

## Housing Shortage Drives Transition-Aged Foster Youth Across San Francisco County Line

Out of County, CA is a series of stories about the experiences of out-of-county foster youth in California. [Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#) | [Part 3](#) | [Part 4](#) | [Part 5](#) | [Part 6](#) | [Part 7](#)

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**Jeremiah** was a 17-year-old in south San Francisco with just three weeks until his high school graduation.

For him, graduating would be a triumphant punctuation mark. For the past three years up until this April, California's foster-care system had bounced Jeremiah through 14 placements in three different cities.

Then, that same month, the phone call came. Just three weeks before his high school graduation, Jeremiah was told that he was going to San Diego. His group home, known as Burrell Place, which had been in operation for more than 20 years in San Francisco's Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood, would be shutting down.

He says that the group home's owner told him it was too expensive to keep the place running. Jeremiah, who will turn 18 in just a couple of weeks, remembers the uncertainty he felt knowing that he was going to lose yet another home.

"I had no idea what I was going to do," he said. "I started frantically packing my things and calling my friends in San Francisco, telling them what was happening. I thought I wasn't going to graduate high school on time."

Luckily, Jeremiah's story has a happy ending.

After calling his girlfriend and telling her that he had lost his housing in San Francisco, his girlfriend's mother told Jeremiah that he could stay with them to graduate high school, pursue his [photography](#) and enroll in community college.

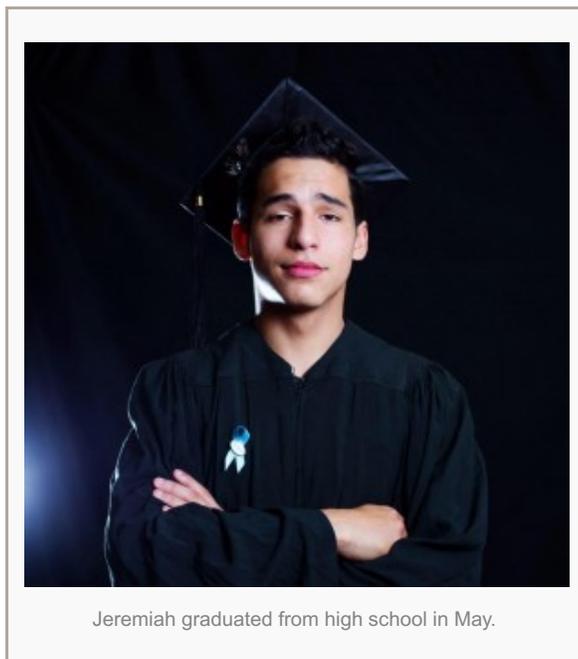
"I'm forever thankful for my girlfriend and her amazing mom for what they did for me," he said. "I would not have graduated high school if I didn't have her."

Jeremiah will be the first to tell you that getting a second chance to stay in San Francisco is the exception, and not the norm. When asked how the others in his group home were affected by the closure, Jeremiah said that "foster care is a different experience for every kid."

Of the three young men who shared Jeremiah's group home, one was deported to El Salvador, and the other two ended up on the streets, homeless.

As for the residential group home, [it sold for \\$900,000](#).

Despite a landmark state law that offers foster care benefits until age 21, San Francisco's endemic housing crisis is contributing to a startling exodus of older foster youth. While Jeremiah was able to hold on to his life in the City by the Bay, nearly two-thirds of young people like him end up being placed out of county. With agencies trying their best to



meet the needs of aging foster youth, they are unable to provide enough beds, leaving neighboring counties to shoulder San Francisco's responsibility.

The California Fostering Connections to Success Act, better known as AB 12, allows youth who would have aged out of the foster system at age 18 to remain under state care as non-minor dependents until they are 21 years old.

When AB 12 was first implemented in 2012, approximately 90 percent of the San Francisco youth who would have otherwise aged out of the system opted to remain in care.

In fact, according to Maryam Toloui, San Francisco's Independent Living Skills Program manager, 63 percent of San Francisco's foster care dependants, ages 18 to 21, are housed outside of San Francisco County. Only 97 foster care dependents, 18 to 21, live in county.

Why? One thing that advocates and service providers point to is the ever-increasing cost of rent in San Francisco County. [Many former residents have fled the city in search of more affordable housing.](#)

Referring to AB 12, Liz Bender, chief of staff at First Place for Youth, an organization that helps foster youth build the necessary skills to successfully transition into adulthood, says that the majority of foster youth cannot afford to leave the system at 18 years old.

"It's a tough market for everyone, and when you're in a position of not necessarily having the support system or the experiences, and being a vulnerable young person, it is extremely difficult to find housing," Bender said.

Counties, including San Francisco, contract with local organizations such as First Place for Youth and Larkin Street Youth Services to locate suitable housing for transitioning foster youth.

Larkin Street currently provides 25 foster youth in San Francisco County with housing through their LEASE (Larkin Extended Aftercare for Supported Emancipation) Program.

Angie Miot-Nudel, associate director of client quality care at Larkin Street, said, "As an agency, we would love to be able to offer more spaces in the LEASE program, but due to the housing market in San Francisco, we are unable to secure more units."

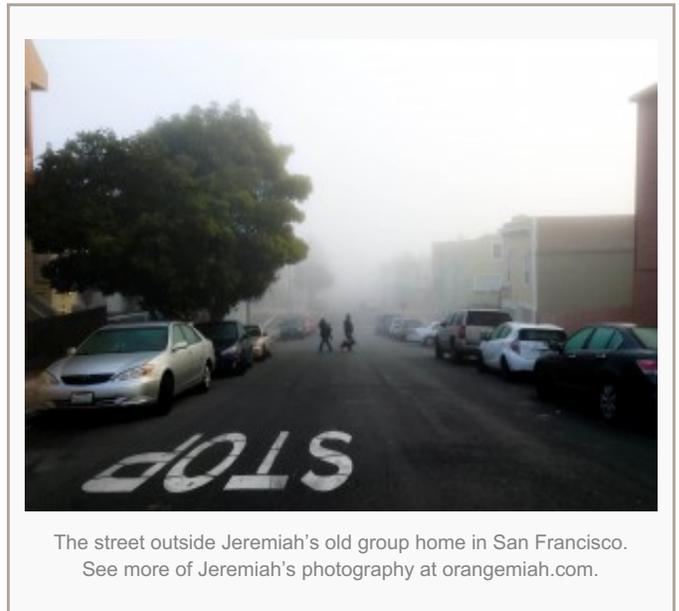
"This is extended to our youth, who really cannot afford to find housing in San Francisco due to the high cost of living and lack of housing resources," Miot-Nudel said. "Sometimes this leads to not the most stable situation, and they are at continued risk of being homeless once they are out of the program."

Bender agrees that housing costs in San Francisco are making it unsustainable to place aging foster youth in the county.

"Housing costs in the Bay Area are a serious challenge for the general population," said Bender. "Multiply and exacerbate that with foster youth who are really struggling to find housing that is sustainable, as they transition into adulthood, and it becomes an insurmountable issue to try to place young people in San Francisco County."

[San Francisco County](#) | [Create infographics](#)

Take Nef, for example.



After spending seven years in foster care, Nef, a 22-year-old born and raised in San Francisco, aged out of the system in 2013.

A week before emancipating, Nef was placed in the 5th Street Apartments, a Community Housing Partnership facility located in San Francisco's South of Market district.

Even though she had housing, Nef still describes her AB 12 years as nomadic.

She couchsurfed for an entire year. The youth living with her at 5th Street—including formerly homeless youth and youth struggling with addiction—took a toll on her.

"The police used to come every week to the house," she recalled. "I had to stop going to college one semester because I was just so stressed out over where I'm going to lay my head at night—I was sleeping in class."

Nef was eventually able to find housing with First Place for Youth in Alameda County.

"I moved because I wanted my own apartment," she said. "I'm finally getting to get some entitlement and ownership over something because, being in foster care, you don't own anything but your stuff."

When asked if she wants to one day move back to in San Francisco, Nef gave a definitive "yes."

"I want my masters," she said, "because that's how much education I need to have to come live in my city."

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*Meiling Bedard and Maria Akhter contributed to the data visualization for this story.*

*About Out of County, CA*

*The Chronicle of Social Change is featuring a series of stories about the experiences of out-of-county foster youth in California.*

*The county-run system that has emerged is riven with conflicting goals, pressures and incentives. Significant disparities have emerged between counties, with stark differences in the types and availabilities of services to children in care.*

*For California's 12,626 out-of-county youth—1 in 5 of all children in the system—the journey across county lines is a frequent and largely unacknowledged experience in the state's mammoth child-welfare system.*

*As part of our Out of County, CA series, we examine several different placement types to better understand what the decision to send children out of county means—including both the costs and benefits—to a group that often travels hundreds of miles in search of safety, stability and permanency.*

*We know there are even more stories left to tell for a group that often escapes wider attention. If you've got a comment, idea or tip, please [let us know](#). We look forward to your comments and perspective.*

