

In San Diego, Black youth are 13 times more likely to be detained than their white peers. Despite overall declines in youth arrests, deep disparities persist: 40% of Black children and 24% of Hispanic children live in poverty, and 8% of students drop out before graduation. For youth navigating these challenges, mentorship is one of the most effective interventions available—yet most lack access to it.

Research consistently demonstrates that quality mentorship delivers both immediate and long-term benefits: better academic performance, decreased substance use, and reduced violent behavior. The difference between a young person staying in school or entering the justice system often comes down to whether they have a trusted adult walking alongside them.

How It Works

In summer 2025, The Kinship Fund convened nine nonprofit organizations whose programs center youth mentorship. Each approach to mentoring takes a unique angle—some focus on the creative arts, others on academically based support, and still others on peer relationships—but all share a commitment to long-term relationships, with many lasting 10+ years.

While these leaders knew one another, they weren't coordinating their efforts. The Kinship Fund created space for trust-building, which has led to tangible collaboration: when one organization had to sunset its program, the collaboration ensured every youth transitioned to another program with organized follow-up. Partners now actively refer youth to one another and pursue joint funding opportunities.

Together, these nine organizations currently serve approximately 2,000 youth annually. Participants in these programs have successfully exited the justice system and stayed in school—outcomes that research shows are directly linked to consistent mentoring relationships.

Prevention and Intervention

Juvenile Public Defenders cite mentorship as the most effective tool for helping young people exit the school-to-prison pipeline. But mentorship also serves as a powerful prevention, providing children as young as third grade with educational and social-emotional support that reduces risky behavior before a crisis occurs.

Why This Matters for DAF Donors

A gift to this project isn't a donation to a single program—it's an investment in systems change. Your contribution joins a coordinated funding strategy in which multiple funders support an integrated approach, rather than duplicating efforts or leaving gaps.

Immediate Expansion Opportunities

The collaborative has demonstrated that coordination creates opportunities impossible for organizations working in isolation. Three specific partnerships are ready to launch with additional funding:

\$10,000 annually - TranscenDANCE and Youth Empowerment (current collaborative member) would create an after-school program combining dance and creative arts with peer mentoring.

\$20,000 annually: D.E.T.O.U.R. and David's Harp (both current members) would build a video library of their weekly curriculum, which is currently offered in person only once per year. This expansion would significantly increase program reach while empowering youth to produce the videos themselves.

\$50,000 annually - California Youth Connections would join the collaborative to develop a cohort of at-risk youth trained in public policy advocacy, amplifying youth voice in regional efforts to end youth incarceration and connecting participants with community leader mentors.