

LOS ANGELES COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

Arlene Barrera

ACTING AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

Peter Hughes

ASSISTANT AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

Robert Campbell

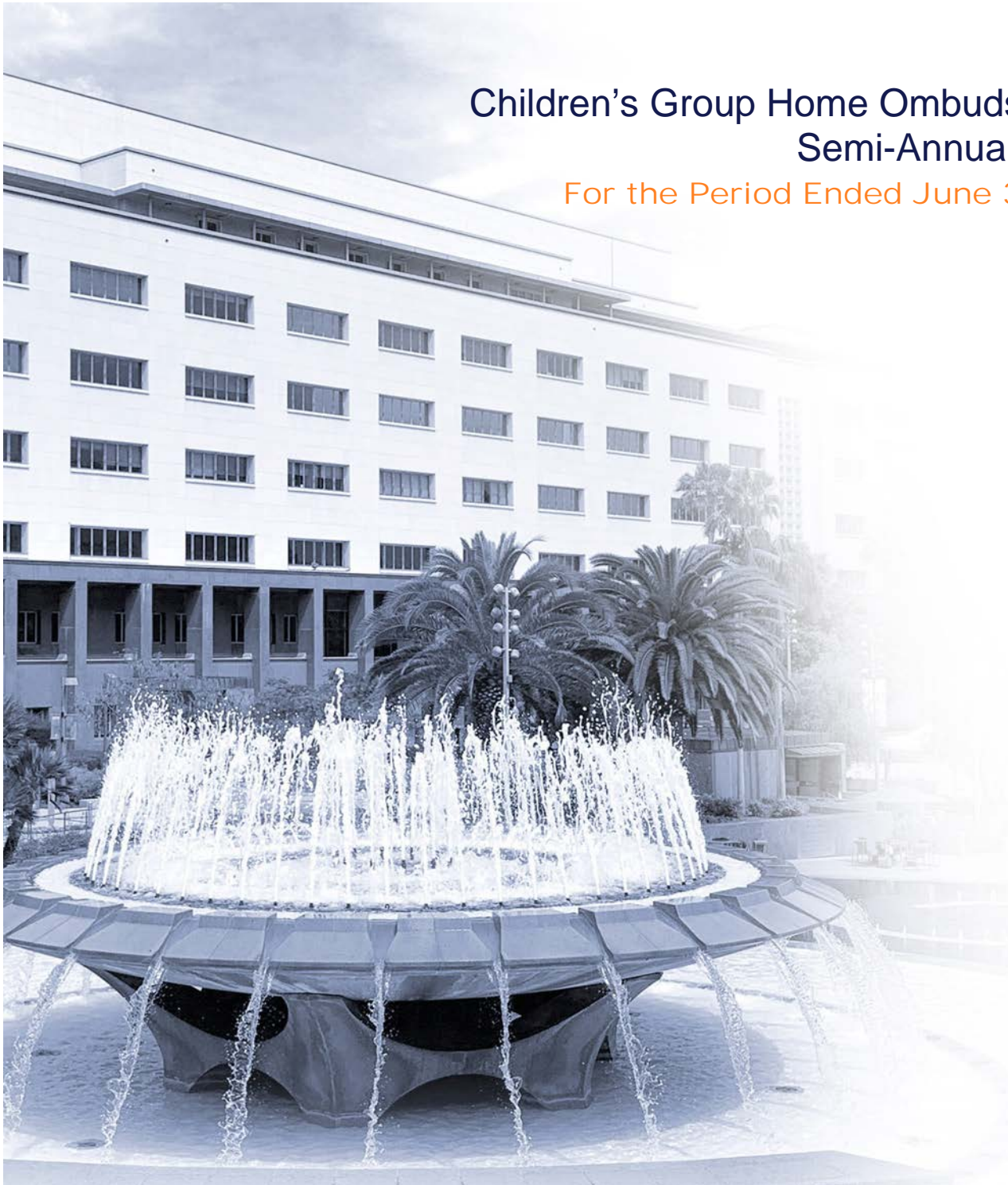
DIVISION CHIEF

OFFICE OF COUNTY INVESTIGATIONS

October 17, 2019

Children's Group Home Ombudsperson Semi-Annual Report

For the Period Ended June 30, 2019



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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FACT SHEET

Children's Group Home Ombudsperson Semi-Annual Report

For the Period Ended June 30, 2019

Summary

The Children's Group Home Ombudsperson (Ombudsperson) conducted outreach visits from January 1, 2019 through June 30, 2019 to **219** youth at **60** Group Home (GH) and Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) sites operated by **30** agencies. This includes outreach visits to 27 sites operated by 11 agencies in coordination with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman and visits to 7 sites operated by 6 non-contracted GH agencies.

The Ombudsperson received **103** requests for assistance during outreach visits and via the Ombudsperson hotline. The requests involved: Personal Rights (18); General Assistance (58); and Information Only (27).

Function

The Ombudsperson conducts announced and unannounced visits at GHs/STRTPs to inform Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) youth about the existence and purpose of the Ombudsperson Program, to solicit their candid feedback and concerns, if any, and to ensure that youth have opportunities to utilize its services. We also conduct joint outreach visits with the Probation Ombudsman at agencies that serve both Probation and DCFS youth.

The Ombudsperson also operates a toll-free hotline and an e-mail address for the DCFS youth placed in GHs/STRTPs to request assistance with issues they cannot resolve on their own. Every County-contracted agency posts the Ombudsperson's contact information inside the home.

The Ombudsperson participates in the child welfare community, including attending and presenting information to the Special Audit Committee, Sybil Brand Commission, and the Commission for Children and Families, as requested.

FAST FACTS

We met with **219** children during this period.

We visited a total of **60** sites operated by **30** agencies.

We received a total of **103** Requests for Assistance.

The most frequent concerns expressed by youth during this period were *Dietary Needs, Conflict with Staff, and School-Related Needs* (all equally, 10% each).

CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSPERSON

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 Ombudsperson
mday@auditor.lacounty.gov
(213) 253-0117

2019-SAGHOSR-2/2



ARLENE BARRERA
ACTING 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

October 17, 2019

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

FROM: Arlene Barrera *Arlene Barrera*
Acting Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSPERSON SEMI-ANNUAL
REPORT – JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2019**

This report summarizes the Los Angeles County (County) Auditor-Controller's (A-C's) Children's Group Home Ombudsperson (Ombudsperson) Program activities for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2019.

Summary of Activities

The Ombudsperson conducted **outreach visits to 219 youth** at 60 Group Home (GH) and Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) sites operated by 30 agencies. The youth ranged in age from 8 to 19 years old. The Ombudsperson received **103 requests for assistance** (requests) to address youth concerns during outreach visits and via calls and e-mails to the Ombudsperson hotline. The Ombudsperson ensured that all requests received were appropriately addressed, or satisfactory progress was made to address the concerns.

Authority

In October 1998, the Board of Supervisors established the Office of the Children's Group Home Ombudsman (now referred to as the Ombudsperson) at the recommendation of the Civil Grand Jury and Commission for Children and Families (CCF). The Ombudsperson is an independent advocate for youth placed in GHs/STRTPs by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). To ensure its independence and the ability to address concerns, the Ombudsperson function resides in the A-C.

Background

The Ombudsperson serves as an advocate for youth placed in GHs and STRTPs by DCFS and provides a confidential and informal process to help resolve any issues during their GH/STRTP placement. The Ombudsperson participates in the child welfare community, including attending and presenting information to the Special Audit Committee, Sybil Brand Commission (SBC), and CCF, as requested.

Outreach Activities

One of the primary Ombudsperson responsibilities is to meet with DCFS children in GHs/STRTPs and discuss their personal rights, and any concerns or unmet needs they may have. We provide DCFS children and staff with information about the Ombudsperson function, and initiate conversations with youth during visits since some youth are hesitant to express their needs until we ask questions. Once they voice their needs, we share the information with the appropriate individuals and assist in developing solutions.

Ombudsperson staff conducts routine site visits encouraging youth to discuss any concerns or to call the hotline if they need assistance. The Ombudsperson provides every County-contracted GH/STRTP agency with posters to display in the homes. The posters include the Ombudsperson's toll-free hotline number and e-mail address.

We prioritize and schedule visits based on concerns reported by residents, information from recent reports, and/or concerns raised by the Special Audit Committee, CCF, and SBC. We work with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman to coordinate visits to GHs/STRTPs that have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. We also visit non-contracted GHs, which DCFS relies upon for hard-to-place youth or when other placement options have been exhausted. Lastly, we conduct multiple visits to some GHs/STRTPs to follow-up on concerns raised during prior visits.

Requests for Assistance

The Ombudsperson receives requests during site visits and through a hotline. Upon receiving a request, the Ombudsperson interviews the requester to understand the situation and to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action.

The Ombudsperson categorizes requests based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller. The Ombudsperson's goal is to be accessible and to assist all callers and youth during outreach visits, and accordingly, presumes all requests to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.

Resolution of Requests

To properly address and resolve requests within the purview of the Ombudsperson, we complete various communications and referrals to DCFS including but not limited to Children’s Social Workers (CSW), Supervising CSWs, Child Protection Hotline (CPH), Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Contract Administration Division, Youth Development Services, and the Public Inquiry Unit. In addition, we collaborate with the Probation Ombudsman and Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance Unit to resolve issues. Lastly, we contact non-County entities such as GH/STRTP staff and management, Community Care Licensing (CCL), the California Foster Care Ombudsman, and if needed, other counties, to ensure youth’s concerns are addressed. Most importantly, we follow-up with the youth.

We immediately report any allegations we receive concerning youth safety (e.g. physical/sexual harm or abuse) to the CPH. CPH may refer the allegations to Emergency Response CSWs for follow-up, local law enforcement, CCL, the child’s assigned CSW, and/or other appropriate agencies for investigation.

Detailed Activities

Outreach

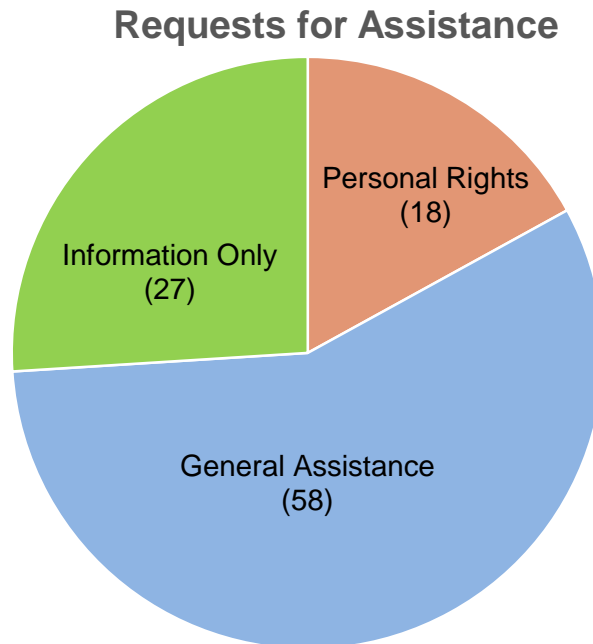
The following is a summary of outreach visits for this reporting period (detailed in Attachment I):



* Includes all physical sites visited, announced and unannounced, even if youth were non-verbal or not available to meet.

Requests for Assistance

The Ombudsperson received a total of **103 requests for assistance**, consisting of 82 calls and 21 direct requests during outreach visits. During this reporting period, there were **no requests about safety concerns**.



The following provides a summary of Requests for Assistance (detailed in Attachments II and III).

Personal Rights

There were 18 (17%) requests relating to Personal Rights which included: Dietary Needs, Allowance, Health/Medical and Dental Care, Clothing Needs, Family Contact, and School Enrollment. For example:

- During visits, we always ask youth about food, from quality and quantity to variety. During one visit, a youth stated he is a vegetarian and would like more options and larger portions. We spoke with the Program Manager (Manager) about this youth's request. Subsequently, the Manager spoke with the youth and followed up with the kitchen staff to ensure his dietary requests were met while taking into consideration his medical restrictions. We also contacted the youth's CSW who had the Public Health Nurse verify that the youth's Health Education Passport documented that he is a vegetarian and has medical restrictions.

Dietary needs/food is one of the most common areas about which youth have concerns, whether it is what food is served, portions, or how often it is served. Unfortunately, the

youth living in a particular residence may not like all the food all of the time, and they may not bear in mind the nutritional requirements to which agencies must adhere. However, when the youth express concerns about food, we always discuss it with the staff. We make sure there are avenues for youth to have a say in the menu and/or food that is purchased, whether it is through written suggestions, grocery shopping with staff, discussions at house meetings, or simply making a verbal request. We also inform the youth that there are nutritional requirements that agencies need to follow.

General Assistance

There were 58 (56%) requests for General Assistance which included: Residential Conflicts with Staff or Peers, School-Related Needs, CSW Contact or Concern(s), Personal Care/Belongings, Issues with Policy/Rules, Placement Change Status, and Condition of Residence and Amenities. For example:

- During one outreach visit with the Probation Ombudsman, a youth expressed that she wanted to know the status of her case and had been trying to contact her CSW for a week or two. She also told us another girl living in the home had the same CSW and wanted to speak with her also. However, the other girl was not home at the time of our visit. Staff provided us with the other youth's information and confirmed that the youth would appreciate assistance as well. The following day we reached out to both the CSW and Supervising CSW via phone and e-mail. Within a few days, the Supervising CSW responded that she had spoken with both the girls, offered immediate assistance if they needed it, and informed them that the CSW would contact them upon her return from vacation. The girls did not express any specific concerns but were happy to connect with the Supervising CSW. They spoke with their CSW a few days later.

Shortly thereafter, we conducted a visit with the Probation Ombudsman at another home within this same agency. Coincidentally, we saw the staff we interacted with from the visit mentioned above. She made a point to tell us that both the girls were very appreciative of us reaching out to the Supervising CSW on their behalf. It made them feel more confident about advocating for themselves because they felt they were heard.

Information Only

There were 27 (26%) requests involving individuals seeking information (22 requests pertaining to the Ombudsperson and 5 requests that were non-Ombudsperson related). In such cases, we provided an answer or directed the requester to the appropriate party.

Index of Attachments

- Attachment I:** Agencies Visited for Outreach
Attachment II: Requests for Assistance Received by Type
Attachment III: Requests for Assistance Received by Agencies

Acknowledgement

We thank management and staff from the various GH and STRTP facilities we visited, the Probation Ombudsman, and DCFS for their cooperation and assistance in helping us address the needs of youth served by the Ombudsperson.

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

AB:PH:RGC:AMS: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
Probation Ombudsman
Public Information Office
Sybil Brand Commission

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSPERSON
AGENCIES VISITED FOR OUTREACH
January 1 through June 30, 2019**

Agencies Visited by Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Sites Visited
1st District			17 Sites
Careprovider.Org			•Covina •Pomona •West Covina
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.		X	•Pomona (3) •Baldwin Park (2) •West Covina
Hope House	X		•El Monte
Inclusion Specialized Programs	X		•Walnut
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn			•Walnut
San Gabriel Children's Center, Inc.		X	•Azusa (2)
St. Anne's Maternity Home		X	•Los Angeles
Trinity Youth Services		X	•El Monte
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center			•Pomona
2nd District			14 Sites
Deliann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home		X	•Los Angeles
Dream Home Care, Inc.			•Carson (2) •Torrance
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care		X	•Carson •Gardena •Hawthorne
Humanistic Foundation, Inc. dba New Concept			•Los Angeles
I am Safe, Inc.	X		•Los Angeles (2)
The Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems		X	•Los Angeles (3)
Wayfinder Family Services		X	•Los Angeles
3rd District			1 Site
Los Angeles Youth Network			•Los Angeles
4th District			2 Sites
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care		X	•Long Beach
Mosaic of Friends	X		•Westchester

NC = Non-Contracted Group Home Agency

JO = Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman

Agencies Visited by Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Sites Visited
5th District			15 Sites
Bourne, Inc.			•Altadena (4)
Careprovider.Org			•Covina
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services		X	•La Verne
Evergreen Home	X		•Burbank
Five Acres		X	•Altadena
Haynes Family of Programs			•La Verne
Hillsides Home for Children			•Pasadena
Victor Treatment Centers (formerly Rosemary Children's Services)		X	•Pasadena (4) •South Pasadena
Out of County			11 Sites
Mary's Path			•Santa Ana (2)
South Coast Children's Society, Inc., dba South Coast Community Services, Inc.			•Costa Mesa (2) •Fountain Valley (2)
Childhelp			•Beaumont
New Beginnings Group Home			•Perris
Blissful Living Group Home, Inc.	X		•Upland
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.		X	•Upland
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn			•Chino
Total			60 Sites

NC = Non-Contracted Group Home Agency

JO = Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman

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

BY TYPE

January 1 through June 30, 2019

1. Safety Concerns	0
2. Personal Rights	18
Dietary Needs	10
Allowance	3
Health/Medical, Dental Care	2
Clothing Needs	1
Family Contact	1
School Enrollment	1
3. General Assistance	58
Residential Conflict(s) with Staff	10
School-Related Needs	10
Children's Social Worker (CSW) Contact	8
Personal Care/Belongings	7
CSW Concerns	6
Issues with Policy/Rules	6
Residential Conflict(s) with Peers	5
Placement Change Status	4
Condition of Residence and Amenities	1
Independent Living Transition	1
4. Total - All Types	76
5. Information Only	27
Ombudsperson Related	22
Non-Ombudsperson Related	5
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsperson	103

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

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

January 1 through June 30, 2019

Agency Name	Supervisory District(s) / Out of County	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Blissful Living Group Home, Inc. (Non-Contracted)	San Bernardino	6	1	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers
Bourne, Inc.	5th	24	4	3	•CSW Concerns (2) •CSW Contact
Careprovider.Org	1st, 5th	18	3	2	•CSW Concerns •Health/Medical, Dental Care
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	5th	30	1	5	•Placement Change Status (2) •CSW Concerns •Issues with Policy/Rules •Personal Care/Belongings
Deliaann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home	2nd	20	3	3	•Allowance •Dietary Needs •Issues with Policy/Rules
Dream Catcher Foundation	2nd	24	4	2	•Allowance •Clothing Needs
Dream Home Care, Inc.	2nd	18	3	1	•CSW Contact
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.	1st, San Bernardino	46	8	1	•Condition of Residence and Amenities
Five Acres	5th	76	2	3	•Allowance •Issues with Policy/Rules •Personal Care/Belongings
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care	2nd, 4th, 5th	30	5	2	•Personal Care/Belongings •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange	54 (plus 37 beds for children from birth to age 4)	1	1	•Dietary Needs
For the Future, Inc. (Non-Contracted)	Ventura	6	1	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Heritage	1st, 4th, 5th	30	5	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers
Los Angeles Youth Network	3rd	16	3	4	•CSW Contact (2) •Personal Care/Belongings •School-Related Needs
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn	1st, San Bernardino	12	2	1	•Personal Care/Belongings
Maryvale	1st	85	1	9 ¹	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (4) •Placement Change Status (2) •CSW Concerns •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers •School-Related Needs
McKinley Children's Center	5th	28	1	1	•School-Related Needs

Agency Name	Supervisorial District(s) / Out of County	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Orange County Children's Foundation	2nd, 4th	12	2	1	•Independent Living Transition
Penny Lane Centers	3rd, 5th	60	10	2	•Dietary Needs •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Project Six dba The Help Group	3rd	32	1	1	•Issues with Policy/Rules
San Gabriel Children's Center, Inc.	1st	12	1	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
St. Anne's Maternity Home	1st	32 (plus 18 beds for children under age 3)	1	2	•Issues with Policy/Rules •School Enrollment
Star View Adolescent Center	4th	44	1	2	•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Trinity Youth Services	1st, San Bernardino	135	3	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Victor Treatment Centers (formerly Rosemary Children's Services)	5th	39	5	19 ²	•Dietary Needs (6) •School-Related Needs (6) •CSW Contact (4) •Family Contact •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	2nd	48	2	1	•Issues with Policy/Rules
Wayfinder Family Services	2nd	32	1	2	•Dietary Needs •Personal Care/Belongings
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	1st	6	1	3	•CSW Concerns •Personal Care/Belongings •School-Related Needs
Total				76	

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

¹ Six requests were from the same youth

² 13 requests were from the same youth