

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

April 10, 2018

Children's Group Home Ombudsman Semi-Annual Report For the Period Ended December 31, 2017



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2017-SAGHOSR-2/2

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FACT SHEET

Children's Group Home Ombudsman Semi-Annual Report

For the Period Ended December 31, 2017

Key Outcomes

During this reporting period, the Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) received 132 requests for assistance via the Ombudsman hotline and during outreach visits related to: Personal Rights – 22, General – 79, and Information Only – 31. There were no requests related to Safety.

The Ombudsman conducted outreach visits to 53 Group Home (GH) sites operated by 22 agencies, including visits to three agencies with multiple sites with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, and visits to three non-contracted GHs with Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) youth. In total, 278 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, the Ombudsman resides in the Department of Auditor-Controller.

Functions

The Ombudsman operates a toll-free hotline and an e-mail address for DCFS youth placed in GHs to request assistance with issues they cannot resolve on their own. The Ombudsman's contact information is 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, if any, 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, and Sybil Brand Commission. In addition, the Ombudsman is a member of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and Services Work Group.

FAST FACTS

A total of 132 Requests for Assistance were received.

Residential Conflict(s) with Staff and Group Home Policies/Rules (both 11%) were the most frequent concerns youth expressed during this reporting period.

In total, 53 sites were visited (operated by 22 agencies).

Overall, 278 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



JOHN NAIMO
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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

April 10, 2018

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

FROM: John Naimo 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JULY 1 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2017**

This report summarizes the Los Angeles County (County) Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program activities for the period of July 1 through December 31, 2017.

Background

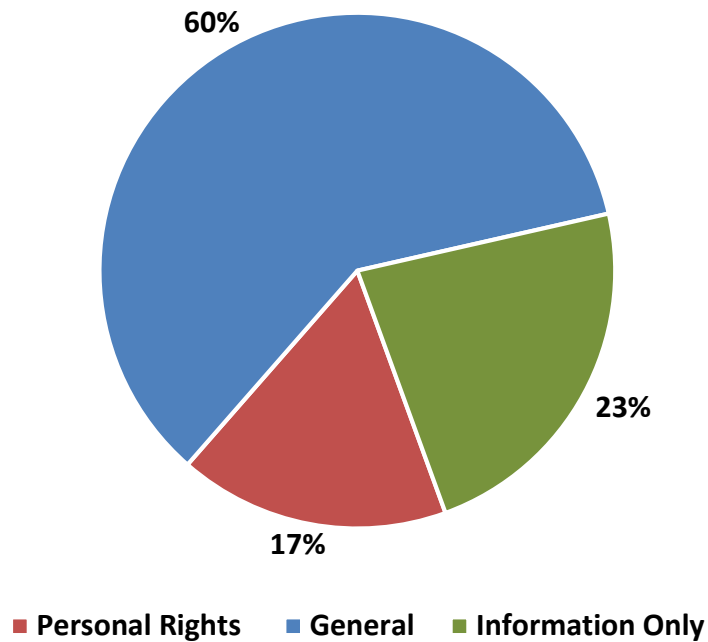
The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH), by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and provides a confidential and informal process to resolve issues raised by children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to requests for assistance (requests), which are received through a toll-free hotline, e-mail, or during site visits. The Ombudsman hotline number and e-mail address are included on posters which are 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, 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 132 requests, consisting of 98 hotline calls and 34 direct requests during outreach 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 outreach visits, and accordingly, all requests are presumed to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.

Requests for Assistance



During this reporting period, there were no requests related to Safety. Details of the Requests for Assistance are as follows:

Personal Rights

There were 22 (17%) requests relating to Personal Rights which include: Clothing Requirements, Allowances, Health/Medical and Dental Care, Dietary Needs, Family Contact, and School Enrollment.

- For example, during an outreach visit, a youth stated that he did not have enough clothes that fit because he recently grew taller. He also added that his bed was too short. To address these issues, the Ombudsman joined DCFS in an already planned meeting with the GH Administration. This youth's specific needs were discussed and the GH clearly committed to purchasing additional clothes and a longer bed. In a follow-up visit to the GH, the youth stated he received more clothes and a new bed.

The Ombudsman regularly communicates with DCFS, and will partner with them in meetings with agencies to share observations and/or concerns. This collaboration and open line of communication provides the Ombudsman with information that is helpful when conducting outreach visits, and in turn, provides DCFS with information from another perspective.

General

There were 79 (60%) General requests which include: Residential Conflicts with Staff or Peers, GH Policies/Rules, Personal Care/Belongings, Independent Living Transition, Children's Social Worker (CSW) Contact or Concern(s), School-Related Needs, Placement Change Status, and Condition of Residence and Amenities.

- For example, a youth called to express that the consequences (lowering of points) she received for acting-out were not fair compared to the consequences received by other residents exhibiting similar behavior. Upon further inquiry, the Ombudsman learned the youth's anger was a reaction to recent family problems in addition to her laptop being stolen while on a home visit. With this, the Ombudsman spoke with the House Manager, not to condone the youth's behavior, but to reiterate what the youth expressed. The House Manager was empathetic to the circumstances, acknowledged that the behavior was uncharacteristic of the youth, and revised the consequences accordingly.

This case is an example of a situation where the Ombudsman is called on to provide a voice and perspective for the youth, and to advocate for them to agency staff in a way that is impartial and non-confrontational. The goal is for the youth to feel heard and to obtain a fair outcome. Also, the Ombudsman, as a neutral party, does inquire with youth to ensure they know the GH rules and behavior expectations.

Information Only

There were 31 (23%) requests involving individuals seeking general information (18 requests pertaining to GHs and 13 requests that were non-GH related). In such cases, the Ombudsman provided an answer or directed the requester to the appropriate party.

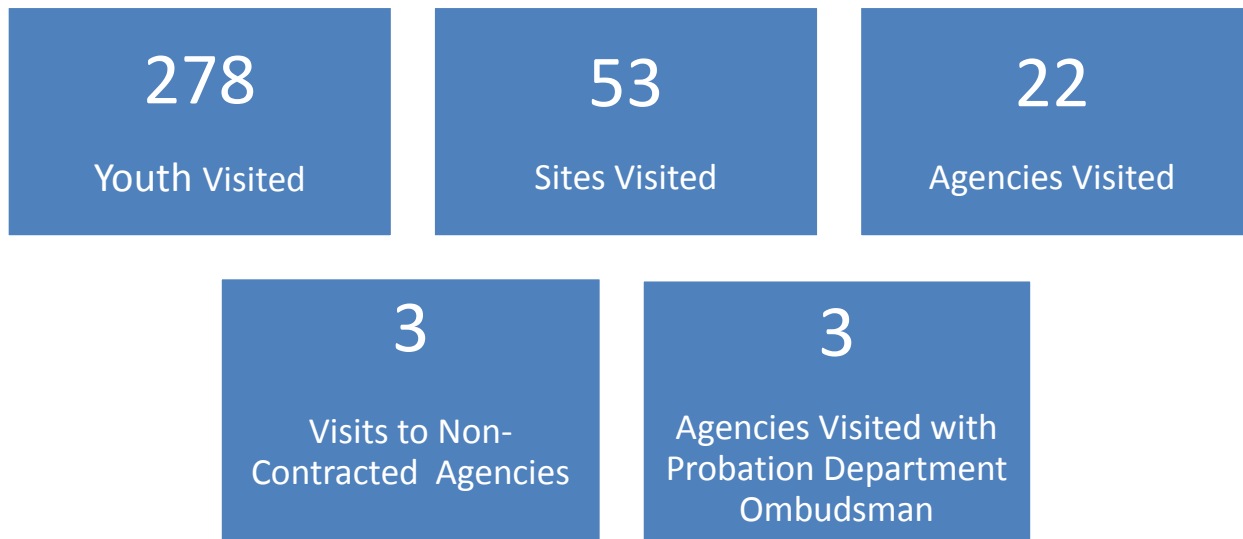
Resolution

To ensure that requests were properly addressed and resolved within the purview of the Ombudsman, we completed various communications and referrals to DCFS including but not limited to CSWs, Child Protection Hotline, Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Contract Administration Division, and the Public Inquiry Unit. In addition, we also worked with the Probation Department's Ombudsman and Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance Unit to resolve issues. Lastly, non-County entities such as the State Community Care Licensing, GH staff/management, California Foster Care Ombudsman, and if needed, other counties were contacted to ensure concerns were addressed.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and agency 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 the 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 Agency
Attachment III: Agencies 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
Bobby D. Cagle, Director, DCFS
Honorable Michael Nash, Executive Director, Office of Child Protection
Terri L. McDonald, Chief Probation Officer
Special 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
Countywide Communications
Sybil Brand Commission

BY TYPE
July 1 through December 31, 2017

1. Safety	0
None	0
2. Personal Rights	22
Clothing Requirements	6
Monetary Allowance (Weekly/Clothing)	5
Health/Medical, Dental Care	4
Dietary Needs	3
Family Contact	3
School Enrollment	1
3. General	79
Residential Conflict(s) with Staff	15
Group Home (GH) Policies/Rules	14
Children's Social Worker (CSW) Contact	13
Independent Living Transition	11
Residential Conflict(s) with Peers	9
Personal Care/Belongings	7
Condition of Residence and Amenities	5
Children's Social Worker (CSW) Concern(s)	2
School-Related Needs	2
Placement Change Status	1
4. All Types Above - Total	101
5. Information Only	31
Group Home Related	18
Non-Group Home Related	13
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsman	132

**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 AGENCY

July 1 through December 31, 2017

LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN

Agency by Supervisorial District	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
1st District			10	
Maryvale	85	1	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers (2) •Clothing Requirements •Condition of Residence and Amenities •Placement Change Status •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
San Gabriel Children's Center	12	2	1	•Personal Care/Belongings
St. Anne's Maternity Home	32	1	1	•Children's Social Worker (CSW) Concern
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	6	1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clothing Requirements •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers
2nd District			20	
Dream Catcher Foundation	18	3	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (2) •Allowance •CSW Concern •Personal Care/Belongings •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff •School-Related Needs
Deliaann-Lucile dba Delilu Achievement Home	14	2	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (3) •Allowance (2) •Personal Care/Belongings (2) •Condition of Residence and Amenities •GH Policies/Rules
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	48	2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Family Contact •GH Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers
Junior Blind of America (now Waverly Family Services)	40	1	1	•Family Contact
3rd District			1	
Project Six dba The Help Group	32	1	1	•CSW Contact
5th District			34	
Haynes Family of Programs	72	1	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Hillsides Home for Children	56	2	1	•GH Policies/Rules
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	18	3	1	•Allowance
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	30	1	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact (4) •Independent Living Transition (3) •Allowance •Clothing Requirements •GH Policies/Rules •Personal Care/Belongings •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers
Rosemary Children's Services	39	5	19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (4) •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (4) •Dietary Needs (2) •GH Policies/Rules (2) •Health/Medical, Dental Care (2) •Condition of Residence and Amenities •CSW Contact •Personal Care/Belongings •School Enrollment •School-Related Needs
Multiple Supervisorial Districts / Out of County			36	

Agency by Supervisorial District		Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Heritage Group Homes	1st, 4th, 5th	30	5	3	•GH Policies/Rules (2) •Personal Care/Belongings
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.	1st, 5th, San Bernardino	48	8	2	•GH Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict with Peers
Luvlee's Residential Care dba New Dawn	1st, San Bernardino	12	2	3	•Clothing Requirements •CSW Contact •Health/Medical, Dental Care
Dream Home Care	2nd, 4th	24	4	1	•CSW Contact
Fleming & Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care	2nd, 4th, 5th	30	5	5	•CSW Contact (2) •Family Contact •GH Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Orange County Children's Foundation	2nd, 4th, Orange	18	3	4	•Independent Living Transition (2) •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Children's Homes of Southern California	3rd, 5th	42	7	7	•CSW Contact (2) •Condition of Residence and Amenities (2) •Clothing Requirements •Dietary Needs •GH Policies/Rules
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network	3rd, 5th	18	3	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Penny Lane Centers	3rd, 5th	60	10	3	•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers (2) •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Mary's Shelter	Orange	30 (plus beds for infants up to 24 months)	2	3	•GH Policies/Rules (2) •Residential Conflict with Peers
Diakonia, Inc.	San Bernardino	18	3	2	•GH Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
West Covina Group Corporation	San Bernardino	6	1	2	•Clothing Requirements •CSW Contact
Total				101	

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

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
AGENCIES VISITED FOR OUTREACH
July 1 through December 31, 2017**

Agency By Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Site(s) Visited
1st District			6 Sites
Hope House	X		•El Monte (2)
San Gabriel Children's Center		X	•Azusa (2)
St. Anne's Maternity Home			•Los Angeles
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center			•Pomona
2nd District			15 Sites
Deliaann-Lucile dba Delilu Achievement Home			•Los Angeles (2)
Dream Catcher Foundation			•Los Angeles (3)
I Am Safe, Inc.	X		•Los Angeles
Junior Blind of America (now Wayfinder Family Services)*	X		•Los Angeles (4)
The Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems			•Los Angeles (3)
Vista Del Mar			•Los Angeles (2)
3rd District			2 Sites
LifeCircles Unlimited			•Pacoima
Project Six dba The Help Group			•Van Nuys
5th District			5 Sites
Casa Editha Foundation dba Ava-Lyn's Group Home			•Pasadena
Rosemary Children's Services		X	•Pasadena (3) •South Pasadena
Multiple Supervisorial Districts / Out of County			25 Sites
Luvlee's Residential Care dba New Dawn	1st, San Bernardino		•Chino •Walnut
Dream Home Care	2nd, 4th		•Carson •Long Beach (2) •Torrance
Orange County Children's Foundation	2nd, 4th, Orange		•Carson •Placentia •Torrance
Children's Homes of Southern California	3rd, 5th		•Reseda •Van Nuys (2) •West Hills (4)
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network	3rd, 5th		•Granada Hills •North Hills •Valencia
Florence Crittenton Services of Orange County, Inc. dba Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange	X	•Fullerton
West Covina Group Corporation	San Bernardino		•Chino
Childhelp, Inc.	Orange, Riverside		•Costa Mesa (3) •Beaumont
Total			53 Sites

NC=Non-Contracted Group Home Agency

JO=Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Department Ombudsman

*Junior Blind of America (now Wayfinder Family Services) has three non-contracted sites.