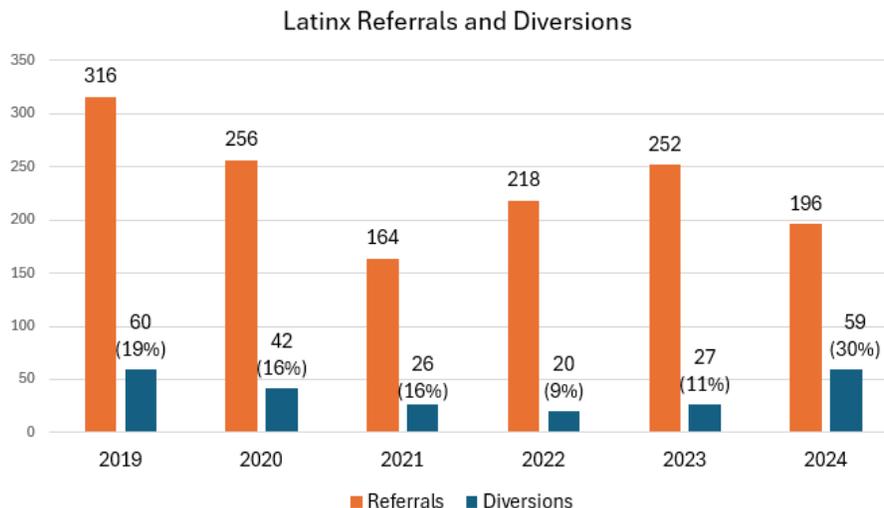
In 2024, the ALN team’s focus on diversion played a pivotal role in mobilizing the community to recognize its value and explore opportunities for expanding diversion pathways. This collective effort underscores the importance of shared contributions to its success. Insights gained from this work have already yielded significant results, as our department has enhanced its internal diversion efforts from 2023 to 2024. Additionally, the expansion of our Intake Unit, including the addition of a second Probation Officer in 2024, has led to a measurable increase in overall diversion referrals, further strengthening our commitment to sustainable diversion practices.

**Line of Sight for the Future of the Work**

Our Juvenile Division continues to be committed to centering equity and decreasing disparities in our system. Our efforts are supported by our continuing partnership with the AECF. In 2022, our Juvenile Division Director enrolled in the first, Santa Cruz County Results Count Leadership Program in concert with other county leaders. The program is designed to strengthen leadership capacity and align contributions to center equity and accelerate equitable results for all people in the County with a focus on our most burden populations. This continued partnership had allowed our Juvenile Division Director to further expand use of the Results Count Framework by deepening foundational knowledge through participation in the AECF 2022-2023 Results Count Practitioners Program (RCP2), which helps leaders increase their application of the Results Count framework, tools, and practices to achieve equitable results for young people, families, and communities. The framework has been implemented through data-driven strategies and coordinated collaboration with county partners, enhancing prevention and diversion efforts to support youth and families while reducing formal involvement in the juvenile justice system.



The following chart illustrates our trend line and affirms our line of sight for the future of our work.



From 2019 to 2022, Latinx youth diversions continued to steadily decrease. However, in the last three years, efforts to promote equity and expand diversion opportunities have been a strategic goal and emphasis in the Juvenile Division. This includes adding a second probation officer to the Intake Unit and prioritizing diversion referrals. As a result of these initiatives, the number of Latinx youth diverted from the Juvenile Justice system increased by 119% from 2023 to 2024.