



JOHN BURTON  
Advocates  
*for* Youth



2023 Annual Report

# Mission

John Burton Advocates for Youth improves the quality of life for youth in California who have been in foster care or homeless by advocating for better laws, training communities to strengthen local practices and conducting research to inform policy solutions.



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# Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I'd like to share with you the first time I met John Burton. It was eight years after I co-founded First Place for Youth, a housing program for young people aging out of foster care. John had just left the California State Legislature and someone I knew invited me to a meeting with him.

I started telling him about the needs of foster youth and John started taking notes on a legal pad. After the meeting, he kept calling me, asking questions and setting meetings for me to explain the challenges of youth aging out of foster care. After about six weeks, I finally said, "Senator Burton, I really enjoy our conversations, but I don't work for you." His response was simple: "Well, let's change that."

I took a chance and said yes, but in the beginning, it was painful. I knew a lot about foster care, but I didn't know the first thing about how a bill becomes a law. It was like someone who doesn't know how to cook going to work for Julia Child.

John schooled me in what I like to call the "John Burton Way." He taught me that evidence is critical in a world of worthy competing priorities. He explained that it is OK to compromise when it is in service to our larger goal. He helped me understand that being principled is important, but not at the cost of progress. Most importantly, John taught me to keep fighting, with absolute painstaking persistence.

I have been fighting this fight with John Burton for almost 18 years. Together, with our incredible team of staff members and the generosity of our supporters, JBAY has championed 52 major reforms, helping tens of thousands of young people in California.

The 2022-23 fiscal year was no exception, as you will read about in this report. JBAY'S key achievements this year included securing funding in the state budget to close the "unmet need gap" for foster youth attending college and increasing housing affordability.

In addition to these major policy victories, JBAY worked intensively with college campuses, public sector agencies and nonprofit partners to help strengthen local practices. Finally, JBAY provided direct, urgently needed financial assistance to nearly 1,600 young people across California.

Today in California, being in foster care or experiencing homelessness as a young adult is no longer a life sentence. At JBAY we've proven it can be the opposite – a springboard into higher education, career fulfillment, and lasting stability. There is much good work ahead and we look forward to your continued partnership. John Burton got this work started. His mindset and approach are infused into every cell of our DNA. But it is up to us carry it on and we will.

Sincerely,

**Amy Lemley**  
Executive Director



# Education

Grit and determination have always described former foster youth Erin Clews. She was raised in foster care and fought her way to enroll in college, against all odds. After leaving the college classroom to care for her newborn child and work full time, she remained determined to pursue her dream of a college degree. However, when she attempted to re-enroll, she found herself ineligible for financial aid because she did not meet her school's Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements – a remnant of her first attempt at higher education.

According to Erin, “When I tried to enroll in classes, I got the same message I had received two years prior, saying I could enroll for classes, but they weren't going to give me any financial aid,” she said.

Erin is not alone. Low-income youth across the state find themselves “locked out” of financial aid after a difficult start often caused by juggling the responsibilities that come with living on the margins.

In 2023, that all changed thanks to the advocacy of John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY). Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 789, which removes barriers to financial aid by requiring public colleges and universities in California to adopt federal standards for Satisfactory Academic Progress. It also expands the appeals process when students are denied financial aid. **AB 789 will give low-income youth like Erin the chance to succeed without worrying about how they will pay for school.**

For youth like Erin, this new law means not having to pay these out-of-pocket costs due to a lack of financial aid after an understandably rocky start. It means not having to make the choice between paying for rent or paying for tuition.

Fortunately, Erin didn't give up. “I was determined to be successful. I had to attend school for two years while paying tuition and fees out-of-pocket, and eventually, I was able to transfer.” Her determination paid off. Erin now attends the University of California, Santa Cruz.



Erin ▶▶▶▶▶▶

*“I was determined to be successful. I had to attend school for two years while paying tuition and fees out-of-pocket, and eventually, I was able to transfer.”*



# Housing

Living alone and pregnant, then 19-year-old Yuki Huang knew she had to leave her studio apartment on the outskirts of San Francisco's Tenderloin District. Huang was one of more than 3,000 California foster youth ages 18-21 who are placed in a Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP). The program gives young people like Huang \$1,129 a month to set them on a path to independence.

But San Francisco's inflated rental market left Huang with severely limited housing options, a common refrain among her peers, she says. Worse still than what she saw outside was what crawled inside her cramped studio, with its broken window and perpetually faulty plumbing. "My home was supposed to be my safe place, my peace," she says. "I didn't want to come home and do homework and see a cockroach running across the room. Cockroaches would come out of nowhere. That affected my mental wellbeing. It made me unhappy. It made me feel terrible."

But lacking sufficient income and without family to lean on, she had nowhere else to go. "It was sad and upsetting. I felt so unsafe," Huang says. "And it hurt, because a lot of people my age get to stay with their parents as long as they want, sometimes until they're 25 or 30. I couldn't go to my mom and dad's house to get a good night's sleep and eat up all their food, or anything like that."

Fortunately, young people like Huang will have the income to live safely thanks to John Burton advocates for Youth. In 2023, **JBAY worked successfully with Assemblymember Phil Ting on the adoption of a policy that increases the foster care rate for youth living in a SILP based on the local cost of housing.** The new policy adjusts the foster care rate based on the local cost of housing.

Yuki was able to stay on track. She is currently studying computer science at the City College of San Francisco (CCSF). In addition to raising her daughter, she is a part of the Foster Care and Kinship Care Education program helping other young people as they navigate their transitions into adulthood.



## Yuki ▶▶▶▶▶▶

*Yuki is currently studying computer science at the City College of San Francisco. In addition to raising her daughter, she is a part of the Foster Care and Kinship Care Education program helping other young people as they navigate their transitions into adulthood.*

# The JBAY Way

JBAY works to improve the lives of transition-age youth who have been in foster care or homelessness by conducting four principal activities, each of which inform one another.

## BUDGET & POLICY ADVOCACY

JBAY advocates for statewide policy reform to create a better, brighter future for foster and homeless youth in California. Advocacy at JBAY takes a variety of forms, including educating elected officials about the needs of youth who have been in foster care or homeless, sponsoring state legislation, testifying at hearings and informing the development of regulations.

## RESEARCH

JBAY conducts research to develop smart, targeted policy solutions and to determine whether adopted policies have had their intended effect. JBAY has a deep commitment to using evidence to guide its policy and technical assistance and issues an average of 10 publications annually. These publications provide a deep look into the issues facing youth who have been in foster care or homeless and ensure that scarce public and private resources are used effectively.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & TRAINING

JBAY collaborates with counties, campuses and community-based organizations across California to train them on best-practices and to ensure that policies adopted at the state level are fully implemented locally. JBAY's technical assistance and training takes a variety of forms, including providing no-cost one-on-one consultation, developing and delivering educational curricula, creating and disseminating toolkits, conducting regional workshops, hosting web seminars, and organizing "communities of practice."

## DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO YOUTH

JBAY understands that policy change requires time, which is why the organization launched the Critical Needs and Opportunity Fund. This program provides direct financial assistance to over 1,600 young people annually who have been in foster care or experienced homelessness.



# 2023 Impact

## BUDGET & POLICY ADVOCACY



**\$18.8 MILLION**

secured in the state budget to increase housing affordability for youth ages 18 to 21 in foster care.



**\$19 MILLION**

secured in the state budget to close the “unmet need gap” for foster youth attending college.



**\$100 MILLION**

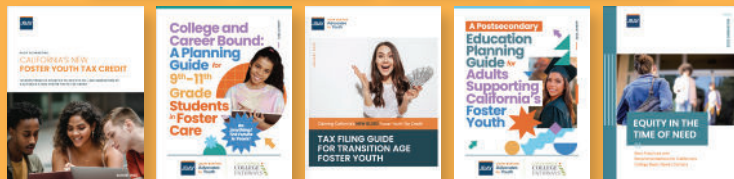
secured in the state budget to provide safe, affordable housing and supportive services to youth experiencing homelessness.



**789 ASSEMBLY BILL**

JBAY successfully sponsored Assembly Bill 789, which helps college students maintain their financial aid by requiring campuses to adopt uniform, equitable academic standards and appeals processes.

**9** publications were issued



**15** webinars held to disseminate reports reaching over **3,700**

## RESEARCH

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & TRAINING



**4,889**

youth statewide received the **Foster Youth Tax Credit**, the nation's first tax credit for foster youth, developed by JBAY.



**9**

organizations received financial and technical assistance to **build over 250 units of safe, affordable housing for youth.**



**15**

counties received help from JBAY to access specialized **housing vouchers** for former foster youth, increasing their utilization in California by 54%.



**55**

community colleges **received technical assistance to implement the state expansion of NextUp**, a support program for foster youth enrolled in college.



**65%**

of foster youth who were **seniors in high school successfully applied for financial aid**, up from 45% in 2017-18.



**13**

community colleges were **provided training to implement a newly established program to address homelessness** among college students; 7 campuses received one on one support.



**1500**

Los Angeles County social workers were **trained using the “Dreams to Degrees” curriculum.**

## DIRECT ASSISTANCE



2% MEDICAL/DENTAL



2% CHILD CARE



3% ENTERTAINMENT



6% ENRICHMENT



8% UTILITIES



8% FOOD



18%

HOUSING



20%

TRANSPORTATION



33%

EDUCATION

**\$292**

given on average, to

**1,598**

youth in need of direct financial assistance\*

\*Fund's distributed from JBAY's Critical Needs & Opportunity Fund



# Health

*Play dates. Cartoons. Toys.*

These are some of the words that describe Cody Van Felden's life these days. With a child of her own, she's busier than ever, but she wouldn't change a single moment. "Emotionally, it's the greatest feeling in the world to be a parent," she said. When she reflects on her path to parenthood, however, a few different words jump out at her.

*Devastating. Gut-wrenching. Fear.*

JBAY is working to change that. One step towards that is collecting the evidence that change is needed. JBAY successfully advocated for legislation that requires the California Department of Social Services to issue an annual report on the reproductive health outcomes of foster youth. The first report was issued in 2023 and is the first of its kind nationally.

The report validated the lived experience of young people like Cody. Foster youth were less likely to receive timely prenatal care, less likely to receive post-natal care and more likely to give birth to low-weight infants.

These findings mirror Cody's experience. "I didn't know I was supposed to be doing blood tests. I was never told by my parents or doctors that it was necessary, and so I never knew I had a serious undiagnosed infection. I ended up requiring [intravenous] antibiotics for two weeks straight while I was pregnant. It was rough," she recalled.

Despite her challenges during pregnancy, she remains optimistic about the future of reproductive health care for foster youth. "Having access to the [annual] data tells us where there's gaps. There's still a lot more to be done, especially for foster youth that don't have access to reproductive health education, but it's amazing seeing the data," she said.

When asked, Cody had a few new words to describe how she's feeling as the proud parent of a two-and-a-half-year-old: joyful, empowered, and motivated.



**Cody** ▶▶▶▶▶▶

*When asked, Cody had a few new words to describe how she's feeling as the proud parent of a two-and-a-half-year-old: joyful, empowered, and motivated.*



# Critical Needs & Opportunity Fund

Christina Alvarado is gearing up to walk across the graduation stage this December to receive her bachelor's degree in Sociology from Sonoma State. Getting to this moment wasn't easy.

Christina entered the foster care system as a young child after experiencing homelessness. She was separated from her brothers and faced an uncertain future. The upheaval of her childhood and separation from her siblings made the decision to pursue college difficult. She recalls, "I was kind of always anxious that I would fall into my parents' paths."

After a visit from Sonoma State to her high school and encouragement from her teachers, she chose to enroll. In September, Christina's plans were upended when she had to cut her hours at work due to strict curfew rules that accompanied her housing. She was unable to afford rent and had to move five hours away, putting all of her hard-won progress in jeopardy.

JBAY was there to lend the helping hand she needed. Christina received financial support from JBAY. She recalls, "During that time, I couldn't pay for food or groceries or school supplies." With JBAY's assistance, Christina was able to focus on moving back toward school and staying on track for graduation.

Christina explained that one of the biggest ways JBAY helped her was by knowing that people actually care. "I feel like it showed that there are people out there to support people like me who have been through what I've been through in the system and with homelessness."

When asked what she would like others to know about her experience, she says: "Not all of us have the support that most people have when it comes to education and financial needs. Programs like JBAY's is a huge factor in continuing our education because it allows us that one little piece of financial support, whether that's getting books for class, or getting something to eat for the day."



## Christina ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶

*"Programs like JBAY's is a huge factor in continuing our education because it allows us that one little piece of financial support, whether that's getting books for class, or getting something to eat for the day.."*

# Partnering with Youth

JBAY is thrilled to introduce our team of Youth Advocates for 2024! This dynamic group of eight young adults plays a pivotal role in our success, bringing valuable firsthand experiences from their time in foster care or facing homelessness. Their perspectives enrich our efforts in the crucial areas of education, housing, and health.

In January, JBAY brought together the new and returning Youth Advocates, along with our dedicated staff in Sacramento for an orientation and a tour of the State Capitol.

The class of 2024 comprises individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Many are college students, triumphing over the challenges that often prevent homeless and foster youth from obtaining a degree. **Traneisia Jones** is a student at Sacramento State, while **Kristin Hernandez** attends UC Davis. **Wednesday Pope** is pursuing her degree at Folsom Community College, and **Rosella Wilhem** is enrolled at American River College. **Esmeralda Nuno Mora** attends UC Berkeley and **Taneil Franklin** attends LA Trade Tech.

Several of them have actively participated in programs created or expanded by JBAY's advocacy, such as extended foster care, NextUp, Guardian Scholars, transitional housing, and the Foster Youth Tax Credit. For some of our new Youth Advocates, the motivation to get involved with JBAY stemmed from the desire to expand access to these crucial programs.

Empowering youth stands out as another key motivation expressed by the new Youth Advocates, including Traneisia, who states, "What most interests me about becoming a youth advocate is advocating for those who have not been able to speak for themselves. I was once one of those who thought my words did not matter, and I'm here to help those who think this, because it is not true. I want to show youth that their voice and journey do matter!"

**Cody Van Felden** and **Erin Clews** will be returning in 2024 to serve as Youth Advocate Mentors. Both have been involved with JBAY for over two years, contributing to numerous projects. Cody played a central role in implementing the Foster Youth Tax Credit and recently represented JBAY at a national conference in Atlanta, encouraging other states to replicate this vital work.

Erin played a critical role in the passage of Assembly Bill 789, reforming financial aid for over 3 million students in California by requiring colleges and universities to adopt more student-friendly policies. Currently a student at UC Santa Cruz, Erin will continue to be involved in the legislation's implementation. Together, this exceptional group of young individuals brings a wealth of experience and commitment.

*Congratulations!*



**Traneisia Jones**  
Student, Sacramento State



**Kristin Hernandez**  
Student, UC Davis



**Wednesday Pope**  
Student, Folsom Community College



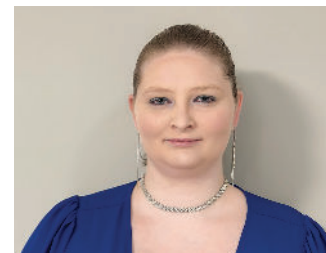
**Rosella Wilhem**  
Student, American River College



**Esmeralda Nuno Mora**  
Student, UC Berkeley



**Taneil Franklin**  
Student, LA Trade Tech



**Cody Van Felden**  
Youth Advocate Mentor



**Erin Clews**  
Youth Advocate Mentor



# 2023 Financials

## REVENUE

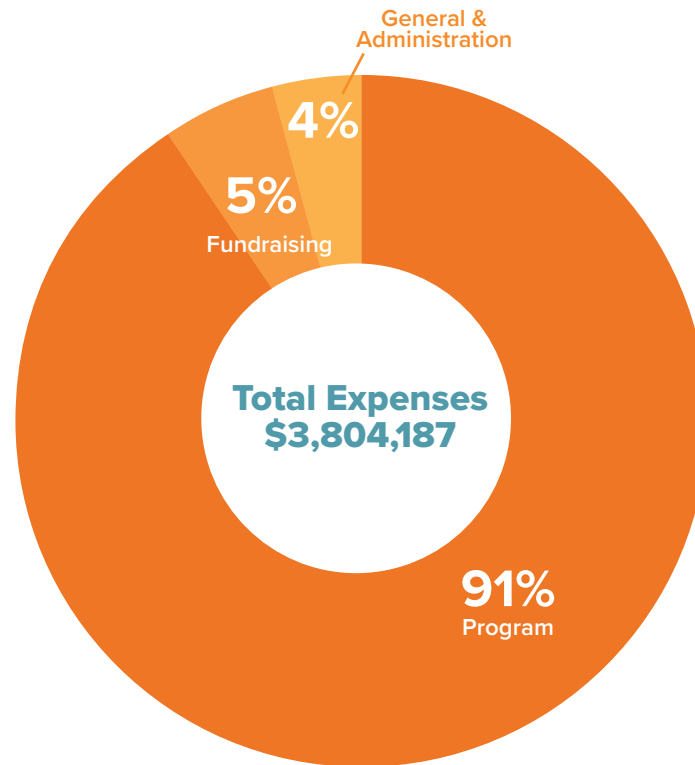
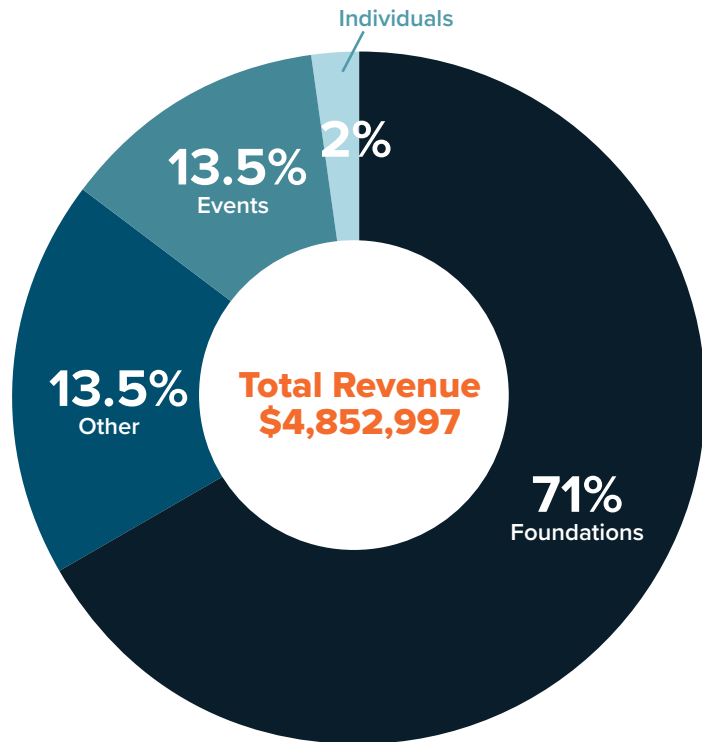
Foundations	\$3,446,067
Events	\$648,572
Individuals	\$107,594
Other	\$650,744
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,852,977</b>

## EXPENSES

Program	\$3,453,515
General & Administration	\$147,948
Fundraising	\$202,724
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,804,187</b>

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

Current Assets	\$12,053,658
Long Term Assets	\$286,976
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$12,340,634</b>
Total Liabilities	\$383,358
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$11,957,276</b>





# Donors

John Burton Advocates for Youth is tremendously grateful for the support of all our donors and funders. Your generosity has helped us to make more possible for older foster youth throughout California.

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Creating a brighter future for youth who have been in foster care or homeless.



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