

TRANSITIONING FROM YOUTH TO ADULthood:

# Mapping the Impact of Systems & Places on Youth Pathways

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# Foreward

## About the Place Matters Project

The places in which we live, learn, and grow influence our trajectory in life. The transition from childhood to adulthood is often a challenging experience for young people. Leading research tells us that this important developmental phase, typically defined as ages 14 to 24, is significantly impacted by the community in which young people live and the resources to which they have access. Yet communities are not equally resourced and many young people lack access to the support and services they need to thrive as young adults.

■ **System-Involved Youth** are a vulnerable and underserved population for whom the transition to adulthood is often marred with obstacles. At age eighteen, many of these young people age out of child-serving systems and are often left to navigate this difficult transition on their own. Youth with criminal records stemming from involvement in the justice system face additional barriers to employment, education, housing, and other essential resources.<sup>i</sup> This is further compounded by persistent opportunity gaps experienced by youth of color, girls, LGBTQ+, and gender nonconforming youth who often make up a disproportionate percentage of these system populations.<sup>ii,iii</sup>

The relationships among demographics, system involvement, and subsequent outcomes are often referred to as “pipelines.” Some examples are the “school-to-prison pipeline,”<sup>iv,v</sup> the “child welfare-to-juvenile justice pipeline,”<sup>vi</sup> and even the “womb-to-foster care pipeline.”<sup>vii</sup>

### System-Involved Youth

The term system-involved youth includes young people with lived experiences of any of the following: homelessness, educational pushout, the mental and behavioral health system, the child welfare system, and the youth justice system.

i Hawes, S., King E., Sanchez, M., & Shaler G. (March 2017). *Unsealed fate: The unintended consequences of inadequate safeguarding of juvenile records in Maine*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Ek6SCG>

ii Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Race for results: Building a path to opportunity for all children*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/resources/race-for-results/>

iii Movement Advancement Project, Center for American Progress, and Youth First. (2017). *Unjust: LGBTQ youth incarcerated in the juvenile justice system*. Retrieved from <http://www.lgbtmap.org/criminal-justice-youthdetention>

iv Petteruti, A. (2011). *Education under arrest: The case against police in schools*. Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute. Retrieved from [http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/educationunderarrest_fullreport.pdf)

v Whitaker, A., Torres-Guillen, S., Morton, M., Jordan, H., Coyle, S., Mann, A., & Sun, W. (n.d.). *Cops and no counselors: How the lack of school mental health staff is harming students*. American Civil Liberties Union. Retrieved from [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf)

vi Herz, D.C., Ryan, J.P., & Bilchik, S. (2010). *Challenges facing crossover youth: An examination of juvenile-justice decision making and recidivism*. Family Court Review, 48(2), 305–321. doi:10.1111/j.1744-1617.2010.01312.x

vii Ketteringham, E.S., Cremer, S., & Becker, C. (2016). *Healthy mothers, healthy babies: A reproductive justice response to the “Womb-to-Foster-Care Pipeline.”* CUNY Law Review, 20(1), 77–125 Retrieved from <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clr/vol20/iss1/4/>



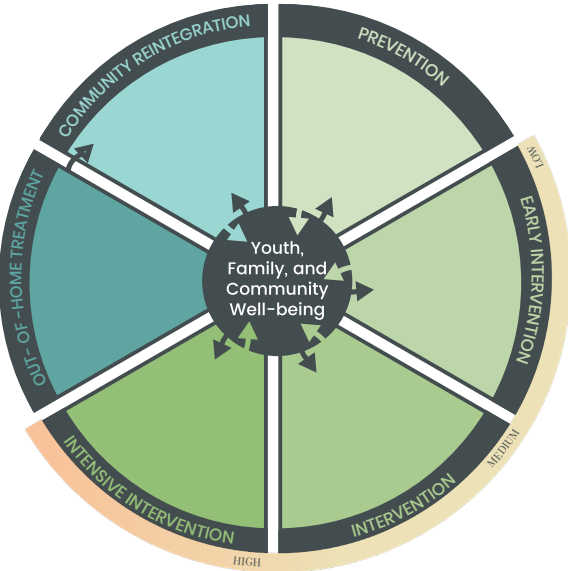


FIGURE A  
Community-based Continuum of Care

Disrupting these pipelines represents a critical opportunity to reduce the negative, and often cyclical, impacts of system involvement on young people.

A significant body of research points to strategic investment in a community-based continuum of care as the most effective and efficient way to achieve this disruption.<sup>viii</sup> Such a system of care would be shaped by the community and include a range of evidence-based, data-informed programs and services to support youth through each phase of care: Prevention, Early Intervention, Intervention, Intensive Intervention, Out-of-Home Treatment and Community Reintegration (Figure A). For a more detailed description of the Place Matters Community-Based Continuum of Care,

refer to the *Place Matters: Aligning Investments in a Community-Based Continuum of Care for Maine Youth Transitioning to Adulthood*<sup>ix</sup> report which is available on our [website](#).<sup>x</sup>

Recognizing the need for consistent and targeted services to support systems-involved, transition-aged youth, the Place Matters project aims to support the state of Maine and its communities in redesigning, implementing, and evaluating a community-based continuum of care through systems innovation, data resources, and community inclusion. Our work focuses on translating data and innovative practices into community-based solutions that are both responsive to local needs and supplement existing assets so that **all transition-aged young people in Maine thrive into adulthood**.

The Place Matters project is housed at the Justice Policy Program within the Cutler Institute at the Muskie School of Public Service, which is located at the University of Southern Maine and is supported by a collective of funders including The John T. Gorman Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Rocking Moon Foundation, the Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, the Maine Economic Improvement Fund, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and The Bingham Program.

viii Heilbrun, K., Sevin, N., Redding, R. (2005). *Juvenile Delinquency: Prevention, Assessment, and Intervention*. Oxford University Press.

ix Sanchez, M., King, E., & Ward, J. (2019). *Place matters: Aligning investments in a community-based continuum of care for Maine youth transitioning to adulthood*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine. Retrieved from <https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/cutler/Place%20Matters%20CoC%20FINAL.pdf>

x <https://justicepolicyprogr.wixsite.com/imagineanewfuture/place-matters>

### Our Three Core Values

#### SYSTEM INNOVATION

We are committed to working towards universal goals and targeted reinvestment into a community-based continuum of care based on analysis of underlying indicators of economic and social well-being.

#### DATA RESOURCES

We are informed by and accountable to the best available data across systems and communities, including the underlying factors and forces of place that shape outcomes.

#### COMMUNITY INCLUSION

We engage and activate community assets and accountability in local problem solving and adaptation.

### Place Matters Report Series

Place Matters has produced a series of reports summarizing our research, community engagement, and policy recommendations. The reports in this series are intended to inform and support the work of policy makers and community members dedicated to improving outcomes for Maine’s youth. As our work continues, additional reports and resources will be added to the series. All published reports can be accessed in full on our [website](#). Reports in the *PlaceMatters* series include:

#### Aligning Investments in a Community-Based Continuum of Care for Maine Youth Transitioning to Adulthood<sup>xi</sup>

The first report in this series examines the influence of place on our developmental experiences, and how the resources and supports we have access to shape our pathways into adulthood. Citing national research and state level statics, this report highlights how Maine’s transition-aged, systems-involved youth are negatively impacted by inconsistently available community-based interventions and supports, particularly in rural areas. It further argues that these gaps in services are exacerbated by state reductions in services and fluctuating government contributions to the social safety net, leaving many of our most vulnerable young people without the support they need to thrive in their communities.

In response to this growing need, Place Matters calls on policy makers and community members to work collectively across our systems of care to align resources and efforts into a community-based continuum of care that is responsive to the needs of the diverse communities across Maine’s 16 counties. The second half of this report outlines Place Matters’ vision of such a continuum of care. It defines each of the six phases of care included in the continuum and provides examples of promising community-based programs from around the country. Finally, this report identifies six recommendations for policy makers, youth advocates and community members to ensure all Maine transition-aged youth experience a fair, equitable, and responsive system of care that contributes to positive youth outcomes (Figure B). **In particular, community asset mapping was highlighted as an important first step in assessing a community’s assets and needs.**

Commit to <b>aligned action</b> that measurably improves positive youth outcomes for transition-aged youth.	Recommit to a <b>leadership body</b> that shares accountability across systems.	Identify <b>community</b> assets, needs and opportunities for <b>investment</b> .
Create <b>opportunities for those with lived experiences</b> to participate in building solutions.	Invest in strategies that focus on <b>common measures of success</b> .	<b>Prioritize</b> reinvestment in <b>community-based interventions</b> and capacity building.

xi Sanchez, M., King, E., & Ward, J. (2019). *Place matters: Aligning investments in a community-based continuum of care for Maine youth transitioning to adulthood*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine. Retrieved from <https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/cutler/Place%20Matters%20CoC%20FINAL.pdf>

### Justice Reinvestment

The concept of justice reinvestment is central to the strategies of resourcing a community-based continuum of care and informs the work of the Place Matters project. The Urban Institute defines justice reinvestment as a system wide process designed for local leaders who want to rethink how they allocate resources throughout their criminal justice and social service system.

FIGURE B  
Six Recommendations for Positive Youth Outcomes



From Pipelines to Informing Place-Based Strategies for Maine’s Older Youth<sup>xii</sup>

The second report in this series uses county and state level data to illustrate the structural, placed-based risk factors at play in communities across our state which negatively impact youth outcomes. Building on research that identifies social and economic factors as influential in shaping a young person’s predisposition for both risk and protective patterns of behavior, this report challenges the notion that individual choices drive delinquent or criminal behavior. Rather, key community characteristics have been consistently identified as determinants of youth vulnerability, risky behavior, and poor outcomes. Examples of these community level determinants include concentrated poverty, housing stability, school quality, and social capital.

This report asserts that understanding youth outcomes as a product of place is critical for both policy discussions and informing investments in strategies. Furthermore, we must have a clear, comprehensive, and data-informed understanding of the challenges young people face in our communities in order to create population level change. By analyzing the current trends in youth outcomes, we can accurately identify where young people are succeeding and where we need to redesign and reinvest our efforts. To that end, this report provides in-depth analysis of 14 place-based economic and social determinants of youth outcomes, comparing trends across counties using a specific population data point selected to measure each determinant (Figure C). For example, the median family income was used to compare the determinant of Household Economic Well-being across counties as well as at the state level. In addition to exploring these key determinants of youth outcomes, the report also includes “snapshots” for each of Maine’s 16 counties providing a deeper look at each county’s strengths and opportunities to inform the level and type of investments needed in a community. Further, these determinants provide a baseline of population level indicators against which to measure subsequent progress.

FIGURE C  
Economic and Social  
Determinants of Youth  
Outcomes

 Household Economic Well-being	 Community Financial Security
 Economic Inclusion	 Housing Affordability
 School Quality	 Community Security
 Social Belonging	 Area Economic Growth
 Human Capital	 Youth Homelessness
 Youth Justice Involvement	 Child Welfare System Involvement
 Educational Pushout	 Mental & Behavioral Health Care

xii Sanchez, M., King, E., and Dumont, R. (2019). Place matters: From pipelines to place-based strategies for Maine’s older youth. Retrieved from [https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af\\_2c01a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf](https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_2c01a22f71814c94936d1309e4e79198.pdf)

Assessing Community Assets & Opportunities – A Case Study of Asset Mapping in Androscoggin County<sup>xiii</sup>

The third report in the Place Matters series provides a case study of asset mapping in Maine’s communities. Turning to Androscoggin County as a community in which to pilot this grassroots approach, the report explores existing assets and needs in the county. It looks at how this information can inform investments in a community-based continuum of care that is responsive to both population level data as well as the voices of youth and individuals who live and work in that community.

Drawing on the comprehensive data analysis conducted in the second Place Matters report, this report first examines Androscoggin County’s strengths and opportunities regarding the social and economic determinants previously outlined. The second part of this report synthesizes this information with local expertise and experiences gained by engaging young people and adults in asset mapping and community dialogues. The report provides analysis of this important qualitative data, highlighting common themes that emerged from community insights on existing assets and opportunities for investment. The report concludes with recommendations to further efforts to improve youth outcomes in Androscoggin County stemming from both the community’s insights and best practices identified through research from around the nation.

Breaking the Cycle: Interrupting Generational Incarceration in Maine

The goal of the fourth report in the series was to further our understanding of the scale of parental incarceration and the impact on the children in Maine. This report provides a snapshot of the number of children who were impacted by parental incarceration in the state system over a 5-year period (2015–2020). The findings show that for the majority of these parents, there is no legal factor prohibiting contact with their children. While more research is needed to better understand the nuances of parental incarceration in Maine, this research supports the implementation of policies and programs to help put Maine families and children first. By ensuring Maine families have access to appropriate services and a community-based network of support we can stop the cycle of intergenerational incarceration and improve outcomes for Maine’s children.

Transitioning From Youth to Adulthood: Mapping the Impact of Systems & Places on Youth Pathways (Current report)

The fifth report in this series seeks to lift up the voices of Maine’s youth and place their lived experiences at the center of public discourse and decision-making. This study elicited life stories from 35 youth (age 14–24) using art-based narrative inquiry methods to map their journeys from childhood to adulthood. This report will offer a deeper look at the firsthand experiences of Maine’s systems-involved youth and explore how their stories can and should inform the development of a community-based continuum of care.

xiii Sanchez, M., King, E., and Schiller, S. (2020). Place matters: Assessing community assets & opportunities – a case study of asset mapping in androscoggin county. Retrieved from [https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af\\_5b274cc8d77b406d88bbd894470ebe6f.pdf](https://cec47d12-75a7-45a9-98a1-99f79c71ca5b.filesusr.com/ugd/d5b6af_5b274cc8d77b406d88bbd894470ebe6f.pdf)



“We grasp our lives in a narrative. In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going.”

CHARLES TAYLOR (1989)

## Introduction

Research indicates that certain kinds of public system involvement (child welfare<sup>i</sup>, mental/behavioral healthcare<sup>2</sup>, justice<sup>3,4</sup>, school exclusion<sup>5,6</sup>, or homelessness<sup>7</sup>) negatively impact development and set youth up for significant challenges as they transition to adulthood. Approximately one-fifth of Maine’s youth are currently experiencing homelessness, disconnection from school, or involvement in the behavioral health, child welfare, or juvenile justice systems.<sup>i</sup> National patterns suggest that many of these youth have been impacted by multiple systems.<sup>8</sup> Maine’s future vitality depends on caring for the well-being of system-involved youth and investing in specific supports and opportunities to help them thrive into adulthood. To understand how to create pathways out of systems, we must understand the factors and root causes precipitating and perpetuating system involvement.

While the impact of system involvement on development has been well documented in research, the stories of Maine youth whose lives have been influenced by public systems have not been a central component of policy making, community-building initiatives, or evaluations of youth-serving systems and programs. Placing the lived experiences of youth in the center of public discourse and at the heart of policy making requires us to listen directly to them about the totality of their experiences across systems. Looking independently at various system metrics (recidivism, school drop-out rates, number of foster

placements) perpetuates an incomplete understanding about youth outcomes, separated from the underlying contextual factors that affect their development. This partial understanding is further ingrained by data about youth produced through quantitative methods that are not easily accessible avenues for youth to voice their experiences.<sup>ii</sup>

**Placing the lived experiences of youth in the center of public discourse and at the heart of policy making requires us to listen directly to them about the totality of their experiences across systems.**

This study aimed to develop a more complete understanding of youth’s lived experiences and the interrelated experiences with public systems by utilizing a more accessible methodology to gather examples of youth voices in Maine. This study elicited life stories from system-involved youth (aged 14–24) using arts-based methods to map their journeys from childhood to adulthood in Maine. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research question: **How have places and interactions with systems (child welfare, children’s mental or behavioral healthcare, education, justice, and homelessness) shaped the pathways of Maine youth as they transition into adulthood?** ■

<sup>i</sup> Calculated based on homeless rates and suspensions reported by the Department of Education, calls to child protective services deemed appropriate by the Department of Health and Human Services, referrals to targeted case management designated “behavioral,” and juvenile referrals to the Department of Corrections, totaling approximately 35,000 youth, or 1/5 of the total 174,000 youth ages 14–24 in the state of Maine. Does not account for duplication between systems and thus multi-system involvement in Maine is unclear.

<sup>ii</sup> For example: intake and exit assessments, pre- and post-surveys, indicators or outputs of system interactions such as school discipline data, number of foster placements, number of youth accessing services at homeless drop-in centers and shelters, or length of detention in Long Creek Youth Development Center.



# Methods

This study employed an arts-based narrative methodology called journey mapping to elicit youth life stories. Journey mapping was chosen as an engaging, accessible methodology for the target audience. **Arts-based methods use creative works to allow more possibilities for young people to express themselves and articulate their life experiences.**<sup>9</sup> Arts-based research uses techniques such as drawing, photography, film, theatre, music, or poetry to enable participants to express themselves in non-verbal ways.<sup>10</sup> This study was grounded in narrative inquiry methodology<sup>11</sup> which involves deep and intensive interviews to give voice to participants' lived experiences<sup>12</sup> with the particular intention of understanding how those experiences unfold through time and across intersecting individual, social, and cultural factors.<sup>13,14</sup> By eliciting holistic stories, narrative inquiry values inclusion and creates space for context and the existence of multiple realities.<sup>15</sup> Narrative inquiry was chosen for this study in part to center youth voice and honor lived experience, but also for its explicit recognition of the importance of human interaction and the fact that the researcher is always a co-creator, interpreter, and presenter of the data.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, in addition to making research more accessible to youth and creating more possibilities for youth to express themselves and articulate their life stories,<sup>17</sup> arts-based methods lend narrative research a unique dimensionality reflecting both internal and external experiences.<sup>18</sup> Seeking holistic life stories from youth whose paths have been indelibly shaped by trauma required a medium that would allow youth to illustrate experiences that defy narration but have nevertheless been pivotal determinants of their pathways.

## Definitions

### DISCRIMINATION AND OTHERING

Othering (us vs. them) is defined as an expression of prejudice based on group or individual identity. It can include, but is not limited to: race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender identity, disability, citizenship status, or socioeconomic status.<sup>19</sup> In this report we discuss othering as the opposite of belonging in regards to systems, places, and groups. Discrimination is a form of othering where prejudice results in unequal policies, practices, or treatment of an individual or group of individuals based on a particular characteristic (e.g. race, gender, age, or sexual orientation). There are federal and state anti-discrimination laws that prohibit discrimination against protected groups in settings such as education, employment, housing, health care services, and government benefits and services.<sup>20</sup> While legal protections exist today, many systems and policies are still based on historical practices and norms of structural discrimination such as colonialism and white supremacy. In addition to structural and systemic discrimination many experience discrimination and othering in day-to-day interactions known as micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are thinly veiled, everyday instances of racism, homophobia, sexism, etc. where an individual may not be exposed to unlawful discrimination, but the experiences are still damaging to the individual's health and well-being.<sup>21</sup>

### MICROSYSTEMS AND MACROSYSTEMS

The concept of a micro- or macrosystem is used in Ecological Systems Theory and throughout this report. A microsystem is made up of the individuals with whom a young person interacts most immediately or closely. Often times that is a young person's family, but could also be a classroom or peer group. A macrosystem is the larger cultural environment in which the youth lives.<sup>22</sup>

## Theoretical Perspectives

This study made use of ecological systems theory of human development<sup>23</sup> as a lens through which to understand youth pathways and how they are shaped by places and by systems, particularly public systems. Youth pathways are also inevitably shaped by economic systems, cultural systems within and across Maine communities, and the historical-political moment in which youth are growing up. Ecological systems theory regards human development as a product of mutually influential relationships between individuals and their environments. **According to this theory, there is a continuous reciprocal process of interactions in which the self is shaped by the contexts in which it dwells, and this in turn shapes society** (Figure 1).<sup>24</sup> Ecological systems theory directly challenges the norm of studying human development from an individualistic and deficits-oriented perspective.

Ecological systems theory is fitting for this study because it counters the ongoing use of individualistic, deficits-oriented, and fragmented assessments of youth that have yielded remediation-oriented and disjointed strategies that allow the social conditions driving system-involvement to persist. Through an ecological systems lens, we aim to understand youth pathways and outcomes by considering both proximate and broader contexts in which youth grow up.<sup>25</sup> Using ecological systems theory in conjunction with narrative inquiry methodology, this study seeks to understand youth pathways fully contextualized within interpersonal, public, and political systems.

Image of ecological systems theory

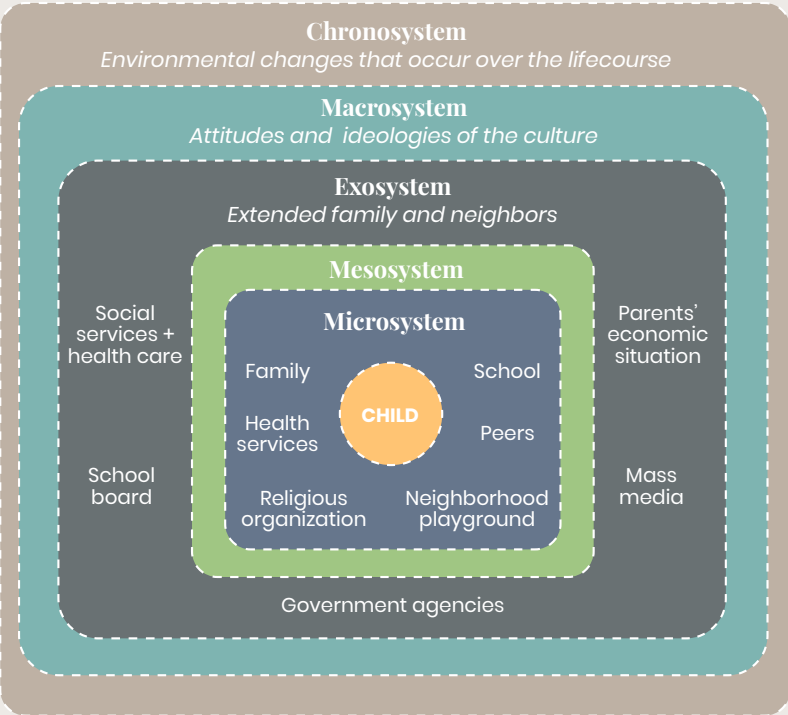


FIGURE 1

**Ecological systems theory regards human development as a product of mutually influential relationships between individuals and their environments.**



Sample

This project used purposive and availability sampling, which involved recruiting participants who were conveniently accessible or possessed a characteristic that related to the purpose of the study.<sup>26</sup> To recruit system-impacted youth, researchers engaged afterschool suspension diversion programs, homeless drop-in centers, LGBTQ+ youth groups,<sup>iii</sup> and the Long Creek Youth Development Center. Researchers then worked with these community-based and system partners to arrange journey mapping sessions.

In total, 35 journey maps were created through nine journey mapping sessions. These sessions took place at six different youth organizations or youth-serving systems: Long Creek (15), Augusta Boys and Girls Club (5), New Beginnings drop-in center (5), Q+ Group at New Beginnings (5), and Lewiston-Auburn Outright (5).<sup>iv</sup> Participants were not asked to provide demographic data, though many chose to include self-identified demographic characteristics such as geography, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, and cultural heritage in their journey maps. The majority of youth in the study were white and many identified as LGBTQ+. The youth from Long Creek were from various parts of the state and youth from the community groups were mostly from Augusta or the Lewiston-Auburn area.

Data Collection & Analysis

Journey mapping sessions were scheduled with system administrators and program coordinators, and journey mapping supplies (large paper and markers) were provided by the researchers. Incentives for participation included \$5 gift cards for youth in community settings, and outside food was provided for youth in Long Creek. Each session was co-facilitated<sup>v</sup> by two to three researchers. Only three out of nine sessions were audio recorded, due to recording restrictions at Long Creek and technology constraints in other locations. Detailed notes were taken by co-facilitators when audio recording was not possible. Most youth chose to verbally narrate their maps, while some opted to only share visually. Several youth preferred to participate verbally only and declined to show their maps.

Journey maps were photographed, and notes/recordings were transcribed after each journey mapping session. Researchers used NVivo software to code both the transcripts and the photographs. Several thematic/code categories were derived from initial codes, and corresponding code categories were created in NVivo. Code categories yielded five major themes that were all interrelated and contained a variety experiences.

35 journey maps were created through nine journey mapping sessions.

iii LGBTQ+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. See the GLAAD Media Reference Guide for more information: <https://www.glaad.org/reference#guide>.

iv Additional journey maps were created that are not included in this paper because they were done by individuals not between the ages of 14-24, they were done collaboratively by youth to represent a particular group or program rather than an individual's pathway, or they were done by program staff.

v See Appendix A: Facilitator's Guide

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study which hinders the ability to make generalizations from the data. The primary limitation of arts-based narrative inquiry used in this study is the perspective of the researchers interpreting and presenting the data. Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity in qualitative methods, co-facilitators of journey map sessions debriefed notes and initial interpretations during data collection and analysis. While this debriefing helped to overcome this limitation, the presence of interpretation bias in this study is still a possibility.

Another limitation to this study was the small sample size. While typical of qualitative studies, given the large number of system-involved youth in Maine, the small sample size means that the experiences of youth in this study may or may not represent the larger population. However, even with the small sample size, clear themes and patterns emerge from the stories of youth, which can help inform policymakers and provide a foundation for further research.

It is also noteworthy that the majority of youth included in this study were white. Journey mapping sessions were not as diverse as one would expect given the diverse racial and ethnic make-up of youth in the organizations and systems where journey mapping sessions took place.<sup>vi</sup> While efforts were made to recruit a more diverse group of participants, all youth from Long Creek who were approved to participate in this study were white. The researchers sought permission from parents or guardians of all youth under the age of 18 at Long Creek and worked with the facility administration to schedule multiple journey mapping sessions to help enable participation for those over 18 to consent. Despite these steps to remove barriers to participation, Long Creek staff determined which youth would be allowed to participate. Some youth that were approved to participate were not granted permission by their parents or guardians, had programming conflicts (i.e. visits) or declined participation.

vi According to a 2020 report by the Center for Children's Law and Policy, 27% of all Maine youth detention cases were youth who identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), with 23% of detention cases being youth who identified as Black or African American. For more information see: Center for Children's Law and Policy et al. (2020). Maine Juvenile Justice System Assessment, <https://www.maine.gov/corrections/sites/maine.gov/corrections/files/inline-files/Maine%20Juvenile%20Justice%20System%20Assessment%20FINAL%20REPORT%202-25-20.pdf>



# Findings

## Factors Influencing Pathways to System Involvement Among Maine’s Transition-Aged Youth

The following factors pervaded youth life stories regarding how places and system interactions shaped pathways into adulthood. These findings validate the factors and root causes identified and mapped in previous Place Matters reports.<sup>vii</sup>

- ▶ **POVERTY** was a constant running through every journey map among Maine’s system-involved, transition-aged youth. This theme emerged through stories of housing instability, adverse living conditions, and financial stress. Poverty was the most profound and interrelated determinant of interactions with Maine’s youth-serving public systems.
- ▶ **FAMILY SEPARATION**, induced by child welfare and justice systems, as well as by poor health outcomes resulting in incapacitation or early deaths of close family members, was cited as a common occurrence in the journey maps.
- ▶ **HEALTHCARE ACCESS** challenges and deferred health problems pointed to a lack of adequate coverage and availability of healthcare services, resulting in negative health experiences that triggered interactions with other public systems.
- ▶ **SCHOOL SYSTEMS** emerged as both a pathway leading to negative interactions with other public systems and a place of opportunity for improvement. For example, youth mapped experiences of exclusionary school discipline as early as preschool but also documented the importance of education as a means to growth and achievement.
- ▶ **DISCRIMINATION AND OTHERING**<sup>27</sup> emerged as experiences of prejudice based on gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and immigration status, which influenced family dynamics and public system interactions. However, youth also actively resisted negative impacts by creating supportive social networks and a sense of belonging within their own identities and chosen social spheres.

vii See [placemattersmaine.org](https://placemattersmaine.org) for previous reports in the Place Matters report series.

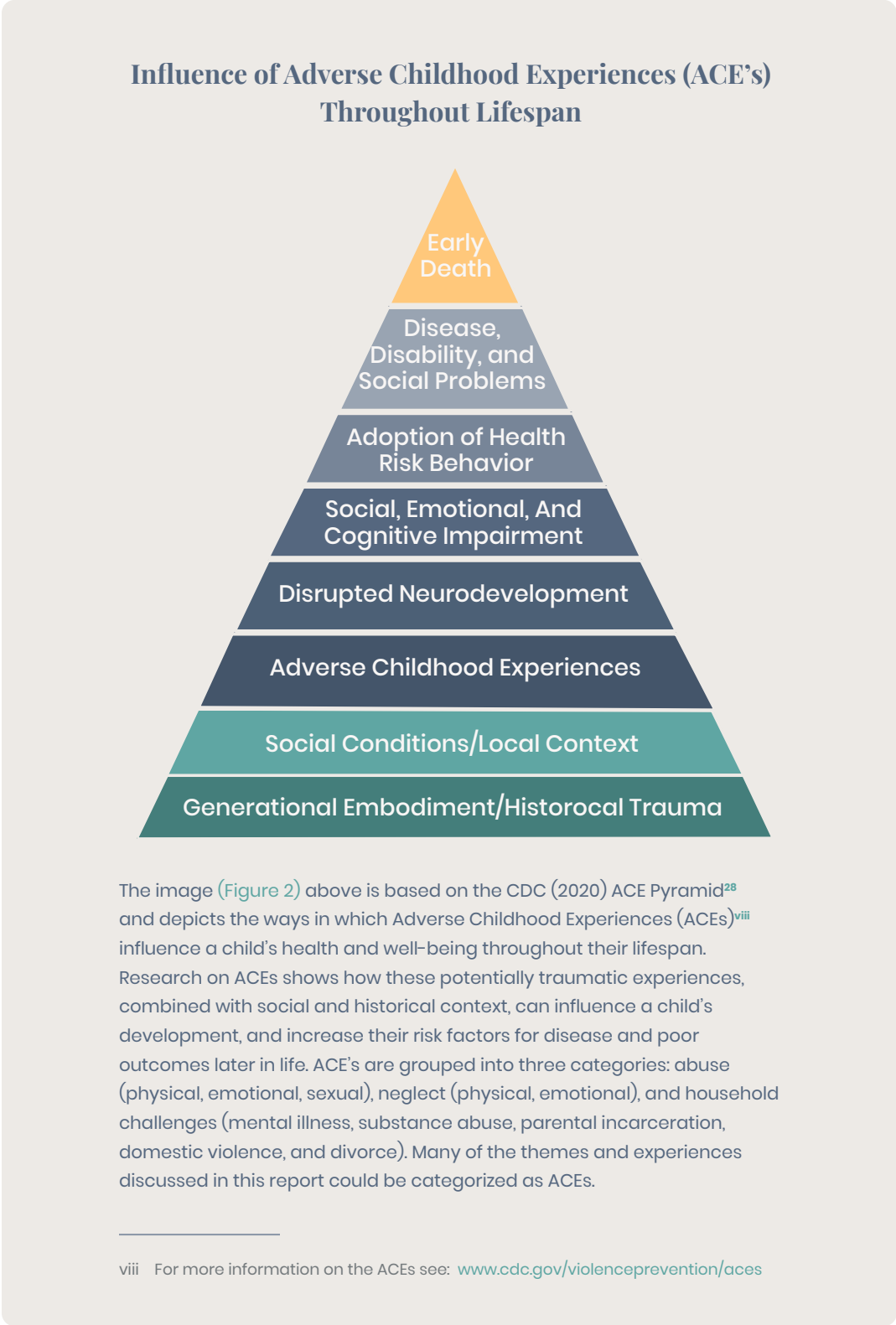


FIGURE 2



Poverty

Poverty was a theme threading through every participant’s journey map. It was depicted or named directly in the vast majority of journey maps, and alluded to in other, less explicit narratives. A common image of poverty was a dollar sign with a thick red line (Figure 3).ix Youth talked about housing instability or adverse housing conditions, financial stress, youth employment, and the impact of poverty on their worldview. Youth’s acute awareness of their financial struggle often came up in each phase of life that they narrated, yet it impacted their paths differently as they moved out of childhood, into adolescence, and toward adulthood.

Participants commonly talked about their families not being able to afford rent or the cost of housing, and many discussed the impact of multiple relocations. Childhood memories of poverty involved visual and verbal imagery of adverse housing conditions, such as descriptions of housing lacking heat or in disrepair with broken windows or crumbling ceilings (Figure 4). Participants’ stories about poverty changed as they reflected on their adolescence. Youth talked about becoming homeless themselves, selling drugs to make money, and keeping secrets from family members about how they were making money. **A sense of obligation to contribute to their families in conjunction with their developing self-agency often led youth to engage in illegal economies, resulting in juvenile justice system involvement.**

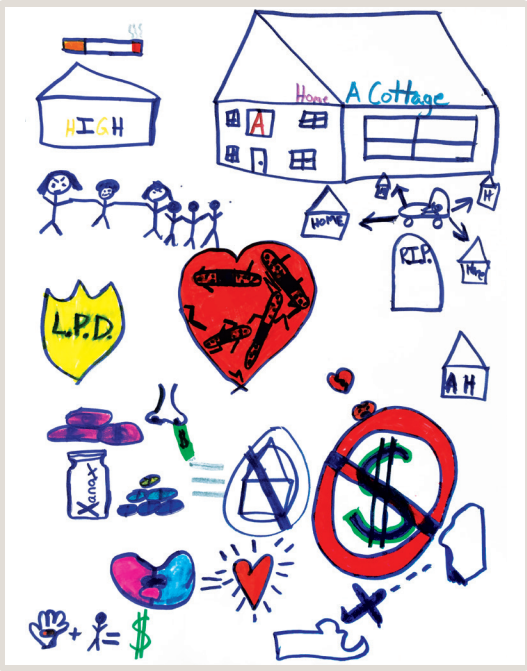


FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4

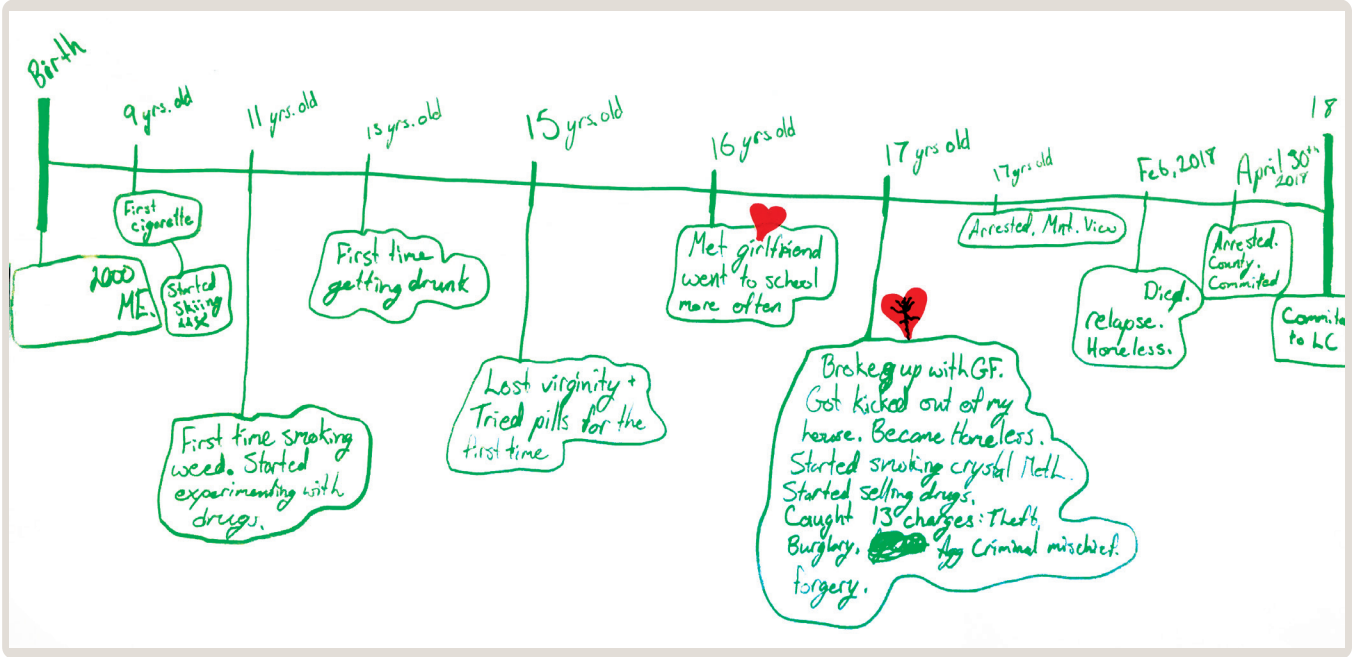


FIGURE 5

One youth’s path through adolescence summarized how the cumulative effects of poverty and housing insecurity in his family led him to create a new microsystem<sup>29</sup> with peers and romantic partners, but when this new microsystem collapsed he resorted to substance use and stealing as solutions to emotional and financial hardship (Figure 5). This cascade of events was captured in a single annotation, “Broke up with GF. Got kicked out of my house. Became homeless. Started smoking crystal meth. Started selling drugs. Caught 13 charges...” This annotation exemplifies the precariousness of many situations documented in this study.

Embedded in participants’ experience of poverty was a strong sense of self-determination and desire to elevate themselves out of poverty. Youth depicted this drive to work hard and contribute value, particularly by providing financially, as developing in tandem with the detrimental effects of poverty unfolding in their lives. While participating in illegal activities for income perpetuated many of the adverse life experiences that youth were struggling to escape (Figure 4. detail), youth also plotted their jobs on their journey maps. Youth with jobs during any phase of their journeys frequently talked about these jobs as anchors in tumultuous times and sources of positive self-identity. However, youth also narrated conflict between choosing legal but low-paying jobs or risky but profitable activities like selling drugs.

Youth with jobs during any phase of their journeys frequently talked about these jobs as anchors in tumultuous times and sources of positive self-identity.

ix Figures of journey maps have been edited to remove names and identifying information.







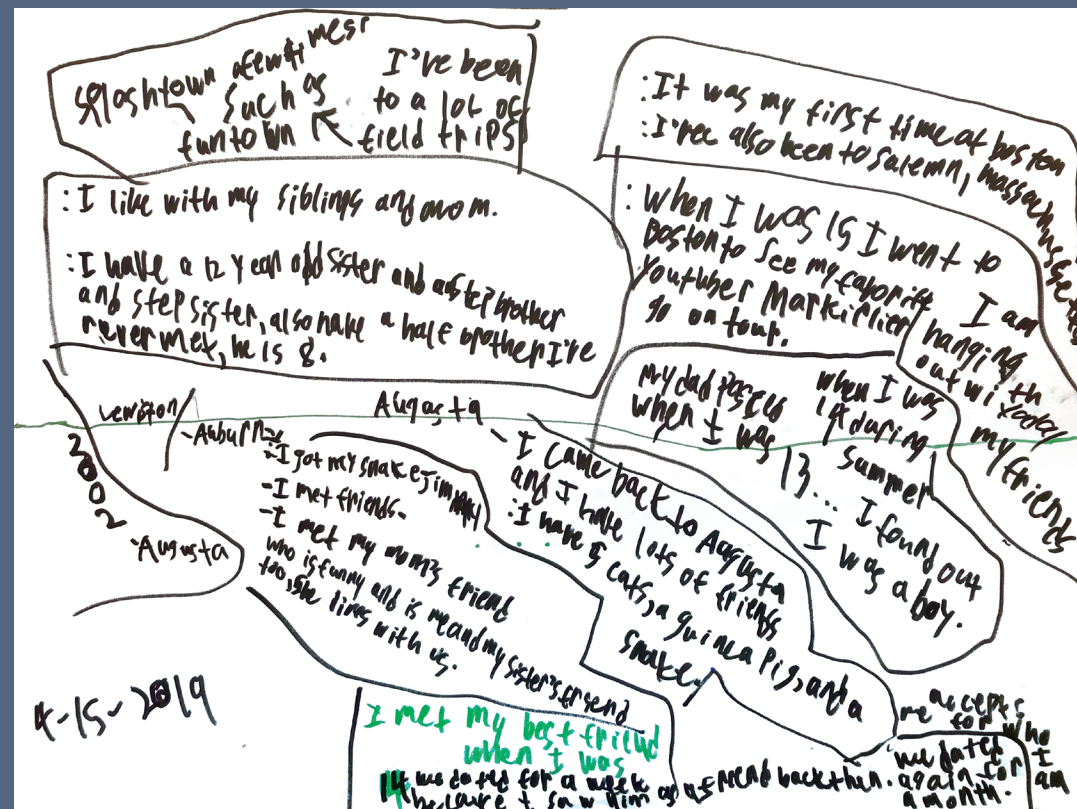


FIGURE 8



FIGURE 10



FIGURE 9

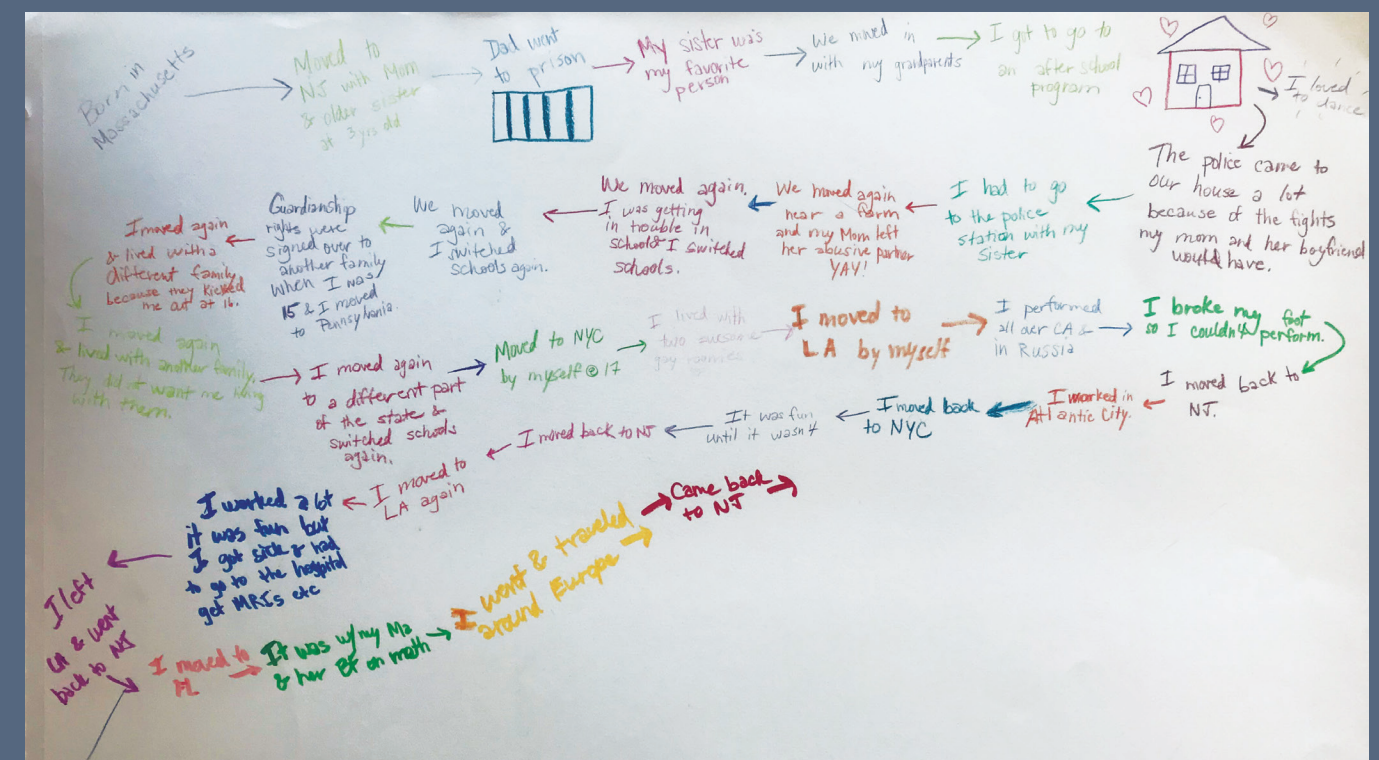


FIGURE 11



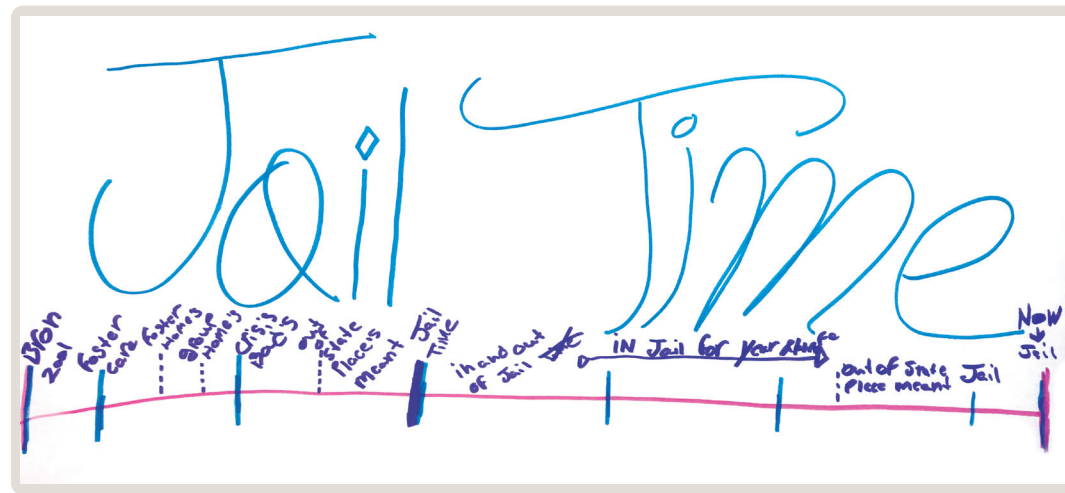


FIGURE 12

Parents struggling with untreated addiction and housing instability were common root causes contributing to multiple moves, homelessness, child welfare involvement, or loss of a parent due to incarceration, and ultimately family separation. Both untreated addiction and housing instability point to failures by different public systems including inadequate access to healthcare and insufficient economic supports. With ruptures in the family occurring at the beginning of many youth's journeys, repetitive and more permanent separations followed as youth pathways unfolded. One journey map directly illustrated how family separation sets off a chain reaction of escalating interactions with child welfare, mental or behavioral health, and juvenile justice (Figure 12). Similar sequences of child welfare and mental or behavioral health interventions leading to increasingly restrictive settings and incarceration appeared in multiple youth journey maps.

For many youth, experiences of family separation and interactions with public systems repeated throughout childhood. **As youth progressed toward adulthood, some described re-experiencing the cycle of family separation and system interventions, this time from the perspective of being parents themselves.** One journey map depicted a childhood marked by family separation and interactions with various public systems, culminating at age 17 with two captions attached to the same entry, “*My daughter was born*” and “*Came to L.C [Long Creek]*” (Figure 13). This youth’s journey underscores how, like poverty, family separation is both a cause and a result of negative system interactions plaguing youth pathways from childhood into adulthood and repeating among multiple generations.

**With ruptures in the family occurring at the beginning of many youth's journeys, repetitive and more permanent separations followed as youth pathways unfolded.**

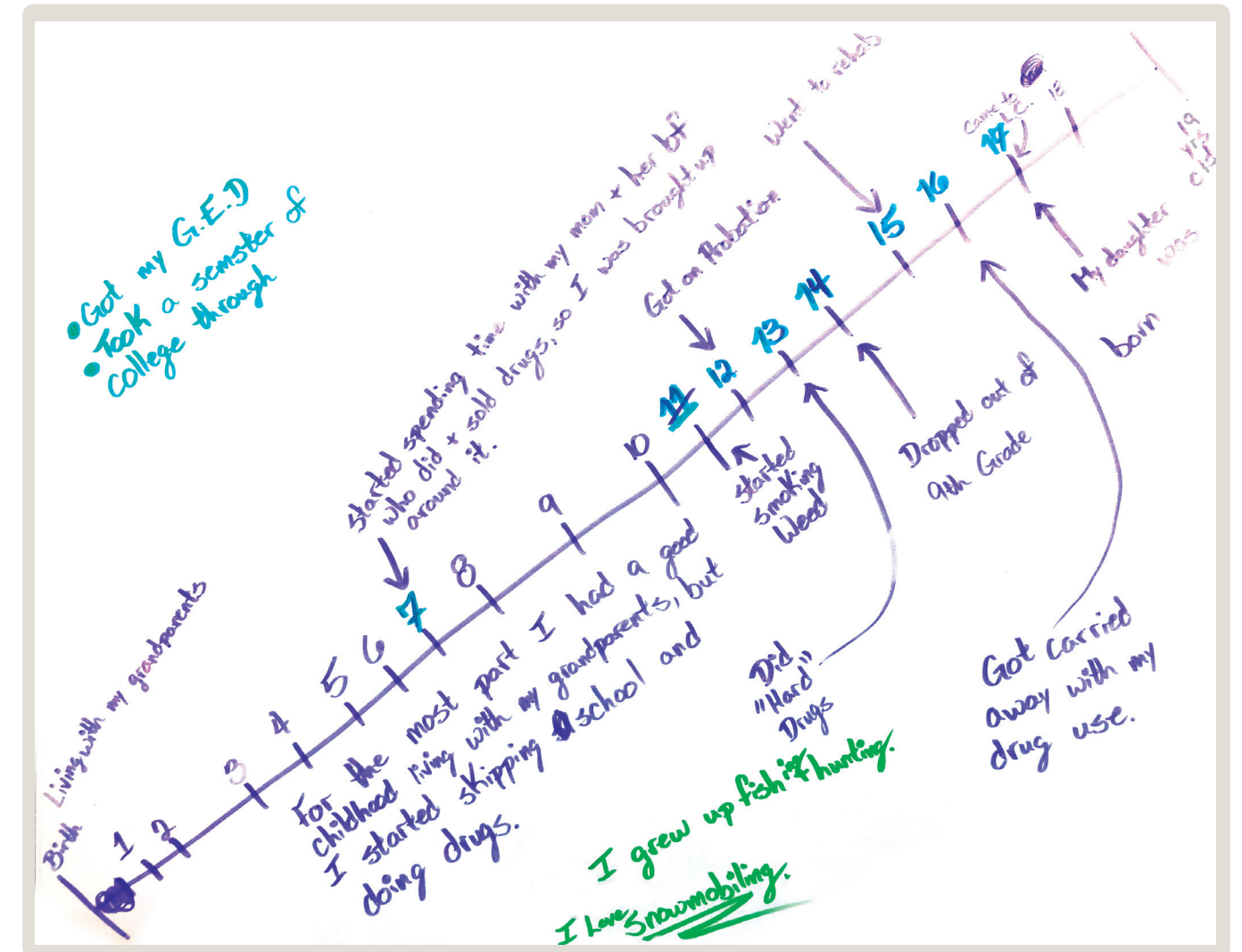


FIGURE 13

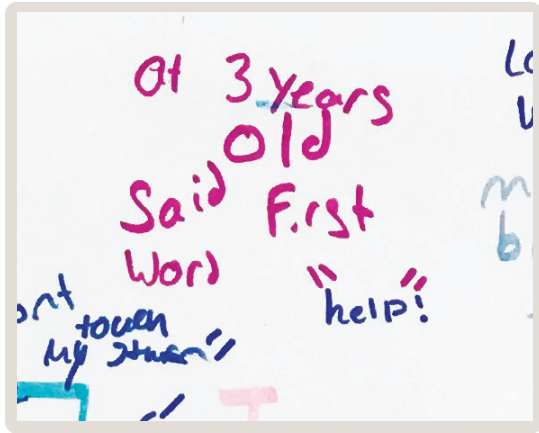


FIGURE 9, detail

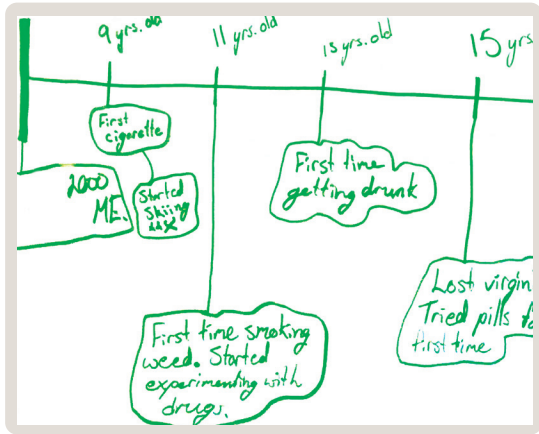


FIGURE 5, detail



FIGURE 3, detail

Healthcare Access

Youth mapped varying interactions with health-related systems along their journeys. Common themes included childhood trauma, mental illness, lack of access to preventative healthcare, substance use (both themselves and their families), and health crises leading to system involvement. In many cases, parents struggling with substance use were unable to access treatment, leading to the child welfare system removing youth from their homes or the justice system removing the parent(s) from the home. Others experienced untreated health conditions, including mental or physical illness and substance use, leading to the death of a parent. **For many young people, the combined themes of poverty, family separation, substance use, and trauma permeated throughout early childhood and led to further mental health needs and substance use later in life.**

One journey map illustrated a childhood of constant trauma, instability, and parental substance use (Figure 9, detail). This young person wrote about her mother, who did not have the care she needed to combat her addiction. She became her mother's caretaker as well as her own: "at 3 years old said my first word: 'Help!'" She later mapped her second suicide attempt at age 11, followed by further attempts throughout early adolescence, indicating a potential lack of appropriate treatment.

Related to their inadequate access to healthcare, youth frequently mapped using substances as a mechanism for self-medicating and escaping. One youth illustrated smoking weed and starting to experiment with drugs at age 11 (Figure 5, detail). Another diagramed his relationship with prescription drugs as both the solution to his untreated trauma and anxiety, as well as a contributing factor to his financial instability, homelessness, and eventual justice system involvement (Figure 3, detail). Entries related to substances were almost always embedded in sequences of adverse experiences and consequences, but they nevertheless represented youth's efforts at self-preservation regarding their mental, physical, and economic well-being.

When youth did have interactions with health systems, it often centered on healthcare professionals identifying health conditions indicative of adverse living conditions and neglect, which resulted in family separations via the child welfare system rather than provision of resources (economic supports, substance use treatment, etc.) to address the underlying conditions. The interplay between health systems and the child welfare and justice systems was reiterated in many journey maps.

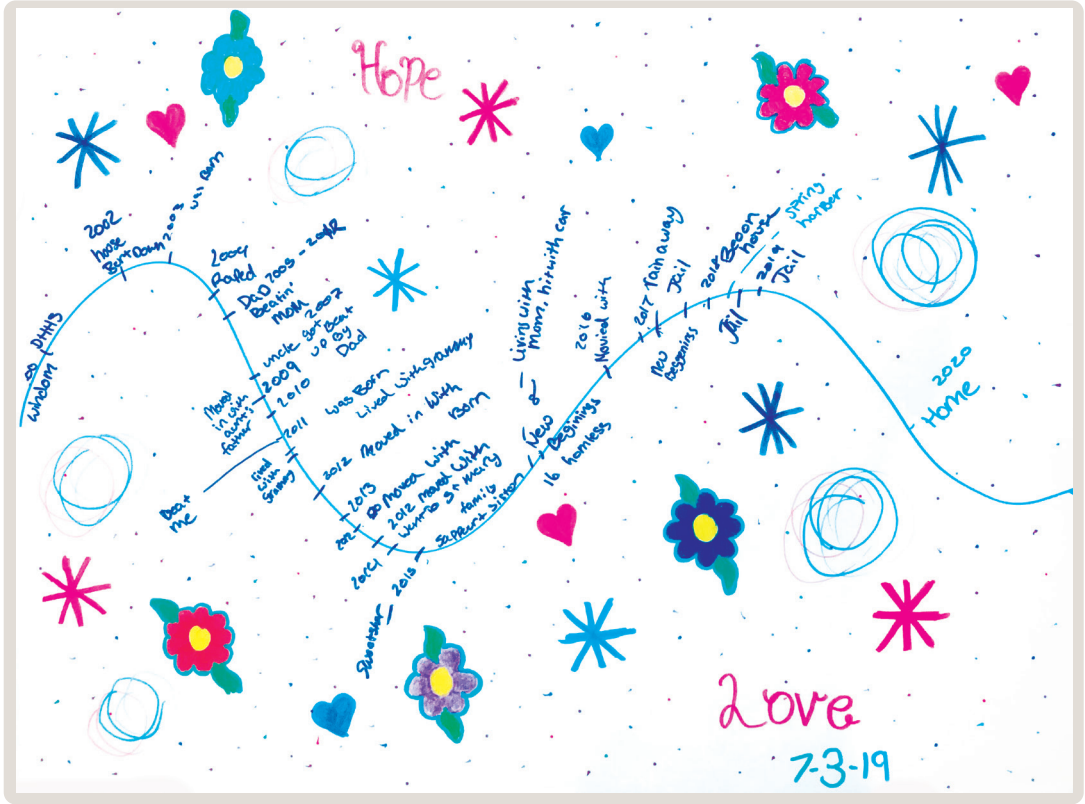


FIGURE 14

One youth mapped a chain of events and various interactions with health systems, family separation, homeless youth services, and the juvenile justice system (Figure 14). While the youth did not elaborate on the circumstances surrounding each event, the pattern of various interactions with crisis centers leading to jail is evident. This indicates that the engagement of these systems came too late to address factors that contributed to the underlying crises and failed to stabilize and support this young person.

Some youth talked about having a high need for medical and mental health interventions but experiencing an absence of appropriate care settings (i.e. settings for girls, transgender or non-binary youth, or youth with mental health needs unrelated to substance use). In particular, LGBTQ+ youth talked about

being misunderstood by providers and not receiving appropriate care from health care professionals. Many youth with higher mental health needs frequently mapped not only out-of-home placements but also out-of-state placements. These placements in higher-level care were usually interspersed between foster home placements, group homes, and juvenile detention.

All of these examples illustrate not only a lack of appropriate care, but also the importance of communication and collaboration between the various systems and supportive care teams for youth who experience the interrelated themes of poverty, family separation, trauma, and a high need for healthcare and substance use treatment.



School Systems

School is one public system that most youth interact with regardless of economic class, family stability, or health status. Unlike most other public systems, school involvement is not prompted by the presence of risks or problems in a young person’s life. Yet the nature of the interactions that youth have with their schools can easily involve these other systems. Schools may be the first system to report child abuse or neglect, or to identify mental or behavioral challenges, or learning disabilities, thus activating these adjacent systems. Additionally, schools’ disciplinary responses to students and use of law enforcement to police student behavior can lead to school exclusion and entry into the juvenile justice system. For some youth, school can be a safe and stable surrogate microsystem, a pathway out of family or generational hardship, and a source of opportunities and supportive resources to help overcome internal and external challenges. For other youth, school offers surveillance without support, assessment without resources, policing of normative adolescent behavior with overly harsh consequences, and diagnosing of traumatized behavior while misunderstanding or ignoring the reasons for unsafe or noncompliant behavior.

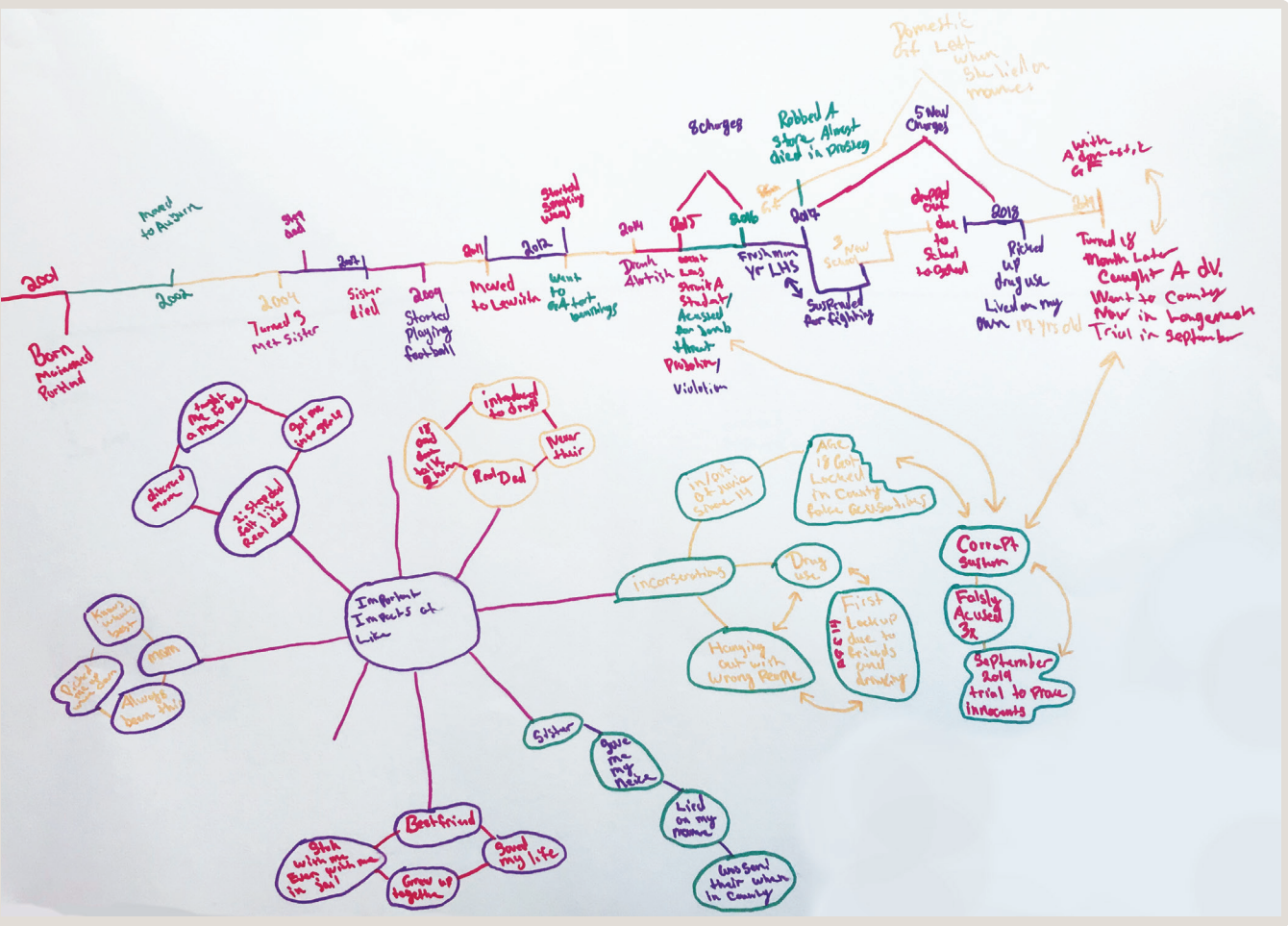


FIGURE 15

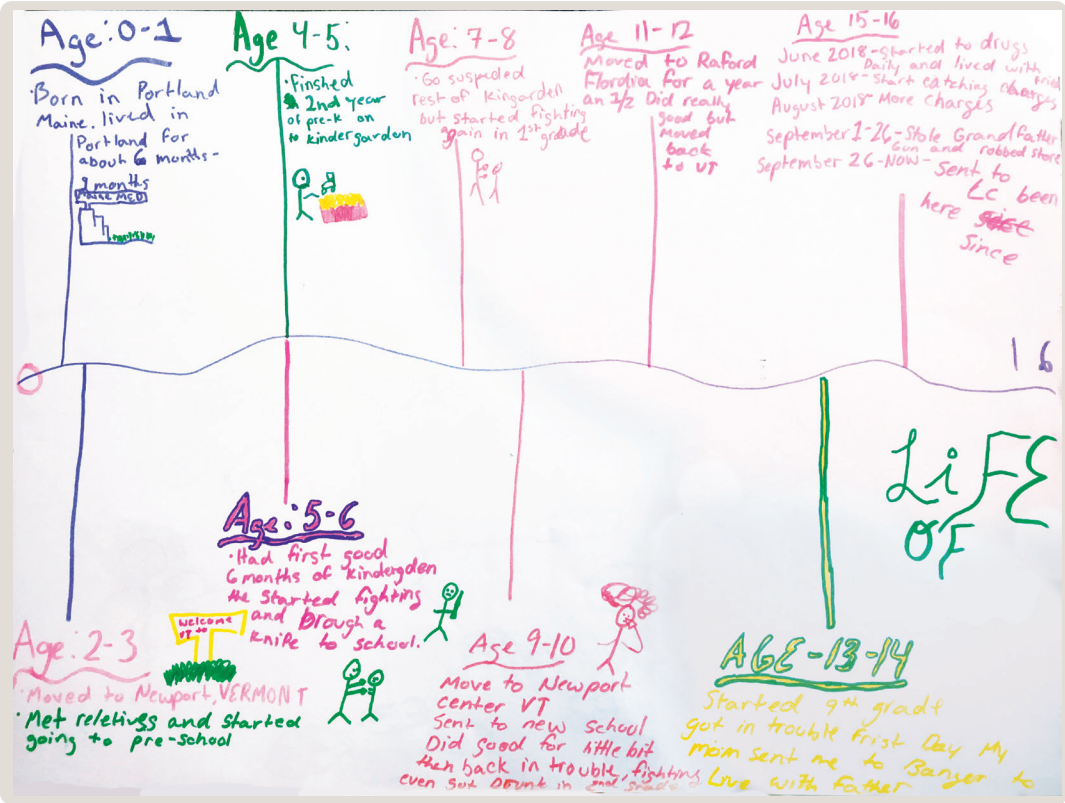


FIGURE 16

Patterns of negative interactions with schools were common among youth who participated in this study. Most youth mapped multiple school changes, getting into trouble at school, and exclusionary discipline leading to push-out. These interactions initiated or cemented youth involvement with law enforcement and juvenile corrections. These patterns are similar to themes that emerged with other public systems, where disruptions to youth schooling were linked to disruptions in family microsystems. For example, persistent housing insecurity or homelessness was often shown to precipitate a family’s move, leading to multiple school changes for youth. In several journey maps, family separations or trauma were mapped closely with getting into trouble in school or getting kicked out of school. Getting into trouble at school frequently led to more moves, such as being sent to live with extended family in a different city or state. Issues at school were also frequently mapped just before or just after justice system involvement, illustrating the relationship between the school and justice systems.

One youth’s timeline mapped his high school years starting with: “Straight A student/ Arrested for bomb threat. Probation. (8 charges) Freshman year suspended for fighting. 3 new schools. Dropped out due to school to school. Picked up drug use. Lived on my own. (5 new charges) 17 yrs old” (Figure 15). This youth’s experiences depicted how negative interactions with schools and involvement with the juvenile justice system were mutually influential, and coincided with major traumas in his family, including the death of his sister and the incarceration of his father.

In Figures 15 and 16, youth journey maps include a series of moves and new schools intertwined with school discipline events and adverse family or life events. Various interactions with school systems are interspersed with justice system involvement and substance use.







## Discrimination and Othering

Many youth illustrated how othering shaped their experiences in their communities and with public systems. At the same time, narratives of belonging also emerged where youth found or created identities and networks that affirmed their worth and bolstered their well-being. **Youth mapped their identity formation by weaving together systemic othering with their persistence to create places and ways to belong.** Self-discovery, self-acceptance, and finding a community were pervasive themes throughout the journey maps.

Gender identity and sexual orientation were major elements in a majority of journey maps as experiences of rejection and acceptance by families and communities were frequently interwoven throughout. One youth created a journey map with bubbles containing annotations such as, “*Trans-Phobic people*,” “*Learned to stand tall in myself and be BRAVE*,” and “*Created a new family and a new community*” (Figure 19). Other maps showed a variety of LGBTQ+ flags to symbolize identity, celebration, and a sense of connection and belonging within the LGBTQ+ community (Figures 20 and 21). An additional youth mapped a sequence related to their experience of sharing their identity with others (Figure 21). Another youth used a mask labeled “Act” and a heart labeled “Love” separated by a dagger and the annotation “*Break the mask*” to illustrate a painful but pivotal choice in their journey (Figure 22).



FIGURE 19



FIGURE 20

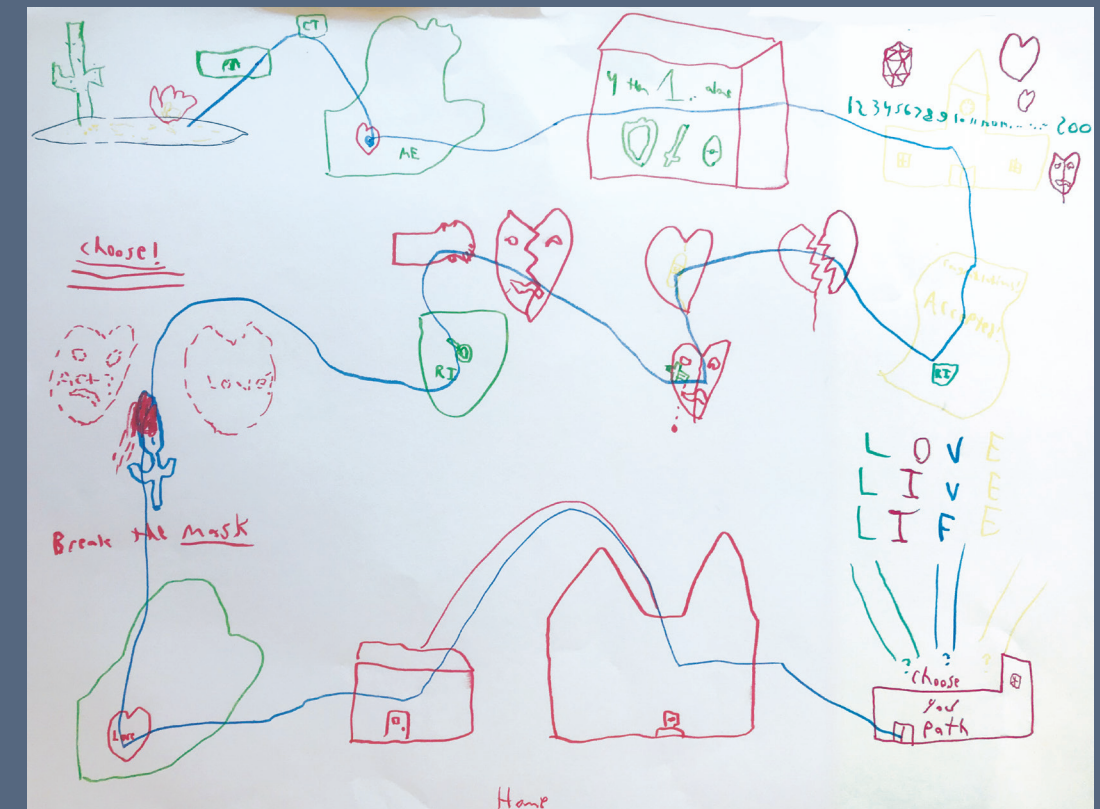


FIGURE 21

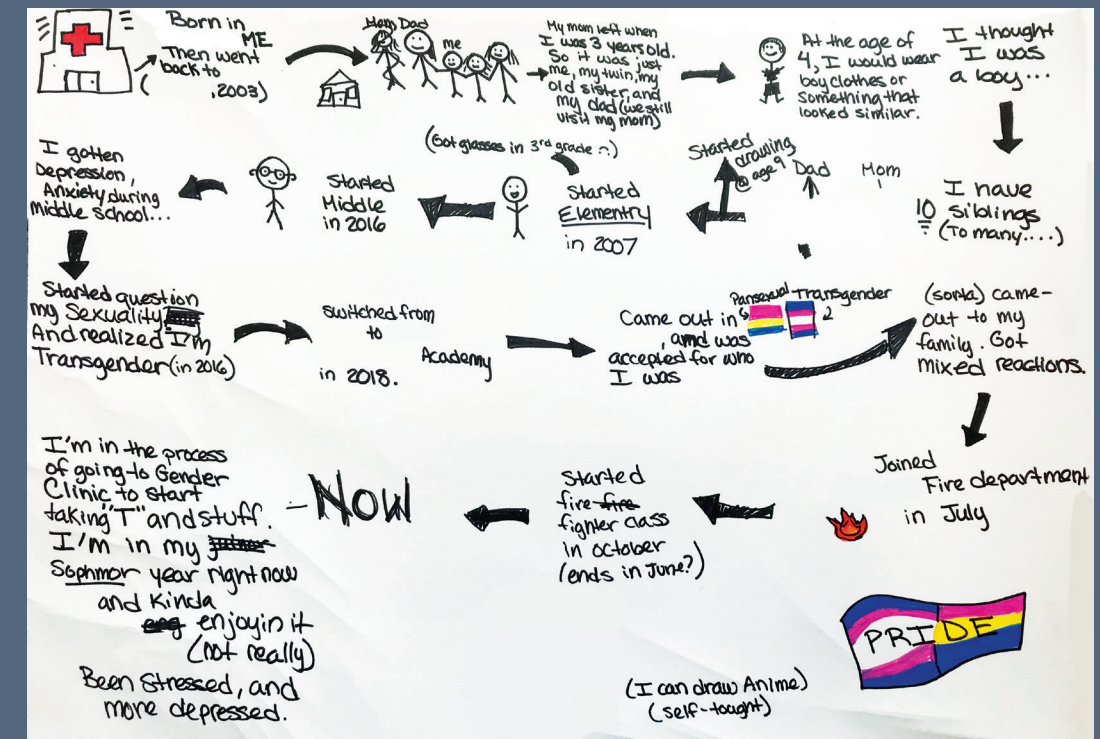


FIGURE 22



While many youth mapped experiences of being othered within their community, some youth also mapped experiences of being othered by public systems, particularly schools and healthcare. One youth, who self-identified as queer and disabled, narrated how health institutions consistently misunderstood them. Their journey map included bubbles with annotations such as, “lack of services” and “you’re faking” (Figure 19, detail). This youth expanded by describing a crisis experience at the emergency department where they felt dismissed by healthcare workers because they were having a non-verbal episode and they were refused services.

Some youth also mapped being othered based on race or ethnicity, culture, immigration status, or socioeconomic status. BIPOC\* youth mapped race and ethnicity as fundamental to their identities and a prominent factor in how public institutions interacted with them. One youth mapped being born in Puerto Rico followed by “moved to USA” (Figure 23). They listed a collection of factors describing their childhood after the move: “grew up poor, no stable electricity food heat healthcare,” “parents knew nothing and had no English to help.” This youth described their family’s need for material and social assistance, but fear of being othered by social institutions kept the family from seeking needed supports. This youth also described concealing their child sexual abuse out of fear that bringing attention to their family would trigger interactions with untrustworthy public systems.



FIGURE 23

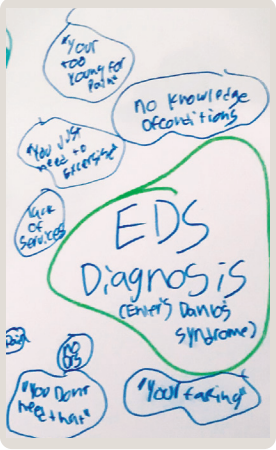


FIGURE 19, detail

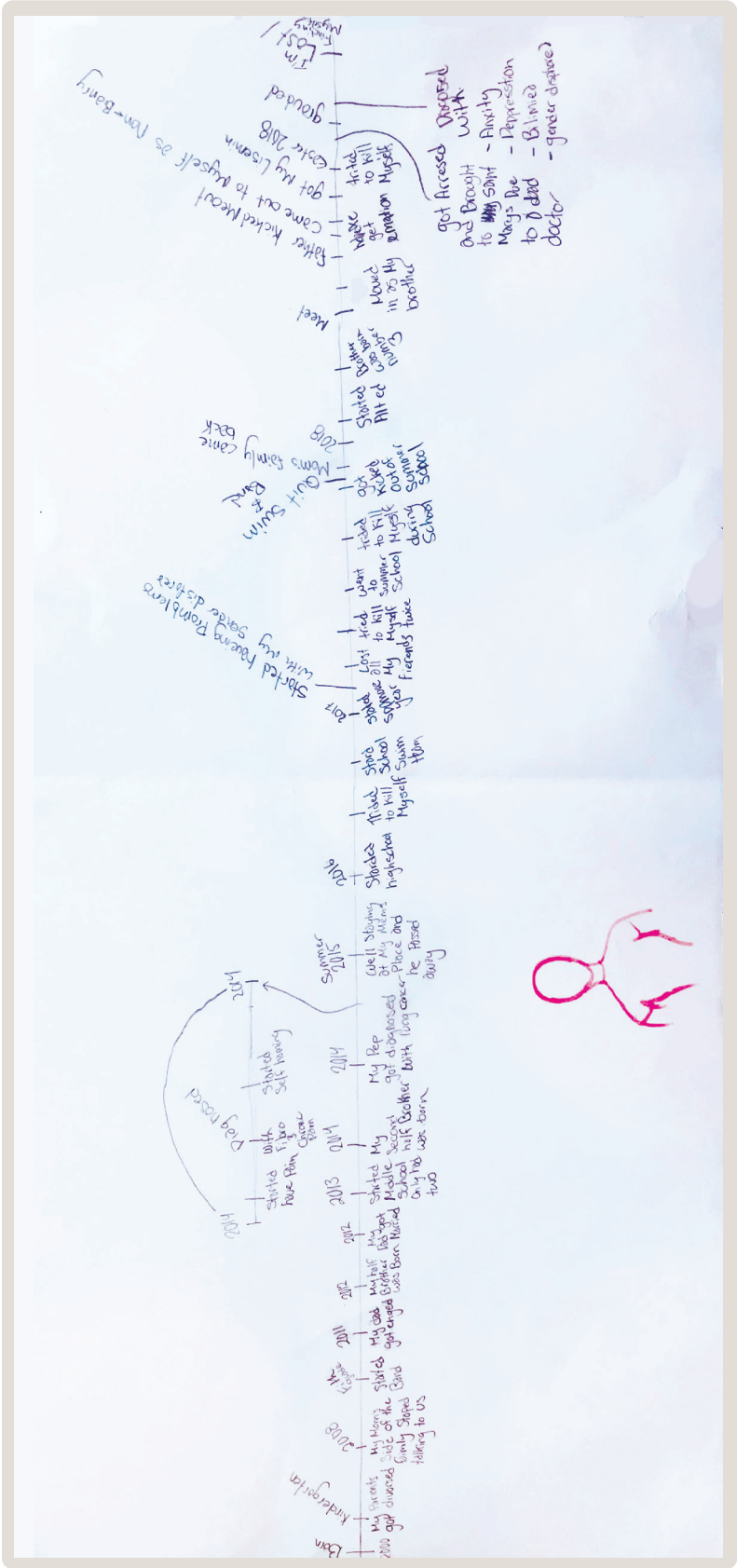


FIGURE 24

For many, othering began in the individual’s family but then ended in public institutions, which further projected the othering social narratives. One youth included a series of annotations illustrating the effect of being rejected by their family, internalizing othering social narratives, being arrested rather than receiving support, and then being transferred by law enforcement to mental health hospitalization (Figure 24). Too often, rather than contextualizing their presenting problems, youth are criminalized. This reinforces the narrative that youth outcomes are a product of internal strengths or deficits, rather than shaped by the social systems in which they dwell. This sequence exemplifies the tendency of public systems to locate deficits within an individual rather than in their social contexts.

While the purpose of this study was to examine how public systems shape youth’s lives, the stories of othering that emerged also implicated social narratives embedded in the macrosystem. Society’s attitudes and beliefs that comprise the macrosystem are the value-bound netting that direct and uphold public policy, resource allocation, and how public institutions operate. These values implicitly govern how public systems view and treat people. The stories of othering in this study exemplify the systemic bias, be it implicit or explicit, that is present in our public systems which can result in further marginalizing the very populations that the systems are supposed to help.

x BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color. For more information see <https://www.thebipocproject.org/>



# Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that influence the pathways of youth as they transition into adulthood in Maine and how system interactions shape these trajectories. The journeys explored in this study further illustrate what prior research has indicated regarding the high level of interrelationship between social contexts and individual outcomes.<sup>30</sup> The following key findings emerge from this study:

- ▶ The profound influence of socioeconomic conditions on how youth pathways unfold and how they interact with youth-serving public systems is undeniable.
- ▶ Family separation is a key determinant of youth pathways, often as a result of the family’s interactions with public systems due to economic and health conditions.
- ▶ Inadequate access to healthcare systems and economic supports contributes to avoidable negative interactions with child welfare, school, mental or behavioral healthcare, homelessness, and justice systems.
- ▶ Missed opportunities for schools to provide a stable tether and generate more promising prospects for youth are too common; schools were instead a juncture of disconnection along youth pathways.
- ▶ Othering significantly affects youth’s interactions with various public systems and can further ingrain a sense of mistrust for public institutions such as healthcare, school, and social supports. Othering can also have a profound impact on the healthy development of youth’s self-esteem and self-identity. However, belonging fosters resilience through opportunities for connection and positive identity development, for example BIPOC and LGBTQ+ safe spaces, youth employment, and other youth leadership experiences.

These themes build on prior research findings showing how interaction with one public system triggers interactions in adjacent systems, forging pipelines that lead to deeper and often permanent system entanglement.<sup>31</sup>

Youth journey maps illustrated what prior research has found regarding poverty’s detrimental effects on health,<sup>32,33</sup> mental health,<sup>34,35</sup> educational experiences,<sup>36,37</sup> child welfare system involvement,<sup>38,39</sup> and justice system involvement.<sup>40,41</sup> Poverty is a major risk factor towards involvement in public systems when these systems overlook the underlying context in which youth live. Child welfare system involvement is triggered when family hardship is identified as parental neglect. When youth are grappling with complex trauma and unmet needs and lack early intervention they end up in the healthcare and mental or behavioral health systems, and sometimes drop out or are pushed out of school. Further social, family, and economic pressures prompt youth to help address their families’ financial struggles by participating in illegal economies (often leading to justice system involvement) during a critical period of adolescent brain development and budding self-agency.

Compounding the pervasive impacts that our economic system has on youth pathways, this study provides narrative arcs to prior research about how interacting with one public system initiates or perpetuates interactions with adjacent systems. Child welfare system involvement has been linked with increased risk of suicide, mental health hospitalization, and risky survival behaviors connected to housing insecurity.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, child welfare system involvement is associated

with homelessness<sup>43</sup> and juvenile justice system involvement.<sup>44,45</sup> Incarceration of a parent, which often precedes or follows child welfare system involvement, exacerbates instability in the microsystem, and too often becomes a predictor of youth’s own involvement with the justice system.<sup>46,47,48,49,50</sup> In schools, exclusionary discipline practices disconnect youth from school, curtailing their social and economic opportunities and increasing their vulnerability to delinquency and justice involvement.<sup>51</sup> In addition, this study brought out how a lack of adequate access to the healthcare system sets youth up for child welfare involvement, housing instability, late-stage mental or behavioral health interventions, school disconnection, and justice system involvement.

While there is ample research on how system involvement begets deeper system involvement, language such as “cross-over youth,” “dually-involved youth,” “multisystem-involved youth,” and other such labels frequently used in both the literature base and in the professional sphere perpetuate a mischaracterization of this phenomenon. **The language used about youth experiencing system entanglement focuses on the individual youth rather than on the societal conditions causing this entanglement.** The journey maps in this study show how public systems act in siloes, yet youth experience them as one system in which they are often pathologized and criminalized. In addition, funds are appropriated to systems that aim to remediate one aspect of an individual youth, rather than towards a more holistic, community-based approach to alter the unfair circumstances in which they live.

The journey maps in this study show how public systems act in siloes, yet youth experience them as one system in which they are often pathologized and/or criminalized.



The system responses that youth in this study experienced were often driven by othering social narratives and mental models (racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia) that pervade society and implicitly guide how public institutions interact with youth in their care. Institutional attitudes and values that do not recognize or validate youth identities translate into policies and practices that fail youth. The fact that so many youth in this study mapped LGBTQ+ identities and pathways exemplifies the overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ youth in public systems as a result of othering and inappropriate system responses to those who exhibit non-cis-heteronormative expressions.<sup>52,53,54,55</sup> Othering policies and practices that emerged in youth narratives included things like administrative paperwork failing to recognize identities, providers expecting youth to conform or present in specific ways, not being believed, not being treated with dignity and respect, and a fear of being othered resulting in not seeking help. While othering and rejection occurs in youth's interpersonal relationships with painful effects, it also occurs in the public realm with equally harmful results. System fragmentation compounded by othering results in failure to understand and support youth.

For many youth in this study, journey maps ended with depictions of current struggles with system involvement, family separations, housing instability, and mental health issues such as depression. However, for some, the journey maps reflect a sense of hope (Figures 14, detail and Figure 25), and a desire to change circumstances. Some express a desire to return home to their families, a wish to go to college, or a newfound sense of identity and belonging that has had a positive impact on their well-being (Figure 26). In the end, these youth need supports—mental and physical healthcare access, economic and educational opportunities, and positive relationships which foster their sense of belonging—to enable them to thrive as they transition into adulthood.

The journey maps reflect a sense of hope and a desire to change circumstances. Some express a desire to return home to their families, a wish to go to college, or a newfound sense of identity and belonging that has had a positive impact on their well-being



FIGURE 14, detail



FIGURE 25

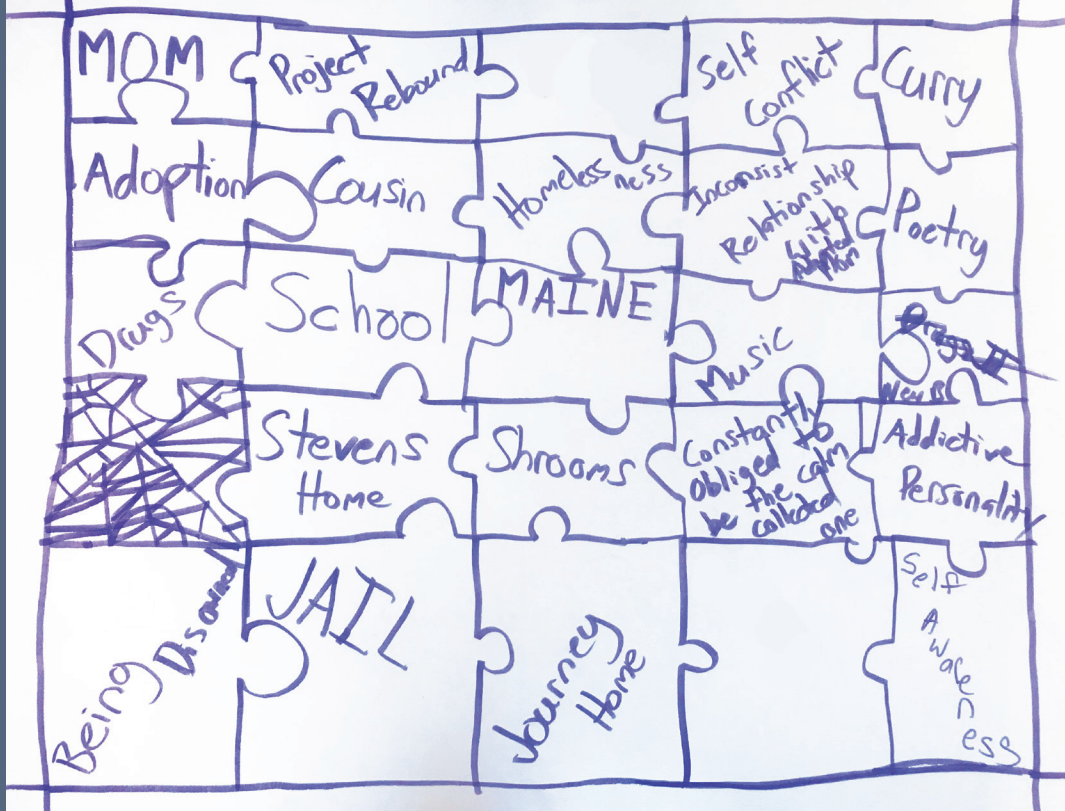


FIGURE 26

# Recommendations

► **Improve public system alignment, integration, and collaboration.**

Stakeholders must work together to address and reduce the fragmented nature in which public systems interact with youth. The disjointed system divisions do not reflect how youth experience public systems, or what young people say they need, which is an array of supports and services in the communities where they live. This study reinforces previous recommendations<sup>xi</sup> to address the data discrepancies and gaps between systems, and invest in a community-based continuum of care by allocating resources and activating local assets. Such a continuum of care cannot be system-based, it must be place-based, because that is how young people experience and interact with systems: from the places in which they live.<sup>56,57</sup> Communication and collaboration among public systems and local service providers is therefore key to creating a holistic support network that can support youth and their families, with practices and policies that reduce the amount of offices, treatment plans, case managers, and risk assessments that young people must interface with to access help.

► **Implement programs and policies to reduce discrimination and increase belonging and equity.**

Systemic bias and discrimination must be recognized and addressed with direct policy and practice changes. All youth need to have equal access to appropriate services, housing, and education and economic opportunities. This could include developing training programs for public system employees and healthcare workers (such as anti-bias and intercultural communication training), reviews of intake forms and procedures, assessments and eligibility requirements for services, or school disciplinary procedures and policies. Youth and people from all backgrounds must be involved in the review and creation of new policies and procedures.

► **Involve youth and create pathways for youth leadership.**

Caring for the holistic well-being of youth to support them thriving into adulthood requires involving youth in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of policies, systems, practices, and programs that aim to serve them. In particular, this must involve youth from diverse backgrounds, including youth who are typically overrepresented in our systems (BIPOC youth, LGBTQ+ youth, youth with disabilities, etc.) yet often underrepresented in the conversations of policy decision makers.

Every youth-serving system, organization, and agency must prioritize involving youth in decisions. For some this could include creating youth-led advisory councils, or contracting with youth-led groups to provide services. Beyond recognizing the importance of youth involvement, we must prioritize creating pathways for young people to lead and impact systems change. Leadership development programs and internships create opportunities for education and professional mentoring which enable youth to develop skills and increase their social capital, yet these opportunities are often unavailable to youth who come from backgrounds of poverty and system involvement. Young people, especially those who have experience with public systems, have the most insight about how those systems can improve service delivery and the well-being of target populations. Yet, these are the voices that are seldom in the room when programs are designed, that seldom staff the organizations providing direct service, and that rarely rise to positions of leadership or decision-making authority. This must change.

xi See [placemattersmaine.org](https://placemattersmaine.org) for more information and previous reports.

# Conclusion

By listening to the stories of Maine’s youth and seeing their pathways illustrated, this study found that caring for youth begins with caring for their families and their communities with holistic, multigenerational solutions. These solutions and support strategies must be implemented early on and must address the cumulative effects of generational cycles of poverty, childhood trauma, and family separation. For our society to demonstrate that it cares about youth thriving into adulthood, we must invest in social policies that support access to comprehensive healthcare and substance use treatment, equal education, and employment opportunities that support economic well-being. These solutions and policies must be inclusive so that each person can access what they need to thrive and belong in the community. This is particularly important in a state where an aging population depends on every single youth thriving into adulthood, into Maine’s workforce, and into the fabric of our communities. The stories that youth tell about their lives right now will be reflected in Maine’s future social and economic landscape. By acting with urgency and in alignment, we can expand the opportunity landscape to build stronger pathways to social and economic well-being for system-involved youth and the communities in which they reside.



# Appendix A: Facilitator’s Guide

## JOURNEY MAPPING

### Why Journey Map?

The Journey Map allows you to reflect on and express how your own life experiences influence your understanding and assumptions about who you are, how you think, and your values. This includes your identities in regard to race, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and roles you may play, as well as the people, places, and experiences that shaped you.

From this self-awareness, you develop the ability to share your own and listen to others’ experiences to understand how your journey may influence (consciously or unconsciously) your beliefs about yourself and the world.

### How to Create Your Journey Map

This is an exercise that invites a bit of creativity to enrich the conversation. Help yourself to paper and supplies that may help ignite the creative process. Who am I as a person and how did I get here? How does who I am shape the roles I take up and how I relate to others?



#### STEP ONE: REFLECT ON YOUR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES

Consider what influenced you – your family, your community, and your life experiences. How did you identify your own race, class, and culture at the beginning of your journey? Where are you today? How did your life journey shape your values and beliefs? In what ways did race, class, and culture influence what you are most passionate about? How did they lead you to where you are in this room today?



#### STEP TWO: DRAW YOUR JOURNEY MAP

Start with the place and time of your birth (context matters) and then move from that point to today. Think of major events or influences in your life. Identify key events that stand out or that have made an impression on you. Your reflections in Step One will inform the milestones that you select to plot on your journey map.



#### STEP 3: SHARE YOUR JOURNEY MAP (CHALLENGE BY CHOICE)

Your voice matters. You have a right to tell your own story. Once you have completed your journey map, you are welcome share at whatever level feels right to you. Your experience can inform better outcomes for other youth. You may also find that there is power in sharing your own story.



#### STEP 4: REFLECT

When you are done sharing, focus on listening to your peers. How do their experiences shape their life? What similarities and differences do you see in your journey and that of others? What insights from today that might influence how you understand yourself and interact with others?

# Endnotes

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