FLOW Youth Center
For the Love Of Well-being

An Opportunity to Realize the Vision of Alternatives to Incarceration for Long Beach

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In the last two years, Los Angeles County (L.A. County, the County) has made important strides towards a restorative approach to its criminal justice system, but the work is just beginning. The L.A. County Board of Supervisors established the Alternative to Incarceration Plan (ATI Plan), created an internal department within the CEO’s office to implement the programming of that plan, and simultaneously passed a motion to transition the County’s Youth Justice efforts from under the supervision of Probation and Parole to a new Department of Youth Development. Throughout this time, a coalition of community organizations called JusticeLA (JLA) has been involved; they have represented and continue to represent community voices in the process. Last year, JLA were key partners in the Reimagine LA campaign for Measure J (also referred to as Care First Community Investment or CFCI), which, upon implementation, will allocate funds toward community reinvestment and alternatives to incarceration programming and infrastructure by reallocating funds from the police and jail systems. At the beginning of 2020, JLA invited Designing Justice + Designing Spaces (DJDS) to help implement the physical infrastructure for the ATI Plan through an equitable community-driven process. Now, we must do the difficult work of engaging communities, collecting data, and designing systems and physical infrastructure that counter decades of systematic harm and disinvestment.

DJDS, JLA, and HR&A Advisors (HR&A) have partnered to propose and develop a piece of physical infrastructure — a building and the surrounding grounds — which we call the FLOW Youth Center (also referred to as the Center; FLOW stands for For the Love Of Well-being). The Center will consist of an accessible, safe physical space that addresses the root causes of youth incarceration and the lack of physical infrastructure and associated programming for holistic health services, education, and employment.

DJDS’s trauma-informed process for an initial pilot project is based on guidance from the ATI Plan’s 114 recommendations. The FLOW Youth Center will create a new building prototype to break the cycle of investing in punishment; it will do so by reinvesting in spaces for care and healing within our communities so that youth receive the services they need so that they may never need to touch the criminal justice system. This Concept Paper describes an innovative and replicable process for radically inclusive, equitable, community-engaged design. To develop a robust, full concept for the project over eighteen months, we are seeking a $1,200,000 investment, with reproducibility and scalability in mind. The scalable process for the creation of the FLOW Youth Center — which will be documented along the way — will include the orchestration of service providers and developer partners, a comprehensive community-engaged process, site selection, financial modeling, and design visioning — the results of which can be used to initiate a capital campaign or apply for government funding.

These new policies in L.A. County are setting a transformational roadmap for the rest of the country for how to transform the punitive justice system into a caring system of justice, yet DJDS is the only interdisciplinary architecture and real estate firm in the country committed to leading the creative visioning and implementation of this entirely new ecosystem of places and spaces. Just as we are
now witnessing a massive federal commitment to infrastructure, we want to help lead the way to a new building boom of spaces of care and the establishment of a restorative justice system. The opportunity to set a national trend is taking shape in L.A. County right now.

This Concept Paper is meant to serve as a bridge between countywide policy initiatives and a grassroots community engagement process for creating an infrastructure of care. The subsequent steps outlined in this paper are a foundation from which the final project approach will emerge, once the community engagement begins in earnest and all core partners join the initiative. Over the past eighteen months, DJDS and JLA have established working relationships with key stakeholders in the Youth Justice Reimagined and Alternative to Incarceration ecosystems, as well as with community organizations throughout the county. In an effort to narrow the geographic focus of the initiative, we interviewed justice deputies from each Supervisory District and many municipal leaders, and we analyzed county data from Million Dollar Hoods and the Advancement Project’s Justice Equity Needs and Services Indices (JENI & JESI). The result was the selection of the City of Long Beach as the initial pilot city. The next stage of work will involve selecting a neighborhood and site within Long Beach. The selection process will need to be sensitive to hyper-local conditions and ensure that the building will be accessible to all; we intend to design this site selection process so that it can be replicated for future projects.

This Concept Paper further elaborates on the reasoning behind the selection of Long Beach as the pilot city, the focus on youth and behavioral health as the initial services, shares a few examples of innovative national case studies, and outlines the proposed process for establishing an interdisciplinary approach to completing a community-driven building concept. DJDS and JLA have also begun community engagement in Long Beach and throughout the County in order to keep ourselves accountable to local leadership. In order to address the historic harm caused by the justice system, these processes are founded on a trauma-informed approach that includes four phases of work: Phase I — Calling in Community & Building the Network; Phase II — Building Community Capacity, Narrowing Geographic Focus; Phase III — Site Selection, Design Visioning & Financial Modeling; and Phase IV — Concept Package Community Review.

We are grateful for your time and energy in considering this model setting initiative for transforming the justice system from punitive to restorative and caring for all members of L.A. County and beyond. We welcome your partnership in visioning a future where everyone can get what they need to thrive.
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Introduction

Los Angeles County is defined by a geography of inequality, where access to quality physical infrastructure, employment, education, and health services is out of reach for many — especially for Black and Latinx communities.
In the last two years, Los Angeles County (L.A. County, the County) has made important strides towards a restorative approach to its criminal justice system, but the work is just beginning. The organizing and advocacy around the Measure J referendum (also referred to as Care First Community Investment or CFCI), the adoption of a “Care First, Jail Last” (Care First) initiative, the Youth Justice Reimagined Report, and the County’s Alternatives to Incarceration Workgroup all demonstrate that the County has the will to make change; now we must do the difficult work of engaging communities, collecting data, and designing systems and physical infrastructure that counters decades of systematic harm and disinvestment.

We must start with the new generation, our youth, and disrupt how the criminal justice system locks them into cycles of neglect and trauma through incarceration. We must invest in the communities where systems-impacted youth come from, coordinating resources to strengthen the local impact of services, so that someone’s zip code is not a facile metric for likelihood that they will interact with the justice system. And we must do so in a way that is as firmly imprinted on the physical landscape as the jails and prisons that have loomed so large in these communities.

In Long Beach, we have developed partnerships with the community and the city government to start this process. Designing Justice + Designing Spaces (DJDS), JusticeLA (JLA), and HR&A Advisors (HR&A) are partners in proposing and developing a piece of physical infrastructure — a building and the surrounding grounds — which we call the FLOW Youth Center (referred to in this document as the Center; FLOW stands for For the Love Of Well-being). The Center will consist of an accessible, safe physical space that addresses the root causes of youth incarceration and the lack of physical infrastructure and associated programming for holistic health services, education, and employment. It will be a place where youth can go to access services focused on care, through holistic behavioral health modalities; rehabilitation; healing through arts and culture, recreation, and green spaces; and job training to provide meaningful work rather than punishment. The Center will be a place where public, non-profit, and private youth organizations can co-locate, coordinate programming, and amplify the impact of their work through collective and integrated action.

The Center represents a physical investment into the built environment of a neighborhood, not just an investment in services; as such, it’s a clear embodiment of the shift away from the status quo, wherein significant County spending has gone toward removing residents from their communities and physically housing them in jails located elsewhere in the County. Further, we propose a design process that gives power back to the community to be the creators of their own spaces, in which they’ll collectively have a leading voice at the table on decisions from site selection to tenanting to concept design. The Center’s success will be a resounding demonstration of how the tenets behind Reimagine LA, Youth Justice Reimagined, and the Care First approach can tangibly benefit communities and establish a model of restorative justice and community investment that is replicable throughout the County.

L.A. County ATI Recommendations

[Images of Care First, Jails Last and Youth Justice Reimagined]
The Problem

Los Angeles County is defined by a geography of inequality, where access to quality physical infrastructure, employment, education, and health services is out of reach for many — especially for Black and Latinx communities. Los Angeles ranks as the seventh worst out of 150 metro regions for its income inequality, and this inequality is defined by where you live. Areas such as South Central, Compton, parts of the Antelope Valley, and Long Beach — all over 65% Black and Latinx and with the highest number of incarcerated individuals in the County — are far from job centers, contain under-resourced schools, have fewer outdoor spaces, lack quality health facilities, and expose residents to higher levels of pollution. They also have higher amounts of opportunity youth — individuals over the age of 16 who are not attending school, training programs, or working. Additionally, Black and Latinx communities are disproportionately incarcerated: in 2020, the County’s jail population was 52% Hispanic, 29% African American, and 13% White, compared to an overall population which is only 49% Hispanic and 8% African American. The same disparities apply for youth under 18, where Black youths are nearly eight times as likely to be arrested as white youths and more than 26 times more likely to be placed in institutional settings.

In light of inadequate investments in care, jails have become de facto providers of health care for Black and Latinx individuals. Lacking access to opportunity, social supports, or stability within their neighborhoods, and more likely to be in a state of trauma as a result of repeated engagements with racist systems not designed to serve them, many Black and Latinx Angelenos receive care for health and mental health challenges only when involved in the justice system. The Justice Equity Services Index, which maps the level of health, housing, employment, prevention, intervention, and community services, demonstrates that many majority Black and Latinx communities have the lowest levels of community services (defined through total number and spending). When these services do exist, they are mostly led by smaller organizations with budgets of less than $500,000. Jails have become the County’s largest provider of mental health treatment, with 30% of those held receiving mental health treatment, a figure that has more than doubled in the last decade. Moreover, a sizable number of those released from County jails — nearly 60% — struggle with significant substance abuse.

The lack of investment in Black and Latinx communities and the overinvestment in mass incarceration is particularly harmful for youth from disadvantaged Black and Latinx communities. Systems-impacted youth are more likely to encounter abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction at home, which are collectively known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). These experiences are mirrored by the external environment, since the physical design and characteristics of our neighborhoods shape our social interactions and state of wellbeing. Unsafe neighborhoods without parks, social supports, affordable and stable housing, quality transit, pedestrian access, or clean air and water heighten levels of stress and increase the probability of chronic conditions associated with ACEs. It’s no coincidence that these communities are often majority Black and Latinx — based on decades of disinvestment — and are home to more systems-impacted youth. More than 65% of systems-impacted youth are afflicted by a mental...
health disorder,¹³ and more than half experience trauma at home or have interacted with Child Protective Services.¹⁴ Due to lack of access to mental health services and support, many youth only begin to receive diagnoses and support for mental health issues after they are criminalized and become involved in the justice system.¹⁵ Once in the justice system, risks of negative life consequences increase sharply. Even a first-time arrest doubles a young person’s chance of not graduating high school.¹⁶ Upon release, youth are sent back into the same communities that lack the resources that they need to address health, education, and economic disparities. Without support, Black and Latinx youth and their families are unable to address past ACEs or break the cycle of interaction within the criminal justice system.
Call to Action

The County has responded to a groundswell of popular support for pushing the criminal justice system toward prevention, diversion, and rehabilitation rather than punishment and incarceration. On March 10, 2020, the County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the “Care First, Jails Last” report, and simultaneously passed a motion to establish the Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) unit within the County Chief Executive Office to implement the report’s recommendations. Care First included a roadmap with 114-evidence based recommendations for L.A. County and its departments to divert budget away from criminalization and incarceration and into innovative systems of care that scale up access to housing, treatment, and physical and mental health care. The Youth Justice Reimagined report and Working Group also provides a path to continue to divert youth out of County facilities, and the proposed Department of Youth Development will bring the resources and expertise needed into one place. The County has resources to support its restorative justice approach, because in November of 2020 the voters of L.A. County passed Measure J, which allocated 10% of the County’s total unrestricted funding to address racial disparities through community investment. The primary intention of Measure J was to secure the resources to provide alternatives to incarceration and to support direct community investment, which we believe needs to start with breaking the cycle of disinvestment and mass incarceration that tends to most impact youth of color.

The Care First report reinforces that for its successful implementation, the County must repurpose and build physical sites to provide housing, holistic treatment centers, job training and life skills classes, and youth programming. This is an opportunity to counter a harmful long-term trend: for decades, the criminal justice system has imprinted racism on our cities through the prevalence, size, and scale of carceral facilities — facilities that often pull people out of their communities. In designating new physical sites for Care First implementation, we can begin to undo this harm. More than simply practical locations for new programs, these sites can be thoughtfully designed — in partnership with communities — to enhance their purpose of prevention, diversion, and rehabilitation. They can be vibrant hubs that support youth development and wellbeing, community investment, and true divestment from the criminal justice system.

The challenge now is to make the promise of these efforts real. Our belief is that doing so requires: (1) engaging communities in designing their own solutions so that the process itself is healing and impactful, since communities know best what they need; (2) ensuring that the work to provide alternatives to incarceration and deeply needed services is imprinted in the physical environment — at the same magnitude and reach that the system has imprinted racism in our communities through carceral facilities; and (3) that whatever we design have the ability to be scaled up and replicated so that we have the far-reaching impact across racial disparities that voters intended, lest we jeopardize public trust.
Our Proposal: The FLOW Youth Center

DJDS and JusticeLA have formed a unique partnership to create the FLOW Youth Center, located in Long Beach, which will be a community-driven, physical site that supports youth development and aims to prevent involvement with the criminal justice system.

Communities know best what they need, and our approach will be guided by deep engagement with the communities in Long Beach, with an aim to make the process itself healing and impactful. Together, we will envision a Center that will offer dedicated physical space for services that have the potential to directly reduce the use of incarceration and that can leverage public and private funding sources to support:

- New and existing community-based restorative justice programs,
- New and existing pre-trial non-custody services and treatment, and
- New and existing non-custodial diversion and reentry programs.

As explained elsewhere, we have built time into our project schedule so that we have the space to listen and learn about existing efforts and organizations before we act, so that our process will build and expand on existing foundations, rather than re-do or replace past work.

Crucially, the Center will also provide physical spaces to co-locate programs supported through
Measure J and the County’s proposed Department of Youth Development. Imagine a new facility that addresses housing, health, and social service needs of young people who have become involved in the criminal legal system, providing them housing assistance, employment and internships, and community-based health services. By designing this space with the communities it will serve, we will position the Center as a new asset that surrounding communities will want to use and that will attract community-based organizations and businesses to provide their services there. The Center’s spaces can be a hub for decentralized coordination of holistic care, such as spaces for family reunification, restorative justice programming, and home bases for Peacebuilders and Youth Empowerment Support Teams (YES Teams). This is all in addition to the building’s primary focus on spaces for services that address mental wellness.

We seek your support to advance a community engagement and design process in Long Beach, resulting in a Concept Development package for the FLOW Youth Center that provides integrated programming for youth health and opportunity outside of the justice system. Specifically, we are working to raise $1,200,000 in philanthropic dollars by August of 2022, in order to fund the concept development work and complete the package by Q2 of 2023. We would then leverage the philanthropic dollars to secure public funding to build the Center. At the conclusion of this process, we will have measured progress toward five outcomes:

1. Support healing in Long Beach through an engagement and design process that is, itself, trauma-informed and reparative.
2. Refine a Concept Development package that will support the expansion and success of alternatives to incarceration for youth in Long Beach, with the specific goal of reducing Black and Latinx youth contact with the criminal justice system.
3. Ensure that the Concept Development package integrates both physical design to support community-identified priorities, and programming that best supports young people served by the Center.
4. Increase the capacity of the Long Beach community to engage in the development process, and counter the routine ways in which economic development projects are top-down and exclusive of community input.
5. Develop a community-driven process that can be replicated in other communities across the County, as they determine how to design and construct new physical spaces to support “Care First, Jails Last” implementation.

Our partnership is equipped with the background and experience in real estate finance, community engagement, capacity-building, and policy — as well as the shared values — that are necessary to successfully bring this process and place to life. DJDS is a nonprofit, multidisciplinary design and real estate firm that includes designers, architects, real estate developers, and community organizers. DJDS works nationally to develop new building types, innovative spaces, and strategies that address the root causes of mass incarceration. The JusticeLA Coalition is a partnership of grassroots organizations that work to reduce the footprint of incarceration by stopping jail expansion and reclaiming, reimagining, and reinvesting dollars away from incarceration and into community-based systems of care. DJDS will also call on the services of HR&A Advisors, where needed. HR&A is a mission-driven advisory firm of analysts, planners, and policy experts with 40 years of experience shaping real estate and economic development across Greater L.A. HR&A helps communities to define clear, data-driven equity goals that address past injustice and build new futures.
Why Long Beach?

Long Beach has already taken crucial steps to rethink its justice system and youth engagement.
Long Beach has already taken crucial steps to rethink its justice system and youth engagement. Our initial discussions with the City’s Health and Human Services and Planning Departments revealed several new programs and partnerships that signal movement toward a care-based approach. Residents have expressed their desire to shift resources away from traditional policing and jails, with over half reporting the desire to “defund the police and invest in community/social services” to the City’s Equity Office. The Long Beach Justice Lab was founded by the City in 2018 to provide data-driven tools, policies, and procedures to divert individuals from incarceration to rehabilitation, including providing advice to first responders. In 2020, the City created a Youth Strategic Plan, following its decision in 2018 to allocate $200,000 towards a new fund, called Invest in Youth Long Beach. Recognizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violent crime, unemployment, and mental health — particularly for Black, Latinx, and Cambodian communities — Long Beach passed a recovery plan with $4 million dedicated to violence prevention. Long Beach’s Department of Health and Human Services — which is developing emergent programing within the Community Impact Division — and Long Beach’s City Council are also activated to address systemic racism. In 2020, the City Council unanimously adopted a Framework for Reconciliation that acknowledges racism as a public health crisis and proposes a plan to close the gap in how impacted and vulnerable populations experience city policies.17

Existing inter-departmental collaboration at the city level in Long Beach is already well-established, and it has produced key strategic initiatives that signal the possibility of strong support for future projects such as this pilot.
This community-led momentum — and positive collaboration with Long Beach's city government — positions Long Beach to create new solutions to address their high percentage of systems-impacted individuals and youth, and their greatest need for care. Long Beach is home to 4.5% of all youth in the County, yet accounts for 7% of all youth arrests in the County. Long Beach ranks as a higher-need city within the County in terms of mental health hospitalization, alcohol and drug hospitalization, violent crime, poverty, and homelessness. The city accounts for a significant number of the County’s jail population, with over 6% of the County’s jail bookings. The city also ranks 7th out of 244 jurisdictions in the County’s Sheriff Department for spending on incarcerated persons. The Advancement Project’s Justice Equity Needs Index, which measures neighborhoods disproportionately burdened by the justice system, identified 3 Long Beach zip codes — 90813 (Central and Southwest), 90802 (Central), and 90805 (North) — as ranking among the 50 highest-need areas in the County. Zip code 90805 also ranks among the 15 highest in the County for youth justice involvement. While service provision overall is considered “moderate” by the Justice Equity Services Index, the location of services is not always equitably distributed based on need. For example, several zip codes with the highest engagement with the justice system ranked as having “low” services related to prevention and intervention. Even with existing services, evidence shows that systems-impacted youth face structural access barriers through bureaucracy and organizational inefficiency. There is an urgent need for more community-based prevention and intervention services for youth in Long Beach, and the FLOW Youth Center can be a home for these new programs (see the chart on page 11).

As one of the most racially diverse cities in the County, Long Beach is a representative microcosm of L.A.’s regional demographics and its geography of extremes, with wide disparities by race that place some neighborhoods as the most vulnerable in the County. Long Beach’s over-use of the criminal justice system should be seen in the context of these other inequities. For example, the City’s wealthier, majority white East neighborhoods see starkly different outcomes from the majority nonwhite neighborhoods in the Central, North, and Southwest parts of the city. Measure of America’s Profile of Los Angeles County describes those sections of the city as part of “Struggling L.A.”, with lower school enrollment, educational attainment, life expectancy, and median earnings, as well as higher numbers of opportunity youth than other parts of the City and County. Zip code 90813 is also among the five highest zip codes in the state for exposure to multiple sources of pollution and poor health of residents, according to the California Environmental Protection Agency. The comparison of two zip codes in particular — 90813 in the Central area and 90808 in the East area — show the stark extremes experienced by residents living less than three miles apart (see the comparison table on page 12).

The goal of the FLOW Youth Center is not only to reduce youth interaction with the criminal justice system, but also to holistically support young people’s health, opportunity, and well-being. By offering services like art classes, career and technical education, housing assistance, health and mental health care, mentorship and more, the Center’s model acknowledges the profound range of ways in which Long Beach’s residents have unequal access to services and disparate indicators of quality of life.
Overview of Spending, Needs, and Services in L.A. County

The following data show levels of spending on incarceration, high-need areas in relation to the justice system, and allocation of dedicated services across all of L.A. County. The maps show that Long Beach has high needs when it comes to addressing all three categories.

According to analysis by UCLA’s Million Dollar Hoods project, Long Beach is the fifth highest spender on incarceration in L.A. County — spending more than $30 million dollars between 2012 and 2017.

It is also a hotspot on the Advancement Project’s Justice Equity Needs Index, containing five of the highest need zip codes in the County.

Additionally, according to the Advancement Project’s Justice Equity Services Index, it is near ten of the least served zip codes in the County.
## Comparison of two L.A. County Zip Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Central Long Beach (90813)</th>
<th>East Long Beach (90808)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>An alley off Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and 11th Ave</strong></td>
<td><strong>A tree-lined median along E. Carson St</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black &amp; Latinx Population:</strong></td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White Population:</strong></td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population under age 25:</strong></td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life Expectancy:</strong></td>
<td>74.6 years</td>
<td>81.7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median household income:</strong></td>
<td>$31,775</td>
<td>$97,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Renters spending 30% of more of income on rent:</strong></td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High school degree or higher:</strong></td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asthma rates per 100,000:</strong></td>
<td>109.2</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2013-2015 Adult Age-Adjusted Hospitalizations due to Mental Health per 10000:</strong></td>
<td>200.4</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Memorial Care: Long Beach Medical Center, 2019
Precedents and Case Study Research

In designing the FLOW Youth Center in Long Beach, our team will reference integrative mental health centers and youth centers as precedents for spatial programming and planning in developing a new model of restorative care.
The first two case studies on the following page represent a shift in health care infrastructure toward integrative care that considers mental health alongside physical health and general wellbeing. For example, The Los Angeles County + University of Southern California (LAC+USC) Restorative Care facility co-locates health treatment services with a variety of supportive housing and services, as a holistic approach to care that unifies mental health, physical wellness, and community. Other projects currently under construction or soon to be completed in the next few years are also taking approaches to integrative care for children and adolescents, along with design approaches that foster environments described as welcoming, healing, nurturing, and comforting. The resulting designs favor an abundance of natural light, access to greenery and outdoor spaces, recreational spaces for physical activity, and color palettes more colorful and/or playful than traditional clinical settings. These qualities are interspersed throughout the various programmatic spaces, even in those restricted settings where intensive, inpatient treatment is administered. In line with the Care First approach, such new models have the potential to address current statistics on justice-involved youth experiencing mental health issues and lacking access to mental health services.

Even with these projects on the horizon, though, there is a pronounced need for additional youth programming, such as workforce training, mentorship, and arts/culture programs as an integral approach to health and wellbeing. Co-locating behavioral health services and youth programs in one centralized hub is a potential new model of care that builds upon the following case studies. More importantly, the FLOW Center is an opportunity to redefine and reimagine the meaning of health and wellbeing, by co-creating priorities and programming with the community it intends to serve.
**LAC+USC RESTORATIVE CARE VILLAGE**

Spectrum of care services interconnected with access to outdoor green spaces

- **OWNERSHIP**: Public-private partnership
- **FUNDING SOURCE**: California Health Facilities Financing Authority (CHFFA) grant and L.A. County’s Departments of Health Services and Mental Health
- **SQUARE FOOTAGE**: 520,000 square feet
- **CONSTRUCTION COST**: $68.5 million
- **PROGRAMMING**: Behavioral health facility offering de-escalating acute care and wellbeing services
- **LOCATION**: Los Angeles, CA
- **ARCHITECT**: Cannon Design

**MONTAGE OHANA CENTER**

Mental Health Treatment in a beautiful and healing natural setting, accessible to all

- **OWNERSHIP**: Nonprofit (Montage Health)
- **FUNDING SOURCE**: $106 million gift
- **SQUARE FOOTAGE**: 55,000 square feet
- **CONSTRUCTION COST**: $65 million
- **PROGRAMMING**: Mental health treatment center for children and adolescents
- **LOCATION**: Monterey, CA
- **ARCHITECT**: NBBJ Architecture
RYSE CENTER COMMONS

Campus for healing and personal expression in a welcoming indoor and outdoor environment

OWNERSHIP
Nonprofit

FUNDING SOURCE
Donors, Partnerships (The California Endowment, the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation), $11 million loan (New Markets Tax Credit Program)

SQUARE FOOTAGE
45,000 square feet

CONSTRUCTION COST
$10.2 million

PROGRAMMING
Youth center offering programs in community organizing, arts/media production, performance, and healing, with access to primary care and mental health services

LOCATION
Richmond, CA

ARCHITECT
Phillips Win Architecture

REACH ASHLAND YOUTH CENTER

Youth support services in a comfortable, community-oriented space informed by youth input

OWNERSHIP
County-owned and operated (Alameda County Health Care Services Agency [HCSA] and the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities [CHSC])

FUNDING SOURCE
County Redevelopment Funds (Alameda County Redevelopment Agency)

SQUARE FOOTAGE
31,500 square feet

CONSTRUCTION COST
$23 million

PROGRAMMING
Provides integrated health services, career development, and creative programming in arts, dance, and media

LOCATION
San Leandro, CA

ARCHITECT
NTD Architecture & design-build team
Project Approach

The Center will be co-created through a process that centers – and compensates – the voices of those who are most affected. Our work will give communities the power to redesign and reclaim justice infrastructure.
In order to make sure the project meets the needs of the local community, the Center will be co-created through a process that centers — and compensates — the voices of those who are most affected. Through all stages of design and development, our partnership will inspire ideas and arrive at decisions based on discussions with residents, care providers, advocates, and systems-impacted individuals. DJDS will draw on deep experience working hand-in-hand with communities, including the Restore Oakland project, where DJDS engaged a community-ownership model involving the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights and the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United. JusticeLA will bring its local experience in prioritizing holistic, community health resources and organizing residents in their campaigns to end the $3.5 billion-dollar jail expansion project, leading the development of L.A. County’s Alternatives to Incarceration Workgroup report, and as key partners in the Reimagine LA campaign for Measure J. DJDS will also continue to engage as a member of the County’s Alternatives to Incarceration Community Cabinet and the Youth Justice Action Groups.

Our work will give communities the power to redesign and reclaim justice infrastructure. DJDS was founded on the idea that the built environment has imprinted racist values and practices into physical form. Ironically, “justice” itself is equated to fairness, objectivity, and impartiality, and yet the infrastructure of our justice system — courthouses, police stations, jails, prisons, juvenile facilities, halfway and re-entry housing, border stations — center top-down authority, punishment, and isolation. Throughout our process, we will partner with the community to do the challenging and arduous work of designing buildings that liberate communities and systems-impacted individuals, and, in the process, redefine justice infrastructure. The subsequent steps outlined in this paper are a foundation from which the final project approach will emerge, once the community engagement begins in earnest and all core partners join the initiative. Thus the details of the process proposed in this document should be viewed as a flexible sketch, rather than a rigid structure; they are meant to accommodate the emergent nature of equitable engagement.

L.A. County has already pledged new investment for alternatives to incarceration, which has real potential to reduce interaction with the criminal justice system in a lasting way. According to the County, young people who participate in pre-arrest diversion programs are 250% less likely to be re-arrested than similar youth who were not diverted, and young people who participate in post-arrest diversion programs are 150% less likely to be re-arrested. We believe these statistics are a clear sign that we need a change in mindset in how we address systems-impacted youth; we need new community-based diversion solutions rather than simple reorganization of existing power structures within probation and public safety departments. Right now, there is no significant space in Long Beach where public, non-profit, and private organizations can offer programs together, increasing their impact through integrated rather than dispersed, individual services. The Center will offer the ability to physically co-locate a range of services for young people, which will be critically important because:

- **It removes barriers.** Physical co-location allows organizations to collaborate with one-another more easily and allows young people to more easily move from one provider organization to another to access all the different kinds of support they may want or need. Co-location can streamline referrals, increase access to care, and increase communication between different
providers. This means a young person can access help for all the many things they want or need in one place.

- **It can reduce stigma.** Community-led design can help ensure that the Center will be a place youth will want to be because it will offer enough interesting programming, internships, classes, and services. The Center will be a space that draws in and creates community for all youth, beyond just those involved with the criminal legal system. This will reduce social stigma for systems-impacted youth — it can facilitate the impression that they are just headed to the Center to hang out like any of their peers, not due to court mandate. Youth being labeled as “risky” or involved in the criminal justice system can be damaging to their opportunities for positive outcomes and overall development.29 A well-designed Center can also reduce the stigma that could be associated with seeking different kinds of services, such as mental healthcare or enrollment in public benefits.

- **It can cut costs for service providers and local businesses.** Some of the best community-based organizations and small businesses operate on limited budgets and depend on a network of goodwill and support from their neighbors and patrons. Co-location and the ability to share common spaces may make it easier for local nonprofits and businesses to start up or scale-up using the Center as a base of operations. Administrative support, meeting spaces, and the cost of utilities like the internet can be shared, lowering barriers for new organizations to grow, stay accountable, learn from each other, and innovate.

- **It can reinforce the power of restorative justice programming** if the spaces in which this programming is delivered are designed by and reflect the values of the local community.

### Engagement Approach

To ensure that the Center is designed in a way that achieves its goals, we seek support for an interdisciplinary engagement process that combines facilitation, design, data analysis, and participatory research. We integrate compassion and healing into our engagement process, which can be seen in our “Designers on Deck” program as well as our “Be, Feel, Do” approach.

**Designers on Deck (DoD)** is a “train the trainers” program through which we engage and compensate community leaders to work with us to connect with the community, engage the community, and design the site and programming. The DoD group, also known as The Hive, will consist of community members and interested systems-impacted individuals who help set the proverbial table. The group will establish a decision-making process that centers lived experience and the voices of systems-impacted youth and other community stakeholders. We seek invitation into the community via their previously-held ties, in order to develop understanding and deference to community members already engaged in restorative justice and youth empowerment work. The DoD program is also a co-learning model, in which we share our knowledge of architecture, design, and real estate while the DoD are given a platform to be experts in their own experience and showcase their knowledge of their communities. Through this co-learning process we aim to build capacity within local communities, so that they are equipped to participate as civic advocates in future justice- and development-related initiatives.
Traditional models of architecture and urban development are often out of alignment with values of the communities in which they work, poorly engage communities in the work, and practice without equitable social impact in mind. In this stage, we will work with the DoD to train community members to understand specific design elements, like warm colors and integration with nature, and make decisions on which elements to incorporate. We will also train them on the real estate process concurrent to the Center’s development, so they will understand and lead on decisions around site selection, financing, partnerships, and construction.

Our “Be, Feel, Do” approach is rooted in building trust, listening, and empowerment. During the beginning months of our process we focus on trust and relationships, building personal connections with community members to determine the best avenues for care and healing from existing traumas. As explained below, we have built time into our project schedule so that we have the space to listen and learn about existing efforts and organizations, so that our process will build and expand on existing foundations. We tap into the knowledge of community members and empower them as the designers and developers of their own futures. This approach, which builds avenues toward collective ownership and pride in the resulting physical spaces, is fundamentally different from traditional extractive models of architecture and development because it positions those most impacted by the harm of traditional development — exclusionary practices like predatory lending and redlining, and disinvestment in communities through the likes of urban renewal — as experts and drivers who determine the destiny of their neighborhoods.

What is the DJDS Concept Development Process, and Why Is It Important?

We will be activating this project through what DJDS calls the Concept Development Process, our term for the initial stage of real estate development in which we flesh out a new building prototype. The result of the Concept Development Process is a package that contains engagement and feasibility analyses, aesthetic design visions, proposed programming and partnerships, and financial modeling, the combination of which can be used by our clients and partners to solicit funding and move a project into pre-development.

Concept development is always the fundamental first step of any capital-building process, even if it isn’t called out by that exact term. Concept development is necessary to get to a robust and well-thought-out proposal, and to get to a project that is
likely to be used and accepted by the community it is intended for.

For a typical experienced developer, concept development is built into their proposal process or marketing material creation. DJDS’s Concept Development Process is designed for organizations and/or community representatives that are new to real estate development, to bring them through a series of steps to prepare them for buying property or redeveloping a building, building capacity while bringing necessary decisions and documentation into place. During the process, DJDS fills in gaps in process knowledge, design and development expertise, and even networking, all to prepare a client to solicit capital investment and move through the other stages of development. The Concept Development Process is a form of comprehensive planning combined with feasibility studies that includes both financial and design analysis. It is done in close conjunction with neighbors, constituents (including present and future site visitors), program partners, development partners, municipal partners, and community-based organizations, with the goal that by the end of Concept Development all of these stakeholders will see the vision for the project and understand the plan to make it a reality.

**How Does the DJDS Process Fit Into the Development of a Capital Project?**

Concept Development is the first of the stages in the development of a new capital project, as shown in the graphic on page 23. The second stage, Site Control/Acquisition, can happen in parallel to Concept Development (and in practice it actually often precedes Concept Development). Once Concept Development is complete, capital fundraising can begin to finance the third stage, called Pre-Development. As implied above, investing in robust and community-driven Concept Development can lead to a quicker Pre-Development stage and result in support, rather than dissent, from the community. We also use the results of the Concept Development Process — the package described above — to convey the financial and aesthetic needs and vision for the project to potential funders.

Pre-Development is the stage in which all the permissions from government agencies will be acquired, construction documents will be completed, tenants will sign agreements, and financing will be secured for construction. The fourth stage is Construction, and the fifth stage is Occupancy (and operations). The sixth and final stage, Stabilization/Refinancing, might come around seven years later when the financing of the building stabilizes and the developers can determine their next steps with regard to the ownership of the property.

**Filling a Market Gap**

In the 1970’s and 80’s, the U.S. saw an unprecedented jail and prison system expansion, a logical consequence of Federal policy decisions that led to more and harsher sentencing. The building and development industries met this demand for carceral infrastructure, and in doing so they profited greatly.

Today, we’re thrilled to see the passage of policies to shift our justice system away from punishment and incarceration and toward care and healing, but as of yet no one in the design or building industries is mobilizing to envision, design, or finance the new ecosystem of buildings needed for a Restorative Justice System, as described in policies like Youth Justice Reimagined or the ATI Plan. DJDS is the only firm committed and poised to lead the imagination and implementation of this new ecosystem. Just as
we are seeing massive investments in infrastructure at the federal level, we want to help lead the way to a new building boom of spaces of care and the establishment of a restorative justice system. One way DJDS has impact is by focusing only on the new models of justice architecture and community resources, correspondingly refusing to work on any lockdown facilities; this commitment, when DJDS is brought to the table on a given project, has resulted in changes to project descriptions, removing carceral facilities from consideration.

**Trust and Transformation Takes Time**

One of the foundational differences in DJDS’s approach to this work is the dedication we have to putting in the energy and patiently holding space through the longer timelines it takes to do this work with integrity. True commitment to the values of relational work, interdependence, and transformation — in order to genuinely bring all stakeholders along in reimagining a new ecosystem of justice — requires a willingness to invest a large quantity of time; this includes additional staff hours to build trust with stakeholders and facilitate the process, and a more flexible, and often elongated, schedule, to take into account the availability of the many community stakeholders.

Our mindset as a society is stuck on punishment and fear; shifting that mindset takes time for everyone involved, from those who experienced punishment to those who carry out punishment and supervision. In order to establish plans for new places and spaces for healing, we need to take the time required to really see the vision. This means more engagement, deeper listening to the needs, both in community and from those within the justice system looking to transform their work, and more feedback loops to ensure people feel they have contributed to the new vision. We do this so they can see themselves and their perspectives in the new places and spaces, and so that they will willingly shift the system and maintain and sustain the spaces that house the work.

The design process and ultimate look, layout, and feel of the spaces we build must be trauma-informed. Using trauma-informed processes is critical, since research shows us that the physical environment greatly impacts our physiological and emotional state of being. The integration of nature, abundant daylight, artwork, objects of comfort, the ability to control the environment, and a diversity of spaces for solitude and community are key elements that must be considered in the creation of spaces for care. These strategies and many more contribute to creating the healing environments that avoid retraumatizing users of the space and support them in restoring their mind, body, and spirit. The FLOW Center will embed best practices in [trauma-informed design](#) throughout its spaces.
Typical Development vs DJDS-Style Development

Typical Development Process

DJDS's Development Process
Project Phases

Phase I: Calling in Community & Building the Network

Timeline: 12 months (currently underway)

Collaborative Information and Data Collection

- The design team will be conducting a spatial literature review of all former planning initiatives and city design guidelines, along with zoning codes and plans, to inform the environmental approach to the project.
- DJDS and JLA will conduct outreach to local Long Beach government officials to learn about existing relevant initiatives established by the City.
- DJDS and HR&A will identify relevant data sets from organizations like Million Dollar Hoods and the Advancement Project.
- HR&A will continue background research and data collection to build our knowledge of other tangentially supportive policy around the built environment.

Building Trust & Partnerships

- DJDS and JLA will establish relationships with local community-based organizations, to support the outreach and recruitment for the community-led engagement process.
- DJDS will continue to refine their partnership with JLA and JLA’s coalition as the project matures.
- JLA and DJDS will continue to participate in all relevant ATI-related implementation working bodies, including the ATI Community Cabinet, Reimagine LA, and the Youth Justice Reimagined Working Group.
- DJDS will conduct outreach to establish relationships and partnerships with:
  - Potential tenant service providers, County health and mental health departments, and City health and mental health departments, in the hope that they can assist in the Center’s implementation;
  - Organizations with key data, in the hope that they will help inform mapping initiatives; and
  - The County Board of Supervisors’ justice deputies, in order to build political support for the Center as well as scaling.
- DJDS will analyze past strategic plans like the Youth Strategic Plan, and compare its findings to those of the DJDS initiative’s community engagement in May of 2021.

Real Estate Development & Financing

- DJDS will conduct initial research to identify potential real estate development partners in the area, and will gather information on public-private partnerships that have been successful in Long Beach or in other areas around the County.
- HR&A will conduct research for potential funding at different scales — from local to national — and from various sources — from angel investors to tax increment financing.
- DJDS will initiate relationships with local real estate brokers.
- DJDS will conduct outreach to discover available government owned land in Long Beach.
Community-Led Engagement

- DJDS will conduct outreach to recruit, and then subsequently establish, a diverse group of Designers on Deck, also known as the Hive. (This is a “train the trainer” model of engagement which will initially last six months. It is an initiative to build local real estate, architectural, and engagement capacity while fostering a cohort of diverse community members that reflects the communities in Long Beach, in order to drive engagement for the project.)
- DJDS will design and implement the Hive cohort curriculum, tailored for Long Beach.
- DJDS and JLA will provide support in creating collateral and materials for Hive members to use to begin their own engagement and outreach in their communities.

Trauma-Informed Design

- DJDS designers will participate in the Hive meetings and share their knowledge of design with the Hive members.
- DJDS will conduct the planning research mentioned above on all preexisting Master Plans or other plans in Long Beach.
- DJDS will conduct research on relevant case studies and precedents, including site visits where practical.

Phase II: Building Community Capacity, Narrowing Geographic Focus

Timeline: 6 months

Collaborative Information and Data Collection

- HR&A will conduct a local landscape analysis to assess land uses, available property, and the presence of community-based organizations and relevant services.
- DJDS and HR&A will provide insights from research, zoning analysis, JENI/JESI indices, comprehensive mapping, and other spatial tools, in order to understand and articulate the geography of needs (from a data perspective), the land uses, the local services available, and the potential sites available.
- DJDS, JLA, or HR&A will request identified data from data advocates mentioned above.

Building Trust & Partnerships

- Relationship-building in this phase will mainly focus on the Hive, in particular on planning their outreach into the communities around the potential project site.
- DJDS and JLA will continue outreach to potential service providers and tenants of the building to inform the ownership and operational approaches to the FLOW Center.
- DJDS and HR&A will deepen relationships with the City and County to explore possible public-private partnership opportunities to support the FLOW Center.
Real Estate Development & Financing

- DJDS and HR&A will conduct market analyses to design funding and financing mechanisms, including public-private partnership models, and they will also investigate community ownership opportunities.
- DJDS will implement the plan developed in Phase I for discovering available government land in relevant areas.

Community-Led Engagement

- DJDS, with support from JLA, will host collaborative monthly meetings with the Hive to build community and facilitate co-learning in architecture, real estate, and our engagement process.
- Each member of the Hive will then conduct at least two engagement events in Long Beach to meet their respective community members and hear their communities’ needs and stories, in order to inform the Center’s site selection and programming.
- The Hive members will share their gathered information in a collective ecosystem map of the Long Beach community and service providers.
- To initiate Participatory Action Research, DJDS will implement a narrative aggregation process for all Hive members. (Participatory Action Research is an approach through which the Hive and other community members will determine what they would like to measure, help collect and analyze data, and use the results to drive their advocacy and influence.)
- DJDS will establish or identify a collaborative data collection method for all Hive members, create a database of information gathered from the community by Hive members, and initiate the coding and analyzing of collected information.

Trauma-Informed Design

- DJDS will analyze information collected by the Hive.
- DJDS will continue case study research.
- DJDS will report findings from previous planning initiative research.
- DJDS will collaborate with the Hive to establish physical site selection criteria for the Center.

Phase III: Site Selection, Design Visioning & Financial Modeling

Timeline: 6 months

Collaborative Information and Data Collection

- DJDS and JLA will synthesize and summarize all of the information collected by the Hive.
- DJDS will analyze the grassroots data collected by the Hive in the context of the data from our research on previous plans and research initiatives.
- DJDS will collect all necessary information for potential sites, in order to begin due diligence.

Building Trust & Partnerships

- DJDS and JLA will convene all partners from municipal and County government, service providers, and the Hive to review collected and synthesized information.
- DJDS and JLA will design a governance process for selecting a site, then use this governance process to review all information and select a potential site for the Center.
• DJDS and JLA will continue refining relationships with potential service provider tenants and potential co-developers.

Real Estate Development & Financing

*Note: The steps in this portion of Phase III will be heavily influenced by the capacity of the partners involved and the ownership state of any chosen location for the building.*

• DJDS will engage with a local real estate broker to help lead the negotiation for the purchase and sale of land and/or an existing building.

• Once the Hive selects a more narrowly delineated geographic area for the Center, DJDS will initiate investigation into potential sites.

• DJDS and HR&A will begin site negotiations and develop site programming and design.

• DJDS and HR&A will conduct a real estate market analysis and do zoning and building analysis to draft initial development and operating pro-formas.

• The real estate team will work out partnership terms and expectations for building financing and operations.

• DJDS will determine the needs and criteria to inform the potential partnership scenarios for the development of the project and purchase of the site.

Community-Led Engagement

• The Hive will help the team code and analyze qualitative and quantitative data and feedback generated from the community engagement process, and this data and feedback will then be used to inform the programming and design. The information gathered by the community will also guide the team in choosing a location and site for the Center.

• HR&A and DJDS will engage in participatory action research with the Hive.

• DJDS will begin work with the community directly adjacent to the chosen project site for a governance and accountability process that might set parameters around, for example, design-making, the design process, and a potential community benefits agreement. (Note that progress on a governance and accountability process will also depend upon the project developer, and that entity has not yet been identified.)

Trauma-Informed Design

• DJDS will develop a draft Concept Development package, which will include initial conceptual designs, recommended programming and the associated partnerships, and financing sources and uses.

• DJDS will create a 3D model of existing buildings and a massing model of proposed options, including landscape design and master plan.

• DJDS will create as many as three conceptual design and financial scenarios based on program recommendations.

• DJDS will develop a conceptual site plan.

• DJDS and the Hive will start the design review process and architectural programming exercises with potential tenants.

• The deliverable will include diagrammatic plans for ground, atypical, and typical floors.
Phase IV: Concept Package Community Review

**Timeline:** 2 months

The project will culminate with a final Concept Development package that will be delivered to funding partners and other relevant entities. This package will incorporate the recommendations from a final round of engagement around design, programming, and finance options from the Hive, other community members, tenants, and partners. This package will be used to raise pre-development funds, to bring the project to the next stage. This is the time to pursue and build development partnerships and incorporate other financing and partnership strategies, in order to make the building a reality.

Budget for Phases I–IV

**Timeline:** 18 months

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DJDS will seek funding for these efforts through partnerships with public and philanthropic organizations looking to pilot and scale novel efforts around restorative justice. The FLOW Center can be supported through a variety of local funding sources.

**City of Long Beach:** The City directed $11.5 million in funding directed toward youth programs through its municipal *Recovery Act* of 2021. The City’s Public Health and Economic Development Departments are additional partnerships through which to leverage existing programs and funding sources to build out the FLOW Center.

**County of Los Angeles:** The *Care First & Community Initiative*’s Spending Plan includes $20.9 million for youth at-risk or already involved with the criminal justice system, and $15 million for individuals returning to their home communities after incarceration. This funding will increase as the County ramps up CFCI efforts through 2024. The County’s public-private partnership through the Ready-to-Rise program provides funding for youth-related restorative justice efforts, and provided $71 million to almost 50 organizations in 2020. Ongoing policy changes to the County’s Probation Department, as well as the forthcoming Youth Development Department, will provide future opportunities for partnership with the County as it implements the ATI and Youth Justice Reimagined Frameworks.
Our Ask

With your financial support, this Concept Development Process will be the first step in the construction of the Center that can be deployed as a replicable prototype for other ATI and Youth Justice infrastructure projects around L.A. County.
Our community-based process to design and develop the FLOW Youth Center will move forward based on the strength of our engagement and the support of local government and philanthropy.

We are in a critical moment as we reimagine our local criminal justice system. The presence of the ATI Office, Reimagine LA, the Youth Justice Reimagined Fund, and the future County Department of Youth Development offer unique opportunities to test and pilot new ways to transform our justice infrastructure, build out the Care First recommendations, and serve systems-impacted individuals in the communities that need this support the most. But to truly maximize the potential of these new funding streams, program providers will need physical spaces that support coordinated, community-based care delivery. Neither Measure J nor CFCI will fund the community engagement or construction critical to ensuring that these new spaces are well-designed, support health, and integrate into communities.

We invite your partnership to create the physical infrastructure that will embody community-driven criminal justice reform. We seek a $1,200,000 investment— a number sought with reproducibility and scalability of the project in mind, which we plan to raise through the agencies implementing ATI, Youth Justice Reimagined, and other related programs, as well as through philanthropic organizations focused on care-based programs. We also look to philanthropic organizations that fund visionary and transformational restorative justice projects and development processes that will complement the innovative and daring policy initiatives taking place throughout the County. Moreover, our work in Long Beach will be able to be applied County-wide, to serve as a template for how nonprofits, local governments, community members, and advocates can work collectively to scale up a partnership’s engagement, design, and implementation process to maximum impact.

With your financial support, this Concept Development Process will be the first step in the construction of the Center, a replicable prototype of a rich engagement, design, and governance process that can be deployed for other ATI and Youth Justice infrastructure projects around L.A. County.
Conclusion

Our Center will take the principles of restorative justice as recorded in the *Care First* report and Youth Justice Reimagined framework and apply them to the built environment.
The movements of the last year prove that the public is ready to move past discussion and re-imagine our justice system. The Care First report, the Measure J referendum from the Reimagine LA Campaign, and Youth Justice Reimagined demonstrate that L.A. County voters and their leaders have the will to address the inequity, harm, and ineffectiveness within the system; the challenge is having the temerity to implement them. Our partners — DJDS, JusticeLA, and HR&A — each bring a different valuable set of skills to this work. We all share the belief that L.A. County can disrupt the larger-scale patterns of harm and disadvantage perpetuated through how we police and imprison people. Our Center will take the principles of restorative justice as recorded in the Care First report and Youth Justice Reimagined framework and apply them to the built environment. The Center will answer questions around how the power of design can create places which are not only physically and culturally accessible, but which also promote the healing of systems-impacted individuals and their communities. Long Beach provides an ideal location for us to engage, analyze, and design how more youth centers focused on restorative justice can be built across the County. We invite you to support us as we radically reimagine and work with community to forge a new criminal justice system that centers care and understanding over excessive and unequal punishment.
A Day at the FLOW Youth Center

A creative narrative of what transformation could look like for a young person and their experience getting the resources they need at the FLOW Youth Center.

*Story by credible messengers Rudy Mata and Jeremy Bocel.*
FINDING MY FLOW

A lot of my problems started at home...

Alexis, what is this? Why the fuck do you always wait til the last minute to ask me for shit. You can’t play ball anyways. You’re a girl!

I told you last week, you said you were busy...and yes I can!

I don’t have time for no stupid shit. You’re too short to play basketball. Don’t waste your time.

Yo, what up, Derrick? What’s up? Get into it with your foster mom again?

Yeah, same old shit. She doesn’t do shit but put me down and drink.

Same shit with me.

...and it seemed like nothing ever went my way. Then I met Jon, a credible messenger.
I need a drink.

Yo, me too. I bet that guy with the Jordans will be cool.

Good morning. How are you two doing? Catch the game last night?

Yeah! Bron had that triple double!

Yeah, but he couldn’t have done it without AD.

Seems like you have a high basketball IQ. You should look into that. So why you all just posted up here?

Why do you care? We’re just trying to get some drink. We need two Modelo’s, can you hook us up?

I care because I’ve been where you are, and it didn’t go so well for me.

Check it out, homie. I’m having a bad day, I just want a drink.

I didn’t really trust him at first but for some reason we decided to at least let him talk for a bit.

Ya, let’s hear him out.

Well I ain’t gonna get you a drink ’cause I been down that road before. But how about a hot meal?
And I’m really glad we did.

The FLOW Spot.
Right away we could tell that the people who worked there really cared. The facilities were actually nice.

A WARM WELCOME
Hey Jon, who are your new friends?

A GYM WITH A MENTOR
The coach seemed cool. She told me to come back on Wednesday so if you guys want to come let’s all go and at least play basketball and watch a movie.

A BARBER SHOP AND JOB TRAINING SITE
I signed up for a class and got a free haircut but I also learned some tricks from one of the credible messengers that will help me get my fades more blended when I cut hair.

ART THERAPY
We’re trying to give kids ways to express and calm themselves amidst everything going on outside.
A DE-ESCALATION AREA
Now we have spaces where kids can de-escalate themselves without getting the cops called on them. I tried this in my backyard before, but the neighbors complained. See that punching bag – it’s called the hit and hug. when you punch it lavender comes out to calm you down.

A WORKING KITCHEN
“Anyone can grab food from the fridge here, we also have cooking demonstrations with food from our garden.”

A RECORDING STUDIO

A SPACE FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE
“This is a healing circle – a space for healing dialogue where we can tell and hear each other’s stories so we can make new stories of forgiveness together.”

ALTERNATIVE THERAPY SPACES
“These are some of our rooms to talk with therapists, some of them even use sound, to help heal people.”

A THEATER

YOU WILL BE HEARD
To me, family has always been a tricky word.
...because all my pain came from my family, or lack thereof. One thing I have learned about family is what you make it. It took me places like this to understand that. I hope that this day forward everyone here looks at this space as a place where everyone can look in each other's eyes and feel the love that a family shares.

We decided to come back.

That place was ill.

Did you see that kid Cody was there? We used to hang.

Even my foster mom started coming.

Say aren't you Alexis's mom?

I am. What's it to you?

I've been working with her after school at the FLOW spot. You should check out her basketball game tonight. She's good! My name's Jon.

Hey coach! This is my foster mom.

Great to meet you. You have a talented daughter. You know we have classes for adults too!
The support I found there helped me turn things around.

Nice game last night. I didn’t know you could dunk!

Thanks. I’ve been feeling great lately. My counselor even suggested we try going off of meds.

You know, I feel good about my life right now and I know that if I struggle I have you guys and the FLOW Spot to turn to. We have to hold each other accountable, that’s the only way we can do this. Together!

That’s right homies, do your thing.

I’m in. Let’s be who we know we are.

Yeah, since we started I’m feeling better than I’ve ever been! She thinks that the meditation and exercise I’ve been getting at the FLOW Spot has been really helping me get more focused and my mood swings are check.

We just got back from the FLOW Spot, guys. We just trying to get home, we don’t want any problems.

Story by Rudy Mata and Jeremy Bocel, Credible Messengers
Art by Trevor Alixopulos
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Acknowledgments

This vision for an infrastructure of care and restoration — instead of cages and incarceration — is inspired by all those who have contributed to the Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) Plan and the Youth Justice Reimagined (YJR) Initiative in L.A. County, and to all those who have worked for decades on community safety in L.A. County. We stand on the shoulders of this community of visionaries and courageous leaders. We are continuously motivated by their ceaseless labor to achieve transformational systems that prioritize care for all humans over punishment and retribution.

Within this partnership, DJDS wishes to express gratitude both to the JusticeLA team for inviting us into the process of implementing the ATI Plan in March of 2020, and to LA Defensa for diving into the implementation of this trauma-informed process with us, moving with us toward a shared goal of defining new building typologies that can accompany new transformative policies.

While not explicitly tied to the ATI Plan, DJDS is also grateful for the privilege of being a part of the Youth Justice Reimagined Working Group, which has contributed to the partnership’s breadth of knowledge around youth justice in L.A. County. Within this partnership, we are all driven by the Working Group’s commitment to emergent new processes that value the inclusion of youth voices and center those with lived experiences; we wish to thank our partners at the Haywood Burns Institute for elevating the importance of place and environment in the implementation of a new Department of Youth Justice.

In all of our work together, all of us partners have understood that the places and spaces these new restorative systems inhabit must exhibit the values of equity, racial justice, and inclusion if they are to provide a real home for the new programming outlined in the ATI Plan and the YJR Initiative.

This concept paper was initially drafted by the team at HR&A Advisors, in partnership with DJDS leadership, and it was then reviewed by the senior leadership team at JusticeLA and LA Defensa, along with Youth Credible Messengers and other community members in the DJDS network. The Youth Credible Messengers led the development of the graphic narrative, A Day at the FLOW Youth Center, in this document, with their lives serving as inspiration for the contents.

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Finally, thank you to everyone who is committed to envisioning a world of care, not cages, and a landscape full of places that heal and repair.
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Endnotes

15 Kutcher, S., and A. McDougall (2009). Problems with access to adolescent mental health care can lead to dealings with the criminal justice system, Paediatrics Child Health, 14,1, 15-18.
18 Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee Youth Diversion Subcommittee & the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, “A ROADMAP FOR ADVANCING YOUTH DIVERSION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY.” http://ccjcc.lacounty.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=958nu4vfxGQ%3D&portalid=11


As designers, we’ve been trained to be the authorities of creating spaces. Often when architects and designers say ‘community engagement,’ it ends up being outsiders coming in with a proposal and a schedule. We have this lens of the way things should be done. But often we don’t see the lens of what’s most inclusive and desirable by communities [...] I’m not just there to do the work, that’s not the most important thing. It may look like good work on paper, but without relationship, it won’t actually be transformative when it comes to implementation.

— Prescott Reavis, NOMA, NCARB, LEED AP, SEED, Spatial Activist, architect, planner, award-winning educator, youth advocate, colleague and friend. 

*Rest in power.*