



“FLY WAS THE FIRST TIME I SAW THAT SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE ACTUALLY CARED ABOUT ME. THAT GAVE ME CONFIDENCE.”



+

T LAB

*T Lab, Tipping Point's R+D team, researches, prototypes, and tests new social services in partnership with our grantees and the Bay Area community at large.*

**T LAB REPORT:** Discovery Phase

## Exploring Alternatives to Incarceration with Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY)

**THE CONTEXT:** Punitive systems destroy the potential of low-income young people

When young people aged 18-21 commit a crime, they are charged and tried as adults. In the state of California, more than half of young adults incarcerated in this age range are then convicted of another crime within three years ([source](#)). These statistics disproportionately affect Latinx, African-American, and Native American people living in poverty. Even upon re-entry after incarceration, low-income young adults struggle more to find housing, complete their high-school education, obtain steady employment with marketable skills, and achieve self-sufficiency ([source](#)).

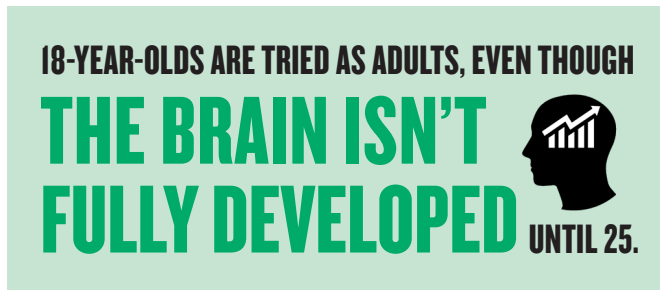
ONCE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM,

50%



OF YOUNG ADULTS RECIDIVATE WITHIN 3 YEARS.

Scientific evidence indicates why this age group struggles: While the justice system considers 18-21 year-olds adults, neuroscience shows the parts of the brain that control decision making and risky behaviors do not fully develop until the mid-20s. Given this gap, behavioral scientists and justice reform experts point to the need for a collaborative, restorative model of rehabilitation for these transitional-age youth (TAY) – a “[third system](#)” between juvenile and adult criminal justice systems that focuses on education and healing.



### **THE OPPORTUNITY: Adapting a successful program to an older population (18-21)**

Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY), a Tipping Point grantee since 2006, works to reduce criminal justice involvement for adolescents through mentorship, leadership training, and educational programming about the law. This year, FLY has its first opportunity to extend its law curriculum beyond age 17 (18-21) through a partnership with Santa Clara County Probation and Superior Court Departments, positioning FLY as a key community partner in a statewide pilot program called Young Adult Deferred Entry of Judgement, or [YA DEJ](#).

YA DEJ redirects TAY who have committed non-violent crimes and face felony charges to a year-long rehabilitation program. Upon successful completion of the program, their record is wiped clean. T Lab is partnering with FLY to research and test this curriculum that specifically reflects TAY needs and experiences with the goal of offering its Law curriculum to YA DEJ participants as part of their rehabilitative journey.

## THE APPROACH: Designing with, not for

The T Lab and FLY team approached the work of adapting the program to TAY needs through three research areas:

1. FLY's organization, culture, and programs;
2. The YA DEJ experience, court processes, and system stakeholders; and
3. The TAY experience, both personally and with the justice system.

The team immersed themselves in FLY culture and the Santa Clara County Court stakeholder and service-provider ecosystem through interviews and observation sessions. One-on-one interviews and at-home conversations contextualized the lives of system-involved youth, while group co-design sessions identified gaps in existing re-entry services.

Throughout all phases of the design process, the T Lab and FLY team's driving ethos is to design with not for TAY. Instead of taking input from TAY participants, the team regularly meets with Young Adult advisors to co-develop aspects of the program. The team has also engaged TAY currently in custody at the YA DEJ facility to incorporate the perspectives of system-involved youth in and out of FLY programming.

## WHAT WE LEARNED: TAY experiences and their unique needs

The main needs that emerged from this investigation of the specific experiences and learning styles of TAY were:

**Consistency:** As a result of so many uncoordinated services, gaps in support networks can lead young adults to relapse into unhealthy personal choices.

**Belonging:** TAY need positive communities to encourage their individual healing and neutralize unhealthy external social influences.

**Voice:** When young adults see that their contributions add substantial value, it builds their confidence and counteracts the effects of trauma.

FLY's existing program addresses some of these needs already: participants reported that taking FLY Law classes gave them a newfound sense of power and agency. This reveals a key opportunity for TAY FLY Law: to equip TAY with knowledge of their rights and the law alongside social emotional learning (SEL) skills that support them to self-advocate within public systems.

**“ I GREW UP MAD AT THE WORLD AND NOT KNOWING MY PLACE IN SOCIETY... IT’S HARD TO TRUST PEOPLE WHO DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT I’VE GONE THROUGH. ”**



### THE PROGRAM ‘NORTH STAR’: Defining success for TAY FLY law

Given that FLY seeks to develop a sense of agency in TAY students, this program must be designed with two key tenets:

1. TAY FLY Law is a class not just about delivering information, but about helping TAY grow.
2. As TAY learn their rights under the law, they will be empowered to make more intentional choices and participate constructively in their communities.

TAY need a curriculum that delivers current, actionable material while emphasizing SEL skills like self-regulation, social intelligence, and critical thinking. Because TAY enter the program having dealt with a variety of challenges, it’s important that the curriculum meets them where they are in their own rehabilitative journey. When TAY are in juvenile hall, lessons focus on understanding laws and personal reflection, and when TAY are out of custody, they practice what they’re learning and then embody new personal behaviors through lessons and out-of-classroom experiences tailored to their needs.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE



**UNDERSTAND**

### Understand the justice system

TAYs learn about the course, understand law, and acknowledge a need for new skills to succeed in life.

**IN CUSTODY CLASSES**



**PRACTICE**

### Put new skills to practice

TAYs try out and apply new skills in the real world, replacing old behaviors with new ones.

**OUT OF CUSTODY CLASSES AND EXPERIENCES**



**EMBODY**

### Embody the change

TAYs new skills become second nature and their lives are stable.

SEL skills and law topics are staged to be relevant to the personal journey of change for TAY in YA DEJ.

## UP NEXT: Making research insights tangible by testing prototypes

Transitioning from research into the prototyping and testing phase of this project, the T Lab and FLY team will build key elements of the new curriculum. They will test new lesson plan formats, an online content hub for students to access course material, text-based

communications, and more. The team is excited to work with young adults to learn what is effective and what keeps them most engaged.

Follow along at [tippingpoint.org/what-we-do/tlab](https://tippingpoint.org/what-we-do/tlab).



**T LAB**

**Tipping Point** works to break the cycle of poverty for individuals and families in the Bay Area by focusing the resources of our community towards nonprofits and public systems providing housing, education, early childhood wellness, and employment services. Since 2013, Tipping Point has invested in Research and Development to fill gaps in the nonprofit sector and develop new poverty-fighting ideas. Known as **T Lab**, our R+D team researches, prototypes, and tests new social services in partnership with our grantees and the Bay Area community at large.