

LOS ANGELES COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

John Naimo
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

Arlene Barrera
CHIEF DEPUTY

Peter Hughes
ASSISTANT AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

Robert Campbell
DIVISION CHIEF

OFFICE OF COUNTY INVESTIGATIONS

November 21, 2017

Children's Group Home Ombudsman Semi-Annual Report For the Period Ended June 30, 2017



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FACT SHEET

Children's Group Home Ombudsman Semi-Annual Report

For the Period Ended June 30, 2017

Key Outcomes

During this reporting period, the Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) received 141 requests for assistance via the Ombudsman hotline and during outreach visits, related to: Safety – 1, Personal Rights – 32, General – 78, and Information Only – 30.

The Ombudsman conducted outreach visits to 64 Group Home (GH) sites operated by 33 agencies, including seven site visits with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, and visits to nine non-contracted GHs that housed Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) youth. In total, 321 youth were visited and were provided with Ombudsman information.

Authority

In October 1998, the Board of Supervisors established the Office of the Children's Group Home Ombudsman at the recommendation of the Commission for Children and Families. The Ombudsman is an independent advocate for youth placed in GHs by DCFS. To ensure its independence and the ability to address concerns involving DCFS operations and personnel, the Ombudsman resides in the Department of Auditor-Controller.

Functions

The Ombudsman operates a toll-free hotline and an e-mail address for youth placed in DCFS GHs to request assistance with issues they cannot resolve on their own. The Ombudsman's contact information is required to be posted in every County-contracted GH.

The Ombudsman conducts announced and unannounced visits at GHs to inform DCFS youth about the existence and purpose of the Ombudsman Program, to solicit their candid feedback and concerns, and to ensure that youth have opportunities to utilize its services. Joint outreach visits with the Probation Ombudsman are also conducted at GHs that serve both Probation and DCFS youth.

The Ombudsman also actively participates in the child welfare community, including attending and presenting information to the Commission for Children and Families, Special Audit Committee, Sybil Brand Commission, and as a member of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights Working Group.

FAST FACTS

A total of 141 Requests for Assistance were received.

Family contact (10%) and group home policies/rules (15%) were the largest percentages of requests by youth this reporting period.

In total, 64 group home sites were visited (operated by 33 agencies).

Overall, 321 children were visited.

CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN

e-mail: afriend@auditor.lacounty.gov hotline: 888.445.1234 mail: 350 S Figueroa St, 8th Floor
web: <http://grouphomeombudsman.lacounty.gov> Los Angeles, CA 90071

CALLERS MAY REMAIN ANONYMOUS



This report is also available online at auditor.lacounty.gov

CONTACT: Michelle Day, Group Home Ombudsman
mday@auditor.lacounty.gov
213.253.0117

2017-SAGHOSR-1/2



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 525
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012-3873
PHONE: (213) 974-8301 FAX: (213) 626-5427

JOHN NAIMO
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

November 21, 2017

TO: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Janice Hahn
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: John Naimo 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2017**

This report summarizes the Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program activities for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2017.

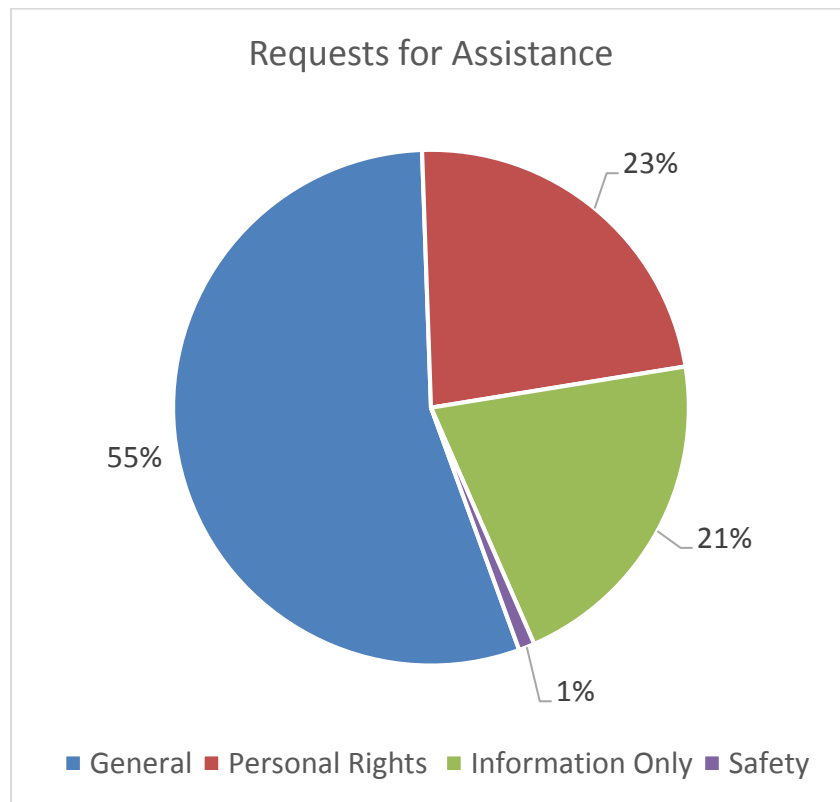
Background

The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH) by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and provides a confidential and informal process to resolve issues raised by children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to requests for assistance (requests), which are generally received through a toll-free hotline, e-mail, and during site visits. The Ombudsman hotline number and e-mail address are included on posters which are required to be displayed in every County-contracted GH. In addition, Ombudsman staff conducts routine site visits encouraging children to discuss any concerns or call the hotline if they need assistance in resolving GH problems.

Upon receiving a request, the Ombudsman interviews the requester to understand the situation and to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action. The Ombudsman may also contact other parties, including DCFS personnel, GH providers, or others as needed to gather additional information, and to facilitate a reasonable solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

Summary of Requests

The Ombudsman received a total of 141 requests, consisting of 102 hotline calls and 39 direct requests during site visits. Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller. The Ombudsman's goal is to be accessible and to assist all callers and youth during site visits, and accordingly, all requests are presumed to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.



Details of the Requests for Assistance are as follows:

Safety

There was one (1%) request relating to safety.

- A 17-year-old youth called to complain about a GH staff. She was initially hesitant to talk because she feared that "nothing would happen," but subsequently shared that a GH staff pulled a chair out from under her on two separate occasions, causing her to fall to the ground both times. We immediately reported this allegation to the Child Protection Hotline (CPH), and the Ombudsman also spoke with the GH manager.

The GH manager reviewed video of the incident, which occurred in a common area that has security cameras, and confirmed the youth's account that a staff person appeared to pull out a chair from under her on two separate occasions. The GH manager informed us that the staff was immediately terminated. We have requested that DCFS management follow up to ensure this incident was properly dispositioned.

Personal Rights

There were 32 (23%) requests relating to Personal Rights which includes Family Contact, Health/Medical, Dental Care, Allowances, Dietary Needs, and School Enrollment.

- For example, a 16-year-old youth in a new GH placement was unable to call her mother because she and the GH had not yet been able to reach her Children's Social Workers (CSW) to receive approval for that contact. CSWs must authorize all persons on their assigned youths' contact lists prior to any direct contact. The youth called the Ombudsman for assistance reaching her CSW and expediting the approval to call her mother. After several calls and e-mails, the Ombudsman reached the Supervising CSW who contacted the GH to provide approval for the youth to call her mother. The Ombudsman followed up with the youth to ensure she could call her mother.

The Ombudsman frequently receives this type of request from youth who are in an existing placement and want to immediately add a person to their existing contact list, or who are newly-placed by Emergency Response Social Workers, where their assigned CSW has not received or had an opportunity to evaluate their requested contacts. CSWs respond quickly to our requests on behalf of the youth, and begin the approval process (i.e., prudent parenting decision to allow a contact with another minor or live scan of adults). We have found that youth want immediate approval and may not understand that their CSW must evaluate contacts for safety. Since family and social contacts are important to youth served by the Ombudsman, we are consulting with DCFS to ensure there is a streamlined and expedited process for reviewing and approving contacts, and that GHs always receive newly-placed youths' contact list at the time of intake.

General

There were 78 (55%) General requests which includes Group Home Policies/Rules, Independent Living Transition, Residential Conflicts with Staff or Peers, CSW Contact or Concern(s), School-Related Needs, Placement Change Status, and Condition of Residence and Amenities.

- For example, during outreach visits with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, youth from multiple sites run by one agency shared that they enjoy "Sunday Night Dinners," where they shop for, prepare, and eat dinner together each Sunday. Youth from different homes were frustrated because the dinner budget was

insufficient to provide a variety of meal options, or enough food to have leftovers. Some youth who had been in this placement for up to two years stated the dinner budget had not changed in that time. Both Ombudsmen discussed this issue with the agency Director and shared how much the youth enjoyed the meals, and their concerns about the budget. During a subsequent visit, the youth informed us their Sunday Night Dinner budget was increased from \$30 to \$50, and they were pleased with the increase.

Information Only

There were 30 (21%) requests involving individuals seeking general information (18 requests pertaining to GHs and 12 requests that were non-GH related). In such cases, the Ombudsman provided an answer or directed the requester to the appropriate party.

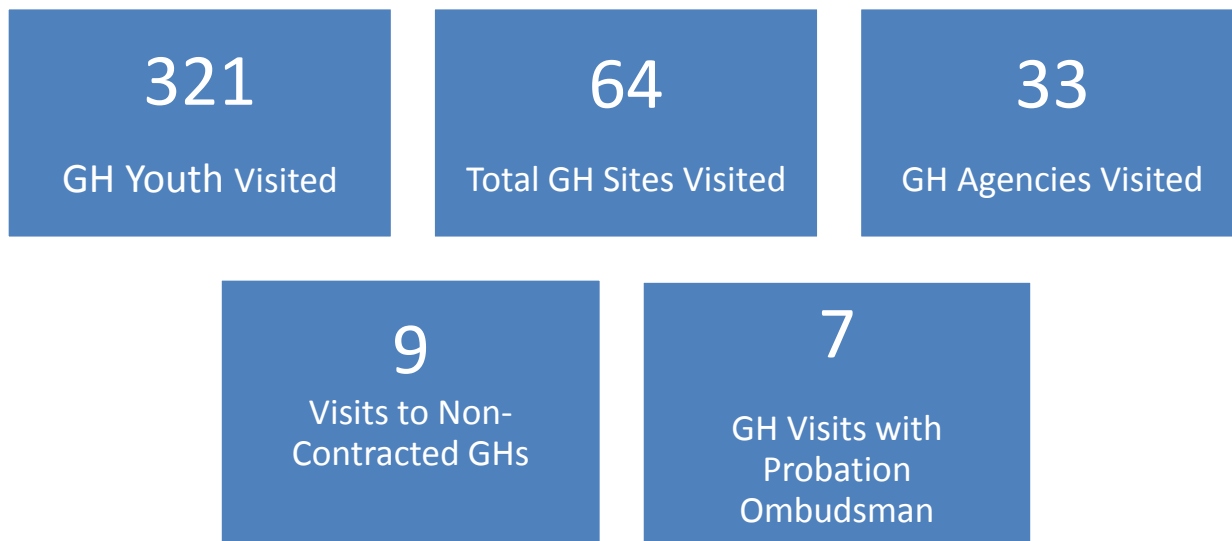
Resolution

To ensure that requests were properly addressed and resolved, we completed various communications and referrals to DCFS's CSWs, CPH, Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Contract Administration Division, and the Public Inquiry Unit. In addition, the Ombudsman regularly communicated and coordinated with the Probation Ombudsman, Probation GH Monitoring and Investigations Unit, State Community Care Licensing, GH staff/management, California Foster Care Ombudsman, and if needed, other counties to ensure the requester's issues were addressed and that proper agencies were notified.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and GH staff with information about the Ombudsman function. Visits are prioritized and scheduled based on concerns reported by residents, information from recent reports, and/or concerns raised by the DCFS Special Audit Committee, Commission for Children and Families, and the Sybil Brand Commission. Visits are conducted with the Probation Ombudsman to GHs that have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. Also, non-contracted GHs are included in our visits, which are used for hard-to-place youth or when other placement options have been exhausted. Lastly, some GHs may be visited multiple times for follow up purposes.

The following is a summary of outreach activity for this reporting period:



Index of Attachments

- Attachment I:** Requests for Assistance Received by Type
Attachment II: Requests for Assistance Received by Group Home
Attachment III: Group Home Sites Visited for Outreach

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Ombudsman, at (213) 253-0117 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

JN:AB:PH:RGC:GH:md

Attachments

- c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
Brandon T. Nichols, Acting Director, DCFS
Honorable Michael Nash, Executive Director, Office of Child Protection
Terri L. McDonald, Chief Probation Officer
Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Commission for Children and Families
Contract Administration Division, DCFS
Out-of-Home Care Management Division, DCFS
Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance, Probation
Jessica Gama, Probation Ombudsman
Public Information Office
Sybil Brand Commission

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED*
BY TYPE**

January 1 through June 30, 2017

1. Safety	1
Physical Safety	1
2. Personal Rights	32
Family Contact	14
Health/Medical, Dental Care	6
Monetary Allowance (Weekly/Discretionary Clothing)	6
Dietary Needs	3
School Enrollment	3
3. General	78
Group Home Policies/Rules	21
Independent Living Transition	11
Residential Conflict(s) with Staff	9
Children's Social Worker (CSW) Contact	9
Placement Change Status	7
Residential Conflict(s) with Peers	7
School-Related Needs	6
Condition of Residence and Amenities	5
CSW Concern(s)	3
4. All Types Above - Total	111
5. Information Only	30
Group Home Related	18
Non-Group Home Related	12
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsman	141

**Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller.*

LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED*
BY GROUP HOME

January 1 through June 30, 2017

Group Home Agency by Supervisorial District	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
1st District			7	
B & I Group Home	12	2	1	•Independent Living Transition
St. Anne's Maternity Home	32	1	2	•Children's Social Worker (CSW) Concern(s) •Independent Living Transition
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope/Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	6	1	4	•Group Home Policies/Rules (2) •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers (2)
2nd District			14	
Dream Catcher Foundation	18	3	1	•Placement Change Status
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	24	1	5	•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers (2) •CSW Concern(s) •Group Home Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Junior Blind of America	40	1	8	•CSW Contact (3) •Allowance •Dietary Needs •Family Contact •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Placement Change Status
3rd District			5	
Hamburger Home dba Aviva Family and Children's Services	36	1	1	•Group Home Policies/Rules
Los Angeles Youth Network	12	1	2	•Group Home Policies/Rules •Physical Safety
Project Six dba The Help Group	32	1	2	•Dietary Needs •Group Home Policies/Rules
4th District			3	
Star View Children and Family Services Community Treatment Facility	40	1	1	•Health/Medical, Dental Care
Dream Home Care, Inc.	18	3	2	•Group Home Policies/Rules •Independent Living Transition
5th District			52	
Five Acres	56	2	1	•Health/Medical, Dental Care
Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services	20	1	1	•Placement Change Status
Haynes Family of Programs	72	1	1	•CSW Concern(s)
Bourne, Inc.	12	2	2	•CSW Contact •Family Contact
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	18	3	2	•Allowance •CSW Contact

Group Home Agency by Supervisorial District		Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services		30	1	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Family Contact (5) •CSW Contact (2) •Group Home Policies/Rules (2) •Condition of Residence and Amenities •Dietary Needs •Independent Living Transition •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Rosemary Children's Services		39	5	32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Group Home Policies/Rules (8) •Family Contact (5) •School-Related Needs (5) •Condition of Residence and Amenities (3) •Health/Medical, Dental Care (2) •Independent Living Transition (2) •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers (2) •School Enrollment (2) •Allowance (1) •Placement Change Status (1) •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (1)
Multiple Supervisorial Districts / Out of County				30	
Heritage Group Home, Inc.	1st, 4th, 5th	30	5	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition •Placement Change Status
Careprovider.Org	1st, 5th	12	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Condition of Residence and Amenities •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Egleston Youth Centers, Inc.	1st, 5th, San Bernardino County	48	8	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition •Placement Change Status
Luvlee's Residential Care dba New Dawn	1st, San Bernardino County	12	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Allowance •Group Home Policies/Rules
South Bay Bright Future	2nd, 4th	18	3	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Fleming & Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care	2nd, 4th, 5th	30	5	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact •Group Home Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff •School Enrollment
Turmont Home for Boys/Girls	2nd, 5th	12	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Family Contact •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Children's Homes of Southern California	3rd, 5th	42	7	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Group Home Policies/Rules
Penny Lane Centers	3rd, 5th	105	11	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Placement Change Status •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers •School-Related Needs
Mary's Shelter	Orange	30 (plus beds for infants up to 24 months)	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition

Group Home Agency by Supervisorial District		Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Florence Crittenton Services of Orange County, Inc. dba Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange	54 (plus 37 beds for children up to age 4)	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowance (2) • CSW Contact
Fields Comprehensive Youth Services, Inc.	San Bernardino	12	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2)
Diakonia, Inc.	San Bernardino	18	3	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Living Transition (2) • Family Contact • Group Home Policies/Rules
Total				111	

*Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller.

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
GROUP HOME SITES VISITED FOR OUTREACH**

January 1 through June 30, 2017

Group Home Agencies By Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Site(s) Visited
1st District			8 Sites
Anka Behavioral Health, Inc.	X		•Pomona
B & I Group Home			•Pomona (2)
Garces Residential Care Services			•Claremont
Hope House	X		•El Monte (2)
Maryvale		X	•Rosemead
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope/Casa Esperanza Treatment Center			•Pomona
2nd District			7 Sites
Fred Jefferson Memorial Homes			•Compton (2)
I Am Safe, Inc.	X		•Los Angeles
Junior Blind of America*	X		•Los Angeles (3)
T & T Home for Boys			•Carson
3rd District			1 Site
Los Angeles Youth Network			•Los Angeles
5th District			14 Sites
Bourne, Inc.			•Altadena (2)
David & Margaret Youth and Family Services		X	•La Verne
Five Acres			•Pasadena (2)
Hillsides Home for Children			•Pasadena (2)
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home			•Lancaster (3)
Robsag, Inc.	X		•Altadena
Rosemary Childen's Services		X	•Pasadena (2) •South Pasadena
Multiple Supervisorial Districts / Out of County			25 Sites
Heritage Group Homes, Inc.	1st, 4th, 5th		•La Verne •Phillips Ranch •Valinda •West Covina •Whittier
Careprovider.Org	1st, 5th		•Covina •Pomona •West Covina
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.	1st, 5th, San Bernardino County		•Covina •Ontario •Pomona •Upland
Luvlee's Residential Care dba New Dawn	1st, San Bernardino County		•Chino •Walnut

Group Home Agencies By Supervisorial District		NC	JO	Site(s) Visited
South Bay Bright Future	2nd, 4th			•Harbor City •San Pedro (2)
Fleming & Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care	2nd, 4th, 5th		X	•Carson •Lancaster •Long Beach
Turmont Home for Boys/Girls	2nd, 5th			•Carson •Lancaster
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network	3rd, 5th			•Granada Hills •North Hills •Valencia
Out of County			9 Sites	
Boy's Town California/Residential Family Services	Orange			•Trabuco Canyon
Florence Crittenton Services of Orange County, Inc. dba Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange		X	•Fullerton
J and P Homes	Orange	X		•Buena Park
Mary's Shelter	Orange			•Santa Ana (2)
All of God's Children	Riverside	X		•Moreno Valley
Diakonia, Inc.	San Bernardino			•Rialto
Fields Comprehensive Youth Services	San Bernardino			•Rancho Cucamonga •Upland
Total			64 Sites	

NC=Non-Contracted Group Home

JO=Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Department Ombudsman

*Junior Blind of America has two non-contracted sites.

NOTE: The Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Contracted Group Home Sites list (dated 10/2/2017) identifies 135 group home sites and two community treatment facilities, operated by 52 agencies, that can house DCFS youth.