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AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

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April 17, 2020

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

FROM: Arlene Barrera *Arlene Barrera*  
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSPERSON SEMI-ANNUAL  
REPORT – JULY 1 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 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 July 1 through December 31, 2019.

### Summary of Activities

The Ombudsperson conducted **outreach visits to 185 youth**, ranging in age from 13 to 19 years old, who resided in 63 Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) and Group Home (GH) sites, which are operated by 31 contracted and non-contracted agencies, including:

- **52 sites/homes** operated by 24 contracted agencies
- **11 sites/homes** operated by 7 non-contracted agencies
- We visited **21** of the 63 sites/homes in coordination with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman

The Ombudsperson received **129 requests for assistance** (requests). This included addressing concerns expressed by youth during outreach visits, via hotline calls, and e-mails. Requests also included receiving or providing information about STRTPs without

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any follow up necessary and redirecting general public requests not specifically related to the Ombudsperson function to the appropriate agencies. For requests made by foster youth outside Los Angeles County, the Ombudsperson referred the requests to the proper jurisdictional agencies to address their concerns. Even though these requests are out of the Ombudsperson's authority, subsequent follow-up was made to youth to ensure they were contacted.

### **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 STRTPs/GHs 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 STRTPs and GHs by DCFS and provides a confidential and informal process to help resolve any issues during their STRTP/GH placement. The Ombudsperson works with child welfare stakeholders, including attending and presenting information to the Special Audit Committee and CCF, as requested.

#### *Outreach Activities*

One of the primary Ombudsperson's responsibilities is to meet with DCFS children in STRTPs/GHs and talk to them about 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 (e.g., agency staff, DCFS Children's Social Workers) and assist in developing solutions.

Ombudsperson staff conducts announced and unannounced site visits encouraging youth to discuss any concerns or to call the hotline if they need assistance. The Ombudsperson provides every County-contracted STRTP/GH agency with posters and we ensure they are properly displayed in the homes when we conduct our visits. The posters include the Ombudsperson's toll-free hotline number and e-mail address.

We prioritize and schedule visits based on concerns reported by youth, information from recent reports, and/or concerns raised by the Special Audit Committee, CCF, or other County child welfare partners. We work with the Probation Ombudsman to coordinate

visits to STRTPs/GHs 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 may conduct multiple visits to some STRTPs/GHs to follow-up on concerns raised during prior visits or via calls to the Ombudsperson hotline.

#### *Requests for Assistance*

The Ombudsperson receives requests during site visits, through a hotline, or via e-mail. 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*

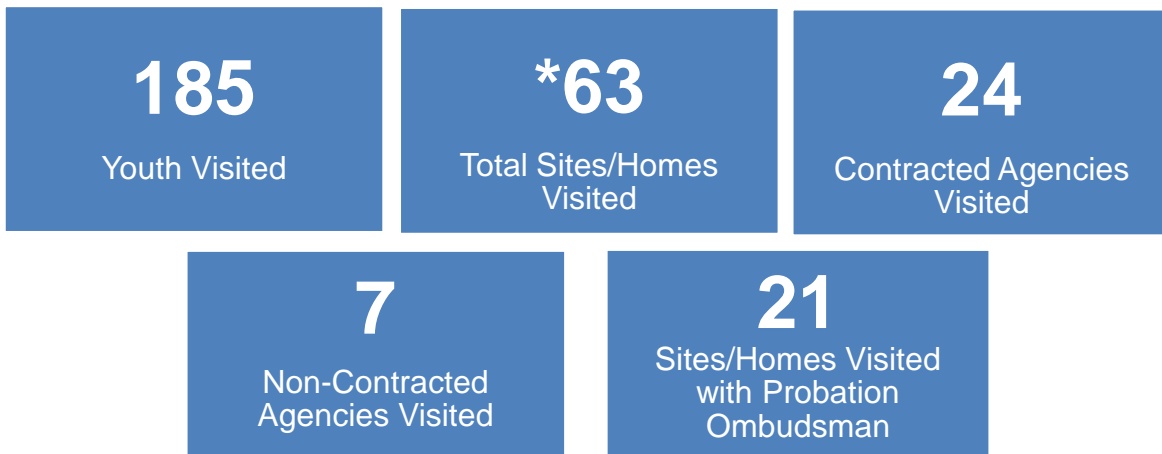
To properly address and resolve requests within the purview of the Ombudsperson, we communicate with and make referrals to DCFS, including but not limited to Children's Social Workers (CSW), Supervising CSWs (SCSW), Child Protection Hotline (CPH), Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD), Contract Administration Division (CAD), Youth Development Services, and the Public Inquiry Unit. In addition, we collaborate with Probation's Ombudsman and Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance (PPQA) Unit to resolve issues. Lastly, we contact non-County entities such as STRTP/GH staff and management, Community Care Licensing (CCL), the California Foster Care Ombudsperson, and if needed, other counties, to ensure youth's concerns are addressed. Most importantly, we follow-up with the youth once we have discussed their request with the appropriate parties. Time frames for follow up varies as the requests may be part of a greater, more complex issue that is not within the Ombudsperson's purview.

If we receive any allegations concerning youth safety (e.g., physical/sexual harm or abuse), we immediately report them to the CPH and/or will contact the CSW. CPH may refer the allegations to Emergency Response CSWs, local law enforcement, CCL, the child's assigned CSW, and/or other agencies they deem appropriate for investigation, based on the information presented to them. We then follow up on the outcome of the allegations reported by us.

### Detailed Activities

#### Outreach

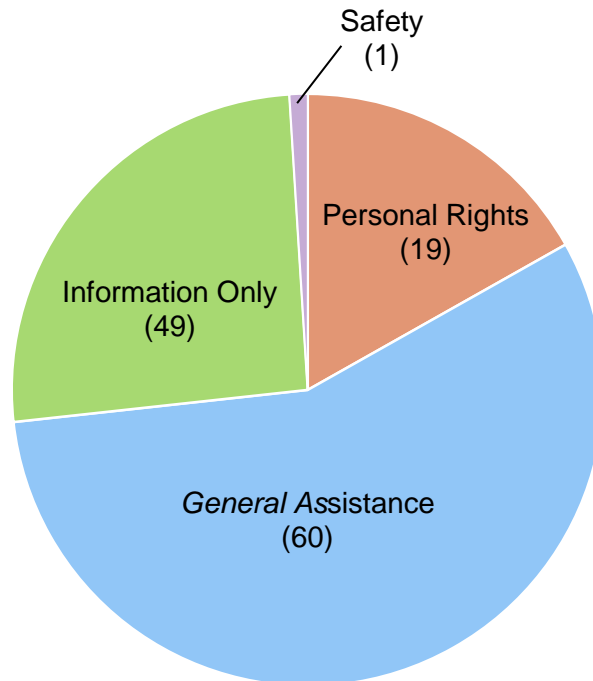
The following is a summary of outreach visits for this reporting period (detailed in Attachment I):



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

## ***Requests for Assistance***

The Ombudsperson received a total of **129 requests for assistance**, consisting of 99 calls, 28 direct requests during outreach visits, and two e-mails.



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

### ***Safety***

During this reporting period, we received one (approximately 1%) request that involved personal safety.

- A youth called the Ombudsperson and stated that she does not feel safe with the other residents in the facility. She stated she was hit on the head by one resident because of her alleged gang affiliation and suffered a concussion. The Ombudsperson immediately contacted the CSW and SCSW who were aware of the situation and scheduled a Child and Family Team meeting. The youth admitted to being at fault in a few altercations with some residents. It was determined that the agency was providing supportive services, strict supervision, and had safety measures in place (e.g., using a code name to protect the youth's identity from other residents). Within 48 hours of the youth's initial call to the Ombudsperson, she was moved to another placement.

### ***Personal Rights***

There were 19 (15%) requests relating to Personal Rights which included: Allowance, Health/Medical, Dental Care, Dietary Needs, Clothing Needs, and Family Contact. For example:

- During an outreach visit, a youth expressed he was saving his clothing allowance so he could purchase more expensive items in the future. However, amid saving money, he changed placements. He stated he did not know what money he was entitled to receive when he changed placements. The Ombudsperson explained to him that any money that he earns or saves, no matter when he moves or where he moves to, is owed to him. The Ombudsperson contacted the prior placing agency to address the issue and coordinated having the funds sent to the youth's CSW. Through the CSW, and follow-up with the youth, he received the \$136.52 that he had saved.

### ***General Assistance***

There were 60 (46%) requests for General Assistance which included: Issues with Policies/Rules, Residential Conflicts with Staff or Peers, Personal Care/Belongings, CSW Contact or Concern(s), Condition of Residence and Amenities, School-Related Needs, Placement Change Status, and Independent Living Transition. For example:

- During outreach visits and through hotline calls, it is common for youth to express their need/want for specific hygiene/hair care products and/or hair care services. They shared that although products and/or services are available/provided to them, they are not always culturally sensitive or do not meet their individual needs. When youth make these requests, the Ombudsperson works with the agency to ensure the youth's requests are met. However, the need to address this issue on a broader scale was apparent. Therefore, the Ombudsperson, along with DCFS' OHCMD and CAD, Probation's Ombudsman and PPQA Unit, the Departments of Mental Health and Public Health, Children's Law Center, and CCL partnered together and determined that offering a training session to STRTPs and Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) would be beneficial to reiterate the need, importance, and requirement of providing appropriate personal care and hair care services to our youth. During this reporting period, the partnering agencies met to strategize and plan a training forum. The training is entitled, "Caring for the Whole Child: Grooming, Hygiene, & Personal Care Services for Children, Youth, and Non-Minor Dependents in STRTPs and FFAs." It was scheduled for April 16, 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be postponed to summer or fall 2020. We will report back in a subsequent Semi-Annual Report on the outcome of the training and explore options to make this training available online or in other accessible formats to maximize the benefit.

### ***Information Only***

There were 49 (38%) requests involving individuals seeking information (34 requests pertaining to the Ombudsperson and 15 requests that were non-Ombudsperson related). In such cases, we noted the information, 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 Agency

### **Acknowledgment**

We thank management and staff from the various STRTP and GH facilities we visited, the Probation Ombudsman, DCFS, and other Child Welfare partners 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](mailto: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  
Ray Leyva, Interim Chief, Probation  
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  
Countywide Communications

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSPERSON  
AGENCIES VISITED FOR OUTREACH**

July 1 through December 31, 2019

Agencies Visited by Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Sites Visited
<b>1st District</b>			<b>21 Sites</b>
Bella Vista Taylor Home	X		•Montebello
Boys Republic/Girls Republic		X	•Los Angeles •Pomona
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center			•Pomona
Eggleston Youth Centers, Inc.		X	•Baldwin Park (2)
Garces Residential Care Services			•Claremont
Heritage			•Phillips Ranch •Valinda •West Covina
Holiday House	X		•El Monte
Hope House	X		•El Monte (3)
Inclusion Specialized Programs	X		•Walnut
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn			•Walnut
Maryvale		X	•Rosemead
Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services		X	•Los Angeles (3)
St. Anne's Maternity Home		X	•Los Angeles
<b>2nd District</b>			<b>15 Sites</b>
Deliann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home		X	•Los Angeles (2)
Dream Home Care, Inc.			•Carson (2) •Torrance
Fred Jefferson Memorial Home for Boys			•Compton (2)
House of Bethesda		X	•Lawndale
Humanistic Foundation, Inc. dba New Concept		X	•Los Angeles
Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services		X	•Carson
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services		X	•Los Angeles
Wayfinder Family Services	X <sup>1</sup>		•Los Angeles (4)
<b>3rd District</b>			<b>2 Sites</b>
Project Six dba The Help Group			•Los Angeles
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network			•North Hills
<b>4th District</b>			<b>3 Sites</b>
Heritage			•Whittier
Orange County Children's Foundation			•San Pedro •Torrance

<sup>1</sup> Three (3) of the four (4) sites are non-contracted.

NC = Non-Contracted Group Home Agency

JO = Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman



Agencies Visited by Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Sites Visited
<b>5th District</b>			<b>12 Sites</b>
Bourne, Inc.			•Altadena (4)
Boys Republic/Girls Republic		X	•Monrovia
Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services		X	•Altadena
Heritage			•La Verne
Victor Treatment Centers		X	•Pasadena (2)
White Family Care Services	X		•San Dimas
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network			•Granada Hills •Valencia
<b>Out of County</b>			<b>10 Sites</b>
Childhelp			•Costa Mesa (3)
Crittenton Services for Children and Families		X	•Fullerton
Boys Republic/Girls Republic		X	•Chino Hills
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope aka Casa Esperanza Treatment Center			•Chino
Fields Comprehensive Youth Services, Inc.			•Rancho Cucamonga •Upland
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn			•Chino
Guiding Our Youth	X		•Simi Valley
<b>Total</b>			<b>63 Sites</b>

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**

July 1 through December 31, 2019

<b>1. Safety</b>	<b>1</b>
Personal Safety	1
<b>2. Personal Rights</b>	<b>19</b>
Health/Medical, Dental Care	8
Dietary Needs	5
Allowance	4
Clothing Needs	1
Family Contact	1
<b>3. General Assistance</b>	<b>60</b>
Issues with Policies/Rules	16
Residential Conflict(s) with Staff	13
Residential Conflict(s) with Peers	7
Personal Care/Belongings	6
Children's Social Worker (CSW) Concern(s)	4
Condition of Residence and Amenities	4
School-Related Needs	4
Placement Change Status	3
CSW Contact	2
Independent Living Transition	1
<b>4. Total - All Types</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>5. Information Only</b>	<b>49</b>
Ombudsperson Related	34
Non-Ombudsperson Related	15
<b>6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsperson</b>	<b>129</b>

*\*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

July 1 through December 31, 2019

Agency Name	Supervisorial District(s) / Out of County	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Bourne, Inc.	5th	24	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Health/Medical, Dental Care (2)</li> <li>•Placement Change Status</li> </ul>
Childhelp	Orange	18	3	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Health/Medical, Dental Care</li> </ul>
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange	77	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers</li> </ul>
Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems	2nd	24	4	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School-Related Needs</li> </ul>
Deliaann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home	2nd	20	3	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Allowance (2)</li> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Dream Home Care, Inc.	2nd, 4th	18	3	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Allowance</li> <li>•Clothing Needs</li> <li>•Personal Care/Belongings</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Field's Comprehensive Youth Services, Inc.	San Bernardino	12	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules (2)</li> </ul>
Five Acres	5th	76	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care	2nd, 5th	48	8	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Health/Medical, Dental Care (2)</li> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules (2)</li> <li>•Dietary Needs</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Fred Jefferson Memorial Home for Boys	2nd	12	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Condition of Residence and Amenities</li> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules</li> </ul>
Future Stars Youth Services	San Bernardino	6	1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2)</li> </ul>
Hathaway-Sycamore Child and Family Services	5th	43	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•CSW Contact</li> </ul>
Haynes Family of Programs	5th	72	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•CSW Concern(s)</li> </ul>
Heritage	1st, 4th, 5th	30	5	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules</li> </ul>
House of Bethesda	2nd	6	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•CSW Concern(s)</li> </ul>
Maryvale	1st	72	1	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules (2)</li> <li>•Personal Care/Belongings (2)</li> <li>•Health/Medical, Dental Care</li> <li>•Independent Living Transition</li> <li>•Personal Safety</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services	1st, 2nd, 3rd	109	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Family Contact</li> </ul>
Penny Lane Centers	3rd, 5th	60	10	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Project Six dba The Help Group	3rd	32	1	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Personal Care/Belongings (2)</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers</li> <li>•School-Related Needs</li> </ul>

Agency Name	Supervisorial District(s) / Out of County	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
St. Anne's Maternity Home	1st	32 (plus 18 beds for children under age 3)	1	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Condition or Residence and Amenities</li> <li>•Dietary Needs</li> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules</li> <li>•Residential Conflict with Peers</li> </ul>
Star View Adolescent Center	4th	44	1	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2)</li> <li>•Dietary Needs</li> <li>•Health/Medical, Dental Care</li> </ul>
Victor Treatment Centers	5th	39	5	17 <sup>1</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules (4)</li> <li>•Condition of Residence and Amenities (2)</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers (2)</li> <li>•School-Related Needs (2)</li> <li>•Allowance</li> <li>•CSW Concern(s)</li> <li>•CSW Contact</li> <li>•Health/Medical, Dental Care</li> <li>•Personal Care/Belongings</li> <li>•Placement Change Status</li> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	2nd	48	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff</li> </ul>
Wayfinder Family Services	2nd	32	1	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dietary Needs (2)</li> <li>•Issues with Policies/Rules (2)</li> <li>•CSW Concern(s)</li> <li>•Placement Change Status</li> </ul>
<b>Total</b>				<b>80<sup>2</sup></b>	

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

<sup>1</sup> Seven (7) requests were from three (3) youth

<sup>2</sup> Does not include 49 Information Only Requests