



Tenderloin Soccer Friday participants, at the Tenderloin Children's Playground, before beginning their soccer game.

Tenderloin Youth Services Gap Analysis

A collaborative effort by San Francisco Planning Department and the Department of Youth Children & Their Families

February 2024



San Francisco
Planning

TENDERLOIN
COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN



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Executive Summary

The Tenderloin is home to approximately 3,500 children (Census, 2022), making it the neighborhood with the highest density of children in San Francisco. The Tenderloin is also known for its stressful street conditions which pose many challenges for those that reside in the neighborhood. San Francisco recorded over 813 accidental overdose deaths in 2023, 18 percent of which are in the Tenderloin. In that same year, of 4,200 drug offense police incident reports, nearly 50 percent of these reports were filed in the Tenderloin. Discussions with service providers confirmed the trend where the open-air drug market industry lures Tenderloin youth to work for them, underscoring the urgency of better engaging with disconnected youth.

The Tenderloin Planning team, whose mission is to bring Tenderloin community's voice into action and transform that action into reality through investments, worked with afterschool program providers to identify ways in which the city and youth service providers can better support youth in the neighborhood. This report aims to assist San Francisco's Department of Children, Youth, & Their Families in making well-informed investment decisions in the Tenderloin, for their 2024-2029 Request for Proposals, which will award more than \$650 million to community-based organizations (CBOs) serving children, youth, transitional age youth/young adults (TAY/A) and families over the next five years.

The analysis includes data from U.S. Census and DCYF, focus group discussions, and interviews with youths, parents, and youth service providers. These efforts helped identify challenges faced by both connected and disconnected youth in the neighborhood. Connected Youth refers to youth actively participating in afterschool programs and neighborhood events, benefiting from community resources and support. Disconnected Youth refers to youth who rarely attend such programs or events and may be at risk of associating with the open-air drug market, gang affiliation, or experiencing homelessness.

We have identified some of the unique challenges faced by youth and TAY in the Tenderloin through outreach and engagement efforts. These challenges include:

1. Lack of safe navigation for children and youth in the neighborhood.
2. Lack of age-appropriate and unstructured low-barrier programming for disconnected teens and TAY.
3. Lack of low-barrier and low-structure programming for teens.
4. Insufficient support to navigate job readiness and career exploration.
5. Need for enhanced culturally competent services that are tailored to the unique needs of immigrant youth and families.
6. Lack of outreach and programming for youth involved in the justice system.
7. Need for cross-organizational collaborative efforts that tailor to the unique needs of Tenderloin youth.

Each of these challenges informed a recommendation for DCYF to consider in their decision-making process.

1. Additional staff support for safe navigation of children to after-school programs.
2. Low-barrier and low-structure programming for teens.
3. Enhance workforce development and career exposure for disconnected teens and TAY.
4. Culturally Responsive Programs for Immigrant Youth.
5. More outreach and programming targeted towards Tenderloin youth involved in the justice system.

6. Dedicated Staffing and Resources for a Youth Services Collaboration and Coordination Program Focusing on the Tenderloin

All children deserve to thrive and have access to opportunities that help cultivate bright futures. Ahead of DCYF's decisions, this analysis elevates the voices of Tenderloin youths and their families, especially those from immigrant households, and ensure their direct input help shape investment decisions that affect their lives and well-being.



Youth basketball tournament at the Salvation Army Kroc Center

Introduction

In partnership with San Francisco's Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF), the Tenderloin Planning team of San Francisco Planning Department prepared an analysis of Tenderloin specific priorities for youth services investments. This collaboration aims to ensure that DCYF's investments can adequately address the unique challenges faced by youth in the Tenderloin and positively impact the lives of children, youth, and their families in the neighborhood. Through reviewing existing programs funded by DCYF and interviews with youths, parents and services providers, this report identifies youth services gaps in the Tenderloin to assist the department in making well-informed investment decisions, especially in the Tenderloin, for their 2024-2029 Request for Proposals, which will award more than \$650 million to community-based organizations (CBOs) serving children, youth, transitional age youth/young adults (TAY/A) and families over the next five years.

The RFP was released in August of 2023. By the deadline October 20, 2023, DCYF has received approximately 700 submitted proposals from 286 Community Based Organizations citywide. DCYF is scheduled to announce award decisions on March 11, 2024.

A Sense of Urgency

The Tenderloin is home to many seniors, families, people with disabilities, **and approximately 3,500 children** (Census 2022). Compared to other neighborhoods of the city, the Tenderloin has the highest concentration of children in San Francisco. The density of children in the Tenderloin is 8,400 children per square mile compared to 2,400 citywide. At the same time, the neighborhood is known for being an epicenter of drug dealing and drug use. Between January 2023 and December 2023, San Francisco recorded over 813 accidental overdose deaths, 18 percent of which are in the Tenderloin¹. And in 2023, of over 4,200 drug offense police incident reports, nearly 2,100 or 50% of reports were filed in the Tenderloin².

For years, children, youth, and their families in the Tenderloin have been walking through conditions most other children in the city are unfamiliar with. Walking to school, afterschool programs, parks, bus stops, grocery stores for children in the Tenderloin mean facing unsafe street conditions and hazards (such as needles, debris, human and animal feces) on a daily basis. Children and youth in the Tenderloin witness firsthand the inhumane



Nov 6th, 2021, Community march and demonstration Infront of City Hall

¹ San Francisco Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, [Report on 2023 and 2024 Accidental Overdoes Deaths](#), February 14, 2024

² Data SF, Police Department Incident Reports: 2018 to Present. Accessed on 1/4/2024.

living conditions of homeless encampments and their impact on their life. More recently, with the worsening of the opioid epidemic and rise of fentanyl, Tenderloin children live through an open-air drug scene daily. They walk through and around drug deals and users taking over sidewalks often blocking them from entering their own homes, witness overdose episodes, drug related crime and shootings; these are experiences that parents living in other neighborhoods of the city cannot imagine their children facing.

In November of 2022, [an abusive attack](#) of a 12-year-old girl by an individual experiencing mental illness in the Tenderloin brought to focus the daily challenges faced by Tenderloin children and youth. Tenderloin youth and community members marched to City Hall and delivered a letter to Mayor Breed expressing the urgency for change and demanding safer living conditions.

Tenderloin Community Action Planning (TCAP)

Mayor Breed responded to the community's call to action by declaring a State of Emergency in the Tenderloin in December 2021. As the Emergency Initiative ended in June 2022, the Mayor allocated \$4 million for investments to improve public safety and quality of life in the Tenderloin. At the time SF Planning's Tenderloin initiatives had completed nearly one year of outreach and engagement towards a Tenderloin Community Action Plan, and therefore was put in charge of programming these investments with and for the Tenderloin community. This unprecedented dedication of resources brought forth real investments that are transforming Tenderloin community action into real improvements and services for the community.

Community Action Projects - In Fall 2022, TCAP in collaboration with Tenderloin community designed a first of its kind participatory budgeting process to seek community-sponsored projects, an innovative process that Tenderloin residents had called for in prior [outreach and organizing efforts](#). Nearly 1,400 residents and workers voted on proposals, and 21 projects were selected for funding. These selected [Community Action Projects](#) aim to enhance public spaces, promote cultural events, support youth, and enhance wellness and access to essential needs in the Tenderloin.

Strategic Priorities - In addition to supporting Community Action Projects in the Tenderloin, TCAP focuses its efforts on [four strategic priorities](#) including: 1) small business support, 2) youth investments, 3) public space improvements and activation, and 4) activating housing priorities. Years of outreach and engagement in the community highlighted the importance of these issues for Tenderloin communities, amongst other critical topics such as public safety and public health. TCAP has focused on these four areas due to the universal support for these issues across varying priorities of organized groups in the Tenderloin, as well as the potential for improved interagency coordination and impactful short and medium-term change for the communities living in the Tenderloin. This report constitutes a milestone of the TCAP team's work on Youth Investment Strategic Priority in 2023.

TCAP Strategic Priority on Youth Investments

The participatory budgeting process underlined the need for investing in youth services as a priority for the Tenderloin community. [Multiple projects directly serving](#) the youth in the neighborhood received top votes from the community including Elm Alley Play Street, Teen Drop-in Center, Arab Youth Mental Health Center, as well as Family Housing Tutoring Program. As TCAP focused on implementing those projects in the second half of 2023, conversations with youth providers and stakeholders in the neighborhood highlighted a need for additional attention and support from the city. As such, TCAP participated in the Tenderloin Afterschool Program Collaborative's weekly convenings to better understand the current landscape of youth services and opportunities for addressing gaps. The Collaborative is a weekly convening of youth service providers that aims to address collective challenges and uncover synergies across programs to enhance services for Tenderloin children and youth.

Concurrently, during Spring 2023 DCYF was preparing [the Request for Proposal \(RFP\)](#) to award more than \$650 million to community-based organizations (CBOs) serving children, youth, transitional age youth (TAY) and families in the city over the next five years as part of its 2024-2029 RFP process; the most critical public funding for youth programming especially amidst the city facing a multi-year budget deficit. Leading up to the release of the RFP, DCYF conducted extensive outreach and engagement in various neighborhoods to understand youth priorities when designing their funding programming.

Conversations with DCYF and the Collaborative highlighted an opportunity for TCAP to further identify the unique needs and challenges of youth in the Tenderloin, and support DCYF in their decision making when reviewing program proposals. This effort aims to develop a gap analysis based on both qualitative and quantitative data, offering detailed review of existing conditions of Tenderloin youth service programs and recommendations to meet urgent needs.

Ahead of DCYF's decisions, this analysis elevates the voices of Tenderloin youths and their families, especially those from immigrant households, and ensure their direct input help shape investment decisions that affect their lives and well-being.

Methodology

This section illustrates the methodology of this gap analysis, which includes analyzing data from U.S. Census and DCYF, facilitating focus group discussions, and conducting interviews with youths, parents, and youth service providers. Based on the findings, the team developed recommendations of specific programs, services, and initiatives that could be implemented to enhance services to children, youth and their families in the Tenderloin and bridge the inequities and gaps these groups are facing.

Data Analysis- This analysis relies on demographic data from U.S. Census, and participants and program data provided by DCYF. The data provides an overview of how existing programs and services are serving the diverse children and youth population in the Tenderloin, and an initial understanding of potential service gaps and opportunities. The demographic data also facilitated the team’s outreach strategies to effectively target underserved groups within the neighborhood.

Focus Groups and Interviews- This analysis relied on one-on-one interviews with youth service providers, focus groups with teens, transitional-aged youth, and their parents to provide an in depth understanding of the challenges faced by the Tenderloin youth and youth service providers. Insights from these conversations helped depict a clearer picture of the gaps and challenges of existing youth services and programs.

Table 1: Designs for Focus Groups and Interviews

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Engagement Format</i>	<i>Number of Interviews or Focus Groups</i>
Youth Service Providers	Interviews	5 Youth Service Providers
Teens (12 – 18 years old)	Focus Groups	1 Connected Youth and 1 Disconnected Youth
Transitional Aged Youth (18 – 24 years old)	Focus Groups & Informal Interviews	2 Focus Groups (Connected TAY) 3 Informal Interviews (Disconnected TAY)
Parents	Focus Groups	1 Spanish Speaking 1 Arabic Speaking

Connected and Disconnected Youth- Prior engagement with the Tenderloin community highlighted concerns from afterschool program providers and parents regarding the trajectory of youth engaging in the open-air drug market in the Tenderloin. These conversations have informed the identification of two distinct groups with the youth community that required distinct outreach strategies and tools:

- **Connected Youth** refers to youth actively participating in afterschool programs and neighborhood events, benefiting from community resources and support. To engage connected teens and TAY, the team collaborated with youth services providers, initiating contact with potential participants and facilitating focused group discussions.

- *Disconnected Youth* refers to youth who rarely attend such programs or events and may be at risk of associating with the open-air drug market, gang affiliation, or experiencing homelessness. Acknowledging the challenge in reaching disconnected teens and TAY compared to their more connected peers. TCAP team leveraged existing long-term relationships that youth service providers and community leaders have developed with them. In reaching disconnected TAY, staff invested time in multiple trust-building eventually leading to informal one-on-one interviews.

This multifaceted approach aimed to amplify the voices of both groups, ensuring that the resulting recommendations would address the broader needs of the youth community in the Tenderloin.

Children Play during street closure in the Tenderloin.



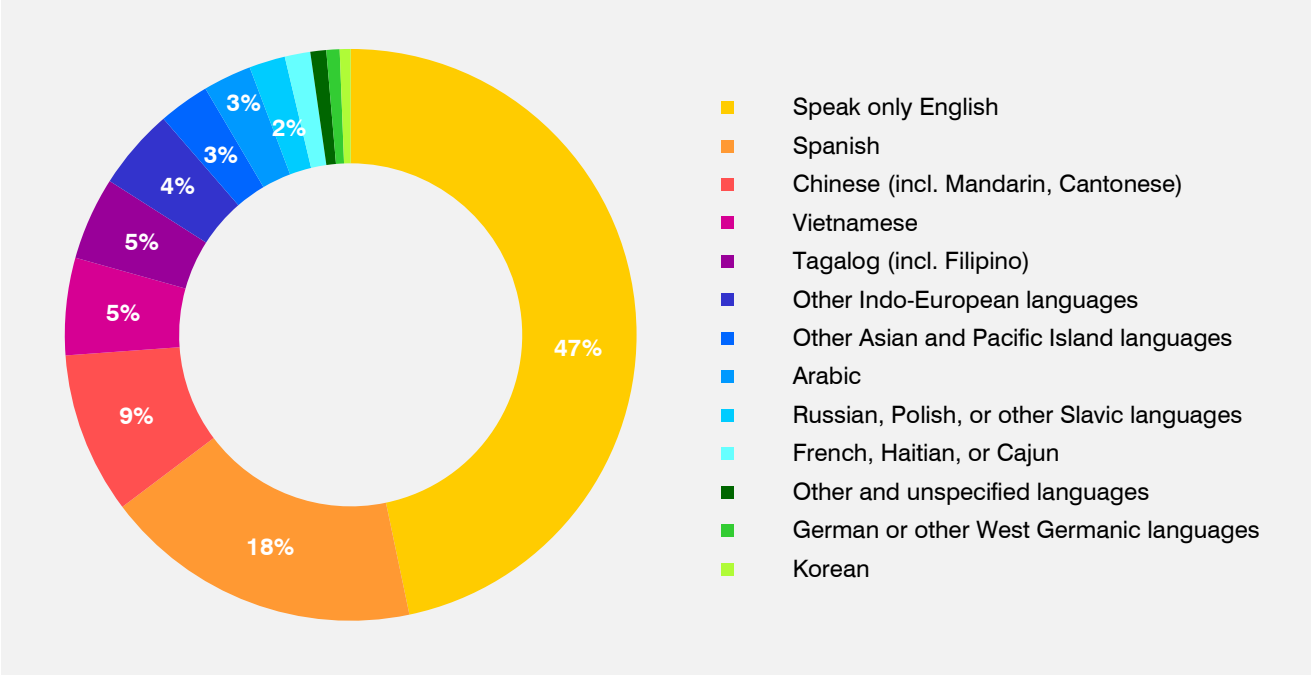
It's worth recognizing that some voices and perspectives may not have been fully highlighted or represented in the findings and that specific challenges faced by youth in the neighborhood might require more attention. For example, outreach to South-East Asian and Chinese parents of Tenderloin Youth for a focus group proved challenging and TCAP was not able to form a focus group for this community.

Further analysis and exploration might be necessary to address these gaps and ensure a comprehensive understanding of challenges faced by Tenderloin youth that were not already highlighted in this report.

Data Analysis

The Tenderloin is home to approximately 32,000 individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds: According to 2022 U.S. Census data, **over half (53 percent) of the Tenderloin population speaks languages other than English at home, compared to 42 percent citywide.** In addition to English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog are also common languages spoken at home by Tenderloin residents.

Figure 1. Language Spoken at Home for Tenderloin Residents



Source: U.S Census American Community Survey, 2017-2022 5-Year Estimates

The Tenderloin has highest density of children in San Francisco compared to other neighborhoods (See Figure 2). In 2022, approximately 3,500 children under 18 and 1,800 youth between 18 and 24 live in the Tenderloin. The density of children in the Tenderloin is 8,400 children per square mile compared to 2,400 citywide.

Table 2. Composition of Tenderloin Population, Children, and TAY by Race/Ethnicity

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>All Ages</i>	<i>Children Under 18</i>	<i>TAY Age 18-24</i>
Asian	31%	31%	34%
White	30%	15%	21%
Hispanic/Latinx	24%	45%	31%
Black and African American	9%	1%	4%
Other Race Alone or Multi-racial	6%	7%	10%

Source: U.S Census American Community Survey, 2017-2022 5-Year Estimates

Table 3. DCYF Program Participants Residing in the Tenderloin, by Race/Ethnicity, FY2022-23 Mid-Year

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Hispanic/Latinx	584	48%
Asian	176	15%
Middle Eastern	132	11%
African American	120	10%
Other Race Alone or Multi-racial	84	7%
White	24	2%
Grand Total	1207	100%

Comparison between the Census demographic data (Table 1) and DCYF's participants data for those who reside the Tenderloin (Table 2) shows that:

- Only approximately one third of the children and youth in the Tenderloin participate in DCYF funded programs.
- Asian children and youth are underrepresented in these programs.
- Hispanic/Latinx children and youth are well represented in these programs.
- Tracking representation of Middle Eastern/Arab youth, a community who are particularly concentrated living in the Tenderloin, is difficult due to lack of representation in Census data.

Outreach and engagement with Arab communities in the Tenderloin highlight a critical challenge with Census data for this community. It is commonly believed within the Arab community that Census data significantly underrepresents their population for various reasons; census relies on self-reporting and without organized outreach and education many households shy away from reporting the language spoken at home. The federal government also categorizes people from the Middle East as White in their

description of “White” as a racial category; a racial identity that does not resonate with the experiences of discrimination these communities often face living in the United States.

While Census does not provide a Middle Eastern category as race, DCYF data accounts for this specific identity which showcases 11% of their program participant as Middle Eastern, a much higher number than the share of households speaking Arabic at home (3%) in Figure 1. It is important to not consider this as an overrepresentation of Middle Eastern youth in DCYF programming but an underrepresentation of accounting for Middle Eastern population in the Census data.

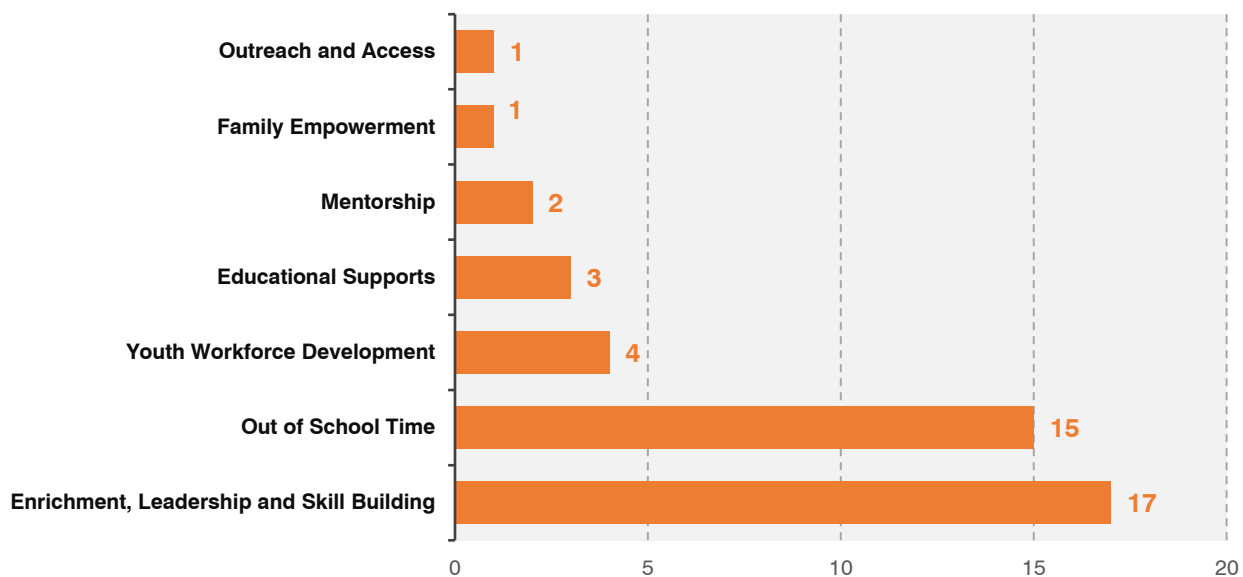
Gaps in youth programs and services the Tenderloin

In the fiscal year 2022-2023, Tenderloin received approximately \$6.4 million in funding allocations from DCYF, supporting a network of 44 different youth services in 21 program sites in the neighborhood. Participants data from DCYF indicates that 1,101 unique DCYF participants from across the city are served by these 44 Tenderloin programs, and only 47 percent (516 participants) live in the Tenderloin.

Tenderloin youth are more likely to attend programming outside of the neighborhood - approximately 80 percent of DCYF participants living in the Tenderloin attend program sites outside of the neighborhood. This is because their program attendance is at the location of their schools which are outside of the Tenderloin. Of the 1,207 DCYF participants residing in the Tenderloin, 613 attend DCYF-funded program sites at their schools. Additional types of program sites include nonprofit organizations, public or affordable housing sites, SF Recreation and Park Facility, Faith-based organizations, Parochial or Independent schools.

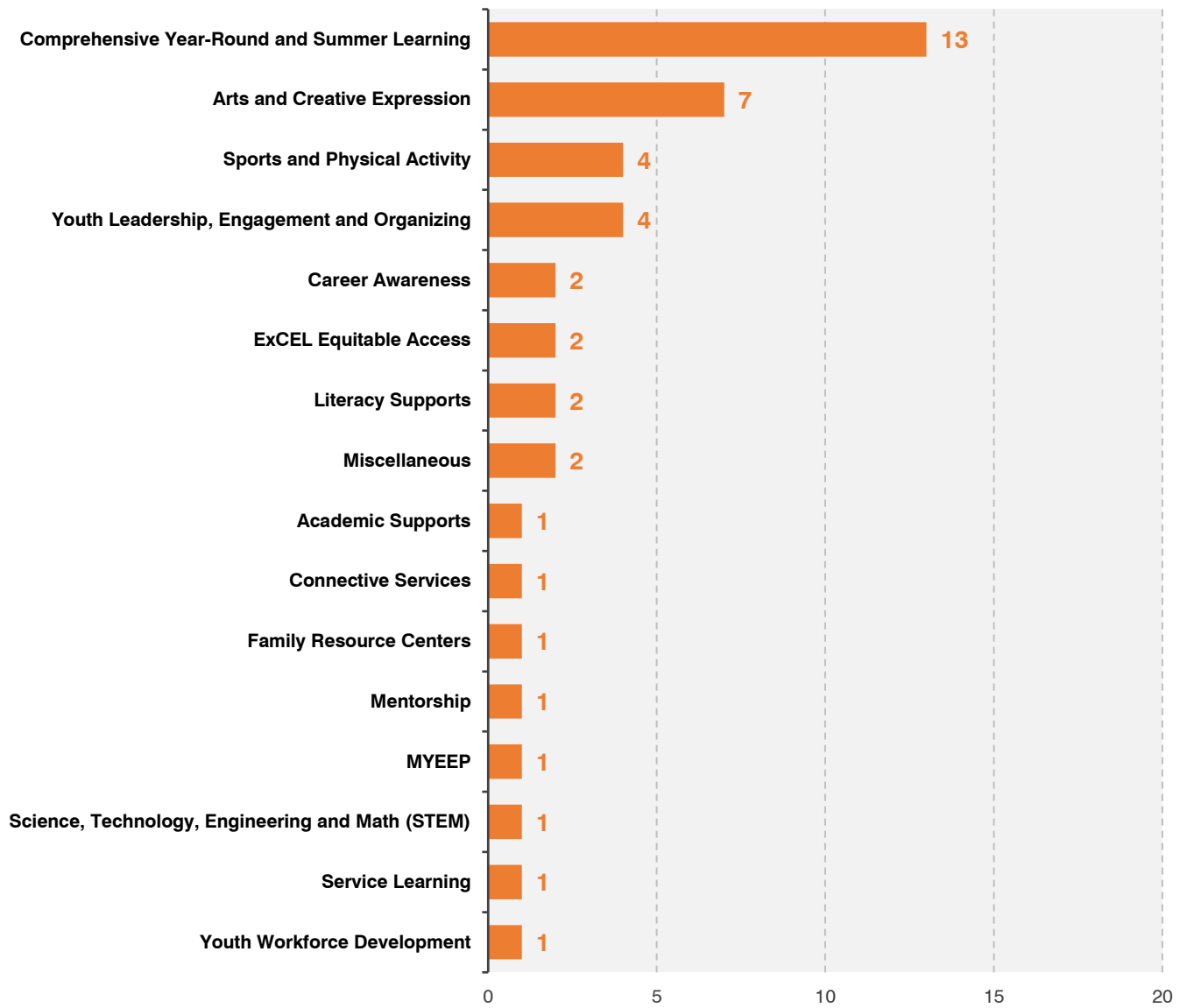
Chart 2 below shows the types of programs in the Tenderloin. A significant majority of Tenderloin programs are under Enrichment, Leadership, and Skill Building, or Out of School Time service areas. Chart 3 indicates, less than one third of the programs provide comprehensive year-round and summer learning opportunities, followed by 7 programs providing arts and creative expression education, and 4 programs each offering sports and physical activity, and youth leadership trainings. There are very limited learning opportunities such as STEM, service learning, or youth workforce development.

Chart 2. Number of DCYF Funded Programs in the Tenderloin by Service Area



Source: DCYF Participants Data (FY2022-2023)

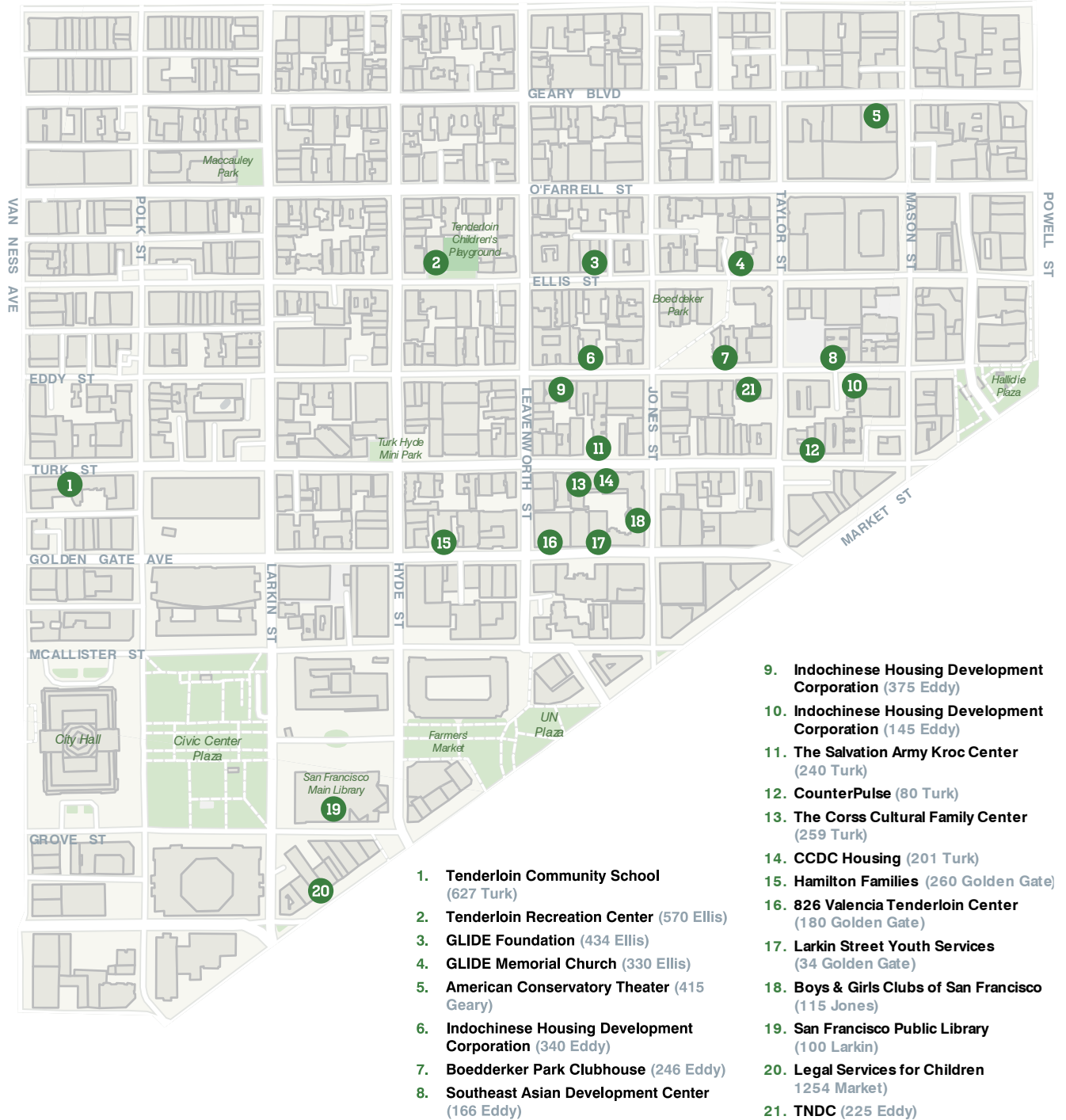
Chart 3. Number of Strategies of DCYF Funded Programs in the Tenderloin



Source: DCYF Participants Data (FY2022-2023)

Figure 3 illustrates the locations of community-based organizations that host DCYF funded programs in the Tenderloin in 2023.

Figure 3. Map of DCYF Funded Program Sites in the Tenderloin*



* Multiple programs could be hosted in one location.

Reviewing DCYF program data, four preliminary gaps in youth service programs in the Tenderloin can be highlighted.

1. Lack of services in Youth Workforce Development, Educational Supports, Mentorship, Outreach & Access, and Family Empowerment.

The majority of DCYF funded youth service programs in the Tenderloin deliver Enrichment, Leadership and Skill Building, and the Out of School Time services, accounting for 75 percent of DCYF funding for the Tenderloin for FY 2022-2023. However, only 8 out of 44 programs, or 15 percent of DCYF funding for the Tenderloin, provide mentorship, educational support, and youth workforce development service; needs that were highlighted in engagement with the Tenderloin community.

2. Lack of diverse programs for weekends.

There is a voiced need from the community to support youth and their families during the weekends. However, of the 44 programs offered in the Tenderloin, only four operate Monday through Saturday. Three of the four focused on soccer activations, and one outreach program aiming to elevate and strengthen the relationships between parents, caregivers, schools and the district to advance high quality learning experiences for students.

Weekend programs could provide accessibility for those unable to attend during the week due to scheduling conflicts. And for families where parents work during the week, weekend programs offer opportunities for more involvement of parents and parent-child bonding. Additionally, they could provide children and youth with flexible learning opportunities, and steer youth away from negative activities such as engaging in the open-air drug market.

3. Lack of programs in the Tenderloin serving Tenderloin youth involved in the justice system.

As mentioned previously, children and youth in the Tenderloin must navigate through the open-air drug scenes daily, and parents and the community are concerned about the trajectory of youth engaging in the drug market. Several young individuals in the Tenderloin have encountered the justice system, highlighting the need for tailored support to facilitate their transition into the community, fostering integration, and paving the way toward a positive future.

While DCYF funds 22 programs specific to addressing violence and addictions citywide, many of which focus on those involved in the justice system and aim to decrease recidivism rates, offering services such as reentry planning, linkage to resources, and workforce development, there is no dedicated program focused on serving at-risk youth at the neighborhood level in the Tenderloin.

4. Lack of dedicated programs and spaces in the Tenderloin for TAY.

Only one program site is funded to serve TAY in the Tenderloin (Larkin Street Youth Services), receiving 8 percent of DCYF funding for the Tenderloin to provide academic support and youth workforce development services for the age group. While children under 18 attend programs at their schools, non-profit organizations or public/affordable housing sites, most programs in the Tenderloin stop serving youth when they turn 18 years old. In addition, the needs of TAY are different from those of children and

teens under 18 years old. For example, they may need to work to support the family, or want to have special support for college education or vocational training. With only one program in the Tenderloin, there are additional needs and opportunities to augment programmatic and funding support for TAY in the neighborhood.



Children play at Boeddeker Park

Challenges & Funding Considerations

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the service gaps, this gaps analysis relied on direct conversations with youths and parents, through focus groups, listening sessions, and interviews as described in the Methodology section of this report earlier. The data analysis in the previous section helped inform the scope of outreach and engagement for this gap analysis. The results further supported the preliminary findings above and provided deeper insights into the challenges faced by children, youth, and their families in the Tenderloin.

This section highlights the critical challenges for youth in the Tenderloin that were underscored throughout the outreach and engagement sessions. Each challenge is supported by a recommendation to consider in consideration of funding programs and services targeting children, youth, and their families in the Tenderloin.



Focus group with Spanish speaking parents at La Voz Latina

1

CHALLENGE 1.

Lack of safe navigation for children and youth in the neighborhood

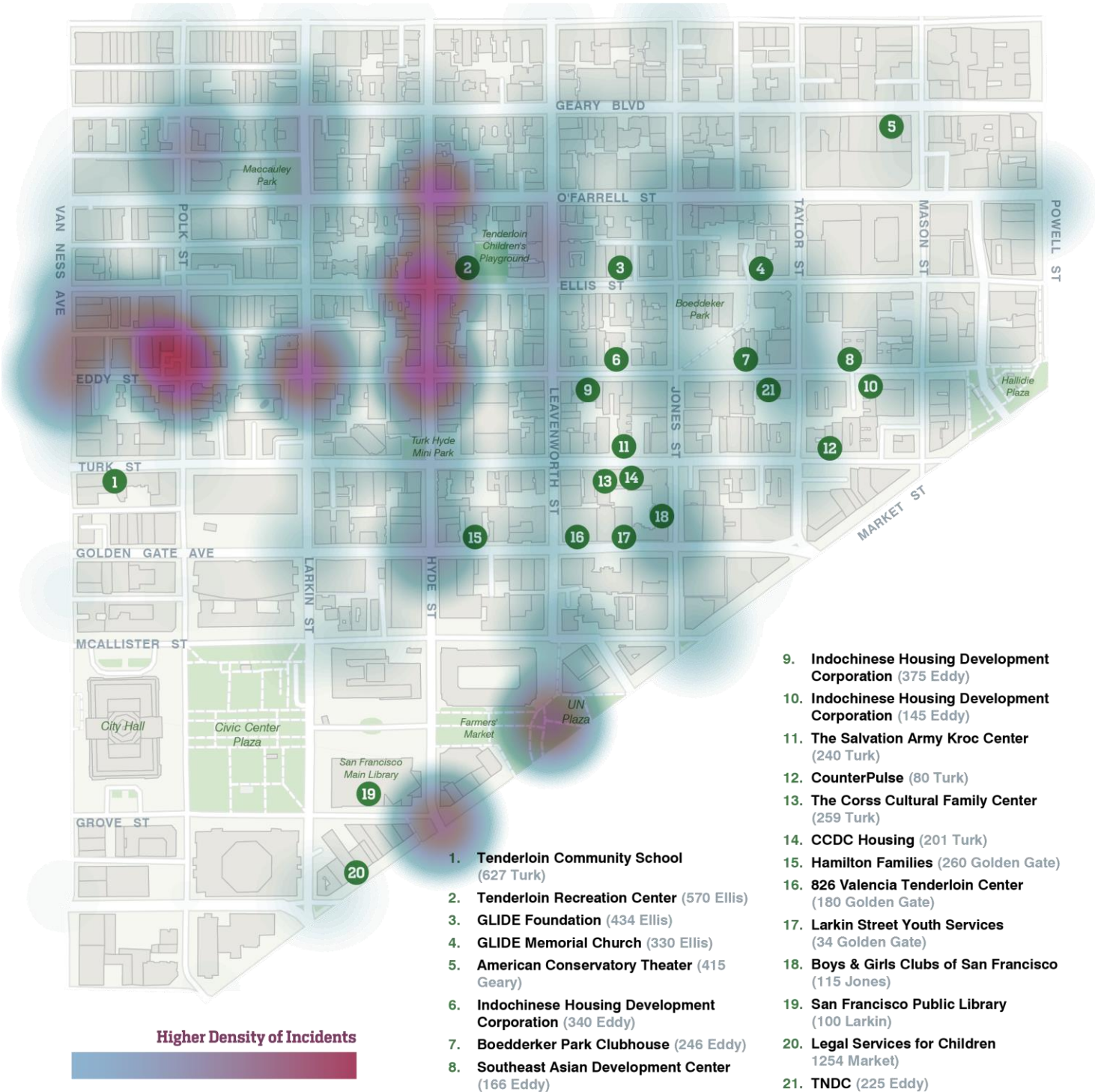
Both youth and parents indicated clear concerns about aggressive attempts by drug dealers to sell them drugs late in the evening or harassment otherwise. Families often do not feel safe going in and out of their own buildings especially during the evenings due to concentration of harsh street conditions, such as encampments, drug dealing, drug use, or violence surrounding afterschool programs and parks in the neighborhood, as shown in Figure 4. Service providers expressed a strong need and desire for more staffing to escort children and youth to neighborhood programs and events and ensure their safety during the operation of these programs.

Conversations with youth service providers indicated that a ratio of *one staff to five children* is needed to escort kids to their afterschool programs and events. Tenderloin is home to a unique program called Safe Passage, a program overseen by the Tenderloin Community Benefit District, started and guided by local mothers that provides a positive presence on Tenderloin sidewalks and intersections. Safe Passage currently operates when youth are heading to and leaving school. While this program serves a neighborhood need during these hours, children and teens still struggle to navigate throughout the neighborhood outside of the limited hours of the Safe Passage program or their routes. This highlights a need for higher staffing levels to support navigations to various programming in the Tenderloin.



Safe Passage ambassadors escort children to cross the streets safely.

Figure 4. Map of DCYF Funded Program Sites in the Tenderloin and Number of Encampments Reports from 311 and Assault and Drug Offense Police Incidents in 2023



Source: DCYF and Data SF

Quotes from Focus Groups and Interviews

Youth

“There are dealers harassing us on the street and nobody is doing anything about it.”

(Connected TAY Focus Group)

Parents

“When my child walks in the neighborhood they offer them free drugs”.

(Focus Group with Spanish Speaking Parents)

“My 14-year-old daughter will tell me, ‘I don’t want to walk through there.’ She gets scared walking by herself”.

(Focus Group with Spanish Speaking Parents)

“Afterschool programs are surrounded by tents and drug dealing activities. We would like more stewardship of places that contain youth.”

(Focus Group with Arabic Speaking Parents)

Youth Service Providers

“It takes about 2 staff for a group of 10 youth, 3 Staff for a group of 15 youth, and 4 staff for a group of 20+ youth to safely escort kids to events. Normally prepping logistics such as staffing and planning for an itinerary happens two weeks before the event”.

“Given the unique street conditions in the Tenderloin, navigating youth to school, afterschool programs and community events remains a consistent challenge. Service providers need more staffing to ensure safe passage for youth.”

FUNDING CONSIDERATION 1.

Additional staff support for safe navigation of children to afterschool programs.

As mentioned earlier, the conditions in the streets of Tenderloin instigated an Emergency Initiative in December 2021 in the Tenderloin to address the street conditions. While the emergency initiative lasted for over six months, the City has continued to launch various interagency collaborations and initiatives to address the drug market and open-air drug scene in the neighborhood. The Drug Market Agency Coordination Center is the City’s latest effort to seize drugs, arrest drug dealers, and eventually shut down the open-air drug market. Concurrently, interagency efforts led by the Department of Emergency Management, Department of Public Health, and Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

amongst many other City agencies have led various initiatives to address encampments, maintain sidewalks clear, increase access to treatment for individuals with substance use disorders, and improve access to housing and shelter.

Despite all efforts and investments, improvements to the streets of Tenderloin are not significant enough to create a safe neighborhood environment for children and youth like what children in other neighborhoods have access to. Until significant progress is made towards addressing the street conditions in the Tenderloin, additional staff support is strongly recommended to provide basic safety for children and families when they navigate throughout the neighborhood to attend community events, afterschool programs, schools and more.

2

CHALLENGE 2.

Lack of age-appropriate and unstructured low-barrier programming for disconnected teens and TAY

Conversations with disconnected teens and TAY revealed a common sentiment for youth services programs that they have outgrown the available programs. For some, they view excessive supervision in existing programs as a deterrent, hindering their participation. For others, specifically TAY, as previously mentioned, only one program site is funded to serve them in the Tenderloin, most programs do not provide services for their age group.

Many have expressed interest in programs that are age appropriate or unstructured, low-barrier, and low-supervision. Specifically, the interviewees have shown a keen interest in sports and physical activities, such as soccer, basketball, and swimming. The Tenderloin Children's Playground holds a special place in the hearts of both connected and disconnected teens, providing a space where they can freely enjoy themselves without feeling overly supervised. Soccer Fridays, a weekly event organized by the Tenderloin Community Benefit District and the Playground, received consistent praise in our discussions with teens, often highlighted as a highly popular program. Arabic and Spanish-speaking parents highlighted the significance of these events and echoed the need for more of such initiatives within the Tenderloin.

Highlighted in conversations with this age group was an emphasis on creating spaces for TAY that cater to diverse personalities and interests. This entails a spectrum of programming to meet their varied needs. Suggestions to serve this demographic's interests range from a music studio for recording to opportunities in clothing design and production, or fitness facilities like a gym or weight training center.

Lack of weekend programming also contributes to a lack of low-barrier programming. Currently, there is no DCYF funded program that operates during the full weekend. Only four DCYF funded programs operate on a Monday – Saturday basis, displaying a gap in operational hours. Both parents and youth in the Tenderloin have expressed a strong desire for weekend programming.

Quotes from Focus Groups and Interviews

Youth

“We aren’t attracted to programs that are geared towards children and where we're always supervised. I can see myself attending a program that offers open gyms, game rooms, and hangout spots with low supervision.”

Focus Group with Disconnected Teens

“Once you turn the age of 18 afterschool programs stop serving you and now you have to face the transition to becoming an adult without the support you once had”

Focus Group with Connected TAY

"There weren't enough positive role models in the Tenderloin. Therefore, people on the block became models for many youths, including my younger self".

Interview with Disconnected TAY

“People view us like outsiders which makes them not to engage with us. I think more outreach about opportunities and services could be better”.

Interview with Disconnected TAY

Parents

“When my child walks in the neighborhood they offer them free drugs”.

Focus Group with Spanish Speaking Parents

“Some of our children don’t want to attend existing programs or have been kicked out and need more innovative programing to meet their desires.”

Youth Service Providers

“Obviously the current programs don’t attract them. We need programs that provide them opportunities and safe places to hang out.”

FUNDING CONSIDERATION 2.

Increase resources for low-barrier and low-structure programming for teens

Given the needs of youth and TAY in the Tenderloin, funding low-barrier, low-structure, and age-appropriate programming such as a drop-in center tailored for teens and TAY is critical and can serve as a multifaceted solution. This hub would serve as both a resource center and a designated social haven, offering a safe, inviting environment where young individuals can gather, socialize, and participate in engaging activities such as sports tournaments and cultural events. Drop-in centers provide the low supervision flexibility of youth to engage in activities they enjoy.

Sports tournaments are also another approach to offering low barrier and low structure programming and can be made possible through a drop-in center. Diverse programs that are age-appropriate and tailored to different needs of teens and TAY and act as a preventive measure against their potential involvement in the drug scene.

In addition, we recommend funding support for weekend programming, serving both youth and parents to allow for inclusive, and low-barrier programming. For example, parents usually desire programming for families, such as trips outside of the Tenderloin and programs that allow for them to spend some time with their kids, while teens and TAY might prefer group activities or sports programs.



Teens play basketball at Tenderloin Recreation Center

3

CHALLENGE 3.

Tenderloin Youth need to make an earning to support family while seeking support to navigate job readiness and career exploration.

The Tenderloin faces economic challenges pertaining to income and poverty. Based on U.S. Census data, the neighborhood has a significantly lower median income compared to the city at large. In 2022, the median household income in the Tenderloin was \$42,000, less than a third of the city's median income of \$137,000. In the Tenderloin 25 percent of the population lived in poverty, compared to the 10 percent citywide. The Tenderloin also experiences a higher unemployment rate, with 11 percent unemployed, compared to the city's less than four percent in 2022³.

Given the substantial low-income profile of the neighborhood, many young individuals in the Tenderloin were compelled to start working and contributing income to support their families. While most San Francisco families would not allow their teen to walk the streets of Tenderloin, teens and TAY living in the Tenderloin have often been offered jobs by drug dealers working the streets of Tenderloin. Discussions with parents, youth, and service providers confirmed the trend where the open-air drug market industry lure Tenderloin youth to work for them. This underscores the urgency of better engaging with disconnected teens and TAY who are compelled to join the drug market to make an earning.

In addition, interviews with disconnected youth suggested other challenges that aggravate their sense of disconnection including potential legal issues or academic qualifications requirements as barriers to enter workforce. This prevents them from participating in youth service programs both during the week and on the weekends. Moreover, parents have noted that language constraints of new immigrant youth are also a significant barrier to the labor market for these youth.

3 Household income, poverty, and unemployment data is from ACS 2022 5-year data release.

Quotes from Focus Groups and Interviews

Youth

“We're not kids, our families depend on us. We need access to jobs and resources that will help us help our families.”

Focus Group with Disconnected Teens

“After school is over, I have work, and don't have time to attend the afterschool programs when they operate.”

Focus Group with Disconnected Teens

"We need access to jobs that pay well and that would accept us. It's hard for me to get any job that requires a background check.”

Interview with Disconnected TAY

Parents

“Being a new immigrant and not knowing how to find a job was scary. I hope that our kids will have the tools they need to succeed in school and find jobs.”

Focus Group with Spanish Speaking Families

Despite such critical challenges, many youths in the focus groups expressed their aspirations for future careers such as in business, law enforcement, medicine, and technology, as well as their frustration with the lack of support, guidance, and resources to help them achieve these goals. Notably, transitional-age youth face the imminent challenge of stepping into adulthood, where financial stability becomes a pressing concern. Discussions revealed a consensus on the necessity for comprehensive youth workforce development programs. These programs should encompass vital components such as financial literacy training, job-readiness skills, and exposure to career paths that align with personal interests while ensuring a sustainable income.

In addition, among the teens, there is an interest in alternative teaching and mentorship outside of traditional schooling. While conventional education may suit some learning styles, there's a desire for more adaptable and personalized learning methods tailored to individual preferences.

Quotes from Focus Groups and Interviews

Youth

“I want to be a doctor and stay in school and want the community to support me.”

Teen Focus Group

Parents

“There are Arab youth engaging in street activities with no programs engaging with them or offering them better opportunities.”

Focus Group with Arabic Speaking Parents

“Give our youth jobs so they can gain life skills and develop good character.”

Focus Group with Spanish Speaking Parents

Youth Service Providers

“We employ youth from the Tenderloin not only to help them individually. This system also creates role models for other youth.”

FUNDING CONSIDERATION 3.

Enhance workforce development and career exposure for disconnected teens and TAY.

Currently DCYF provides funding for four youth workforce development programs in the Tenderloin including two career exposure programs for middle school students, one Mayor’s Youth Employment and Education Program for students aged between 14 and 17 some exclusively cater to youths who meet academic goals and exclude those with academic challenges, and only one serves transitional-age youth. As a result, youth who struggle with school often miss out on valuable opportunities. With only one program serving transitional-aged youth offered by Larkin Street Youth Services, it is not sufficient to meet the various needs of TAY population in Tenderloin. Service providers supported the idea that expanding career exposure and job readiness opportunities would help with the success of Tenderloin youth.

Enhanced workforce development programs in the Tenderloin should provide opportunities to disconnected teens and TAY. These programs would introduce them to career options that aligned with

their interests, equip them with the essential skills and resources required for employment, and pave the way for long-term career-building opportunities.

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CHALLENGE 4.

Need for enhanced culturally competent services that are tailored to the unique needs of immigrant youth and families.

The Tenderloin is home to many new immigrants. Many face language barriers and cultural adjustments that hinder their success in education or employment. At the same time, there is a lack of culturally specific and sensitive programming offerings in the Tenderloin, making them inaccessible to immigrant youth and families. For example, interviews with youth service providers reveal that the Arab community in the Tenderloin is underserved. The majority of the Arab community in the Tenderloin come from a Muslim background. Culturally responsive programming would require separate programming for male and female youth. Without such programming the Arab youth, and girls in particular, do not attend youth programming. Conversations with Arab parents revealed that Muslim girl youth are interested in sports activities but require separated facilities from programs that involve men. Arab parents also expressed concerns about a lack of cultural representation in provider staffing. Parents are interested in maintaining the cultural connection for their youth and are worried that the existing mosques are not set to provide programming that attract their youth.

Another large population of families in the Tenderloin are Spanish speaking families who also expressed concerns for a lack of programs that are offered in Spanish to help children feel comfortable in speaking their mother language at public settings.



Children gather at Tenderloin Recreation Center for group activities.

Quotes from Focus Groups and Interviews

Parents

“Some of our kids don’t know English. They want to learn but don’t know how. Many programs stopped providing bilingual services for new immigrant youth.”

Focus Group with Spanish Speaking Parents

“I’m worried that our kids are losing their cultural identity. We need a center that celebrates and educates youth about their culture.”

Focus Group with Arabic Speaking Parents

“Our community used to have confidential and comfortable setting for Muslim women to participate in activities, such as exclusive swimming pool sessions, which no longer exist in the neighborhood.”

Focus Group with Arabic Speaking Parents

Youth Service Providers

“There’s a subset of Arab Youth in the neighborhood who are considered at risk youth, and a subset of Arab girls in the community that don’t attend programming because of the lack of culturally sensitive services”.

“Getting data on the Arab Community is hard which makes it harder for this community to get resources. We need to help serve both groups of youth before it’s too late.”

Interview with Youth Service Providers

FUNDING CONSIDERATION 4.

Culturally Responsive Programs for Immigrant Youth

Tailored, culturally responsive services can significantly ease this transition for immigrant youth and families by addressing their unique needs and promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment, which could lead to increased access to resources, effective educational support, empowerment, and self-efficacy, increased mental health and well-being, and trust and positive relationships with the community.

Currently, only one program is funded by DCYF for outreach and access, which aims to focus on strengthening the relationships between parents, caregivers, schools, and the district to advance high quality learning experiences for all students.

We recommend funding more programs dedicated to outreach and access to immigrants' youth and families, encompassing in-language translation services, and translated materials. By reducing language and cultural barriers, this could ensure reaching immigrant communities from diverse cultural backgrounds effectively.

In addition, we recommend funding programs or facilities that specifically target Arab youth to help address the gap of culturally sensitive programming for this community in specific. This should include programming that targets Arab women in specific as more privacy is needed to provide culturally responsive programming. Conversations with the Arab community highlighted a need for services that provide programming for both parents and children in parallel.

Similarly, for Spanish speaking families we recommend funding considerations for youth services that provide Spanish speaking programs and staff for Latine immigrants who live in the Tenderloin. These programs will support the sense of pride for youth for their language and community and will supplement programming that help this youth in English language skills.

5 CHALLENGE 5. **Lack of outreach and programming for youth involved in the justice system.**

With the increase in youth involved in the drug market, and increased enforcement strategies the city is implementing, lack of programming for justice-involved youth who live in the Tenderloin is critical. Currently there are no such programs located in the Tenderloin. Given the challenges of street conditions in the Tenderloin and their impact on youth, ensuring youth involved in the justice system are part of the conversation would help potential service providers develop effective programs that address the unique needs of this group. This would engage them in positive activities and interrupt the pipeline to the Tenderloins open-air drug market.

FUNDING CONSIDERATION 5. **More outreach and programming targeted towards Tenderloin youth involved in the justice system.**

Programs addressing violence and addictions with a focus on justice-involved youth in the Tenderloin would provide them the opportunities to excel and succeed despite the challenges in the neighborhood. Such programs would need to develop and deepen relationships with this group and provide a diverse array of services such as afterschool enrichment, academic support, arts and recreation, technology

education, leadership development, job skills and career development, community service-learning opportunities, mental health and trauma counseling supports; substance abuse prevention programming; gang prevention and intervention; case management services for transitional aged youth and diversion youth; life skills and family support workshops; and information and referral services for students in the neighborhood. Examples of programs funded to provide these services include the Excelsior Beacon Center, Young Community Developers, and Success Center San Francisco.

In addition, considering the life experiences of justice-involved youth, we recommend enabling staff and coaches from the Tenderloin community or have a history of overcoming life challenges to be positive role models that could provide them with support in a trusting environment. This approach is being put into practice in some of the current DCYF funded programs that aim to address violence with addictions such as the Success Stories Program.

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CHALLENGE 6.

Need for cross organizational collaborative efforts that tailor to the unique needs of Tenderloin youth.

Youth in the Tenderloin face unique challenges presented by the current street and living conditions in the neighborhood. These challenges require collaborative approaches and resource sharing among service providers to effectively address gaps in services and meet the needs of Tenderloin youth. Without such coordination, some resources could remain untapped while others overbooked. Lack of coordination also results in overlapping or duplicating certain resources while other types of needs may be overlooked. Intentional coordination for youth services exists in other vulnerable communities; for example, BMAGIC, located in Bayview/Hunters Point, comprises of nonprofit organizations committed to facilitating, coordinating, and developing community resources to support service providers and community members in Bayview Hunters Point. However, these models do not exist in the Tenderloin which contains many of San Francisco's immigrant populations.

FUNDING CONSIDERATION 6:

Dedicated Staffing and Resources for a Youth Services Collaboration and Coordination Program Focusing on the Tenderloin

Dedicated staffing and resources for collaboration amongst youth service providers will help build meaningful partnerships nonprofit organizations, schools, and other stakeholders involved in serving children, youth and their families in the Tenderloin. These partnerships will better equip youth service providers in the Tenderloin to collectively address those unique needs of Tenderloin youth more effectively. The intended collaborative partnerships should also aim to increase the flow of knowledge and information, and establish partnerships with service providers, and the City to support youth comprehensively in the Tenderloin.



Youth gather for a group activity at the Tenderloin Children's Playground

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Teen Nights at Tenderloin Recreation Center