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April 15, 2021

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair  
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell  
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl  
Supervisor Janice Hahn  
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Arlene Barrera *Arlene Barrera*  
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPs SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT – JULY 1 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2020**

This report summarizes the Los Angeles County (County) Auditor-Controller’s Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPs<sup>1</sup> (Ombudsperson) Program activities for the period of July 1 through December 31, 2020.

**Summary of Activities**

The Ombudsperson conducted self-initiated **outreach visits to 85 youth** ranging in age from 13 to 20 years old. We visited 30 youth in person and 55 via televisits. Seventy-four (74) youth were from STRTPs, and 11 were from group homes (GHs). In total, this comprised outreach to 38 STRTP and Group Home (GH) sites/homes operated by 16 agencies, including:

- **31 sites/homes** operated by 12 STRTPs<sup>2</sup>
- **7 sites/homes** operated by 4 GHs

<sup>1</sup> Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs.

<sup>2</sup> Among approximately 100 sites/homes operated by 34 STRTP agencies

- We visited/televisted **6** of the 12 STRTP agencies in coordination with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman.

The Ombudsperson received **71 requests for assistance** (requests) via the youth helpline (i.e. calls and e-mails), and during outreach visits (i.e. in-person and telecasts). Requests also included public inquiries on a variety of topics. Inquiries not within the subject matter jurisdiction or expertise of the Ombudsperson function were referred to an appropriate agency for response.

### **Background**

In October 1998, the Board of Supervisors established the Office of the Children's Group Home Ombudsman at the recommendation of the Civil Grand Jury and Commission for Children and Families, to provide advocacy and a confidential, independent, and informal process to help youth under Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) oversight resolve issues while in GH placement. To ensure independence from DCFS as the placing agency the Ombudsperson, since its inception, resides in the Department of Auditor-Controller.

In January 2017, the State of California (State) implemented the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) to make changes to the State's child welfare system. Under CCR, GHs have been transitioning to STRTPs to meet higher standards of care in a short period of time.

To align the Ombudsman with the STRTP model, in June 2020 the GH Ombudsman Program was renamed to the Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPs to clearly identify the setting where target youth reside, as well as to incorporate gender neutrality. This name change did not impact the underlying program mission or function. All hard-copy informational material and the webpage have been updated accordingly.

### *Outreach Activities*

A primary Ombudsperson responsibility is to meet with DCFS children in STRTPs/GHs, talk to them about their personal rights, and provide them the opportunity to share concerns or unmet needs. Visits are planned so that each STRTP/GH site is visited at least every six to nine months. Site visits are typically scheduled, though prior to the COVID-19 pandemic could also be unannounced. We prioritize and schedule visits based on concerns reported by youth through the helpline, and/or concerns raised by the Special Audit Committee or other County child welfare partners. We provide DCFS youth and staff with information about the Ombudsperson function as well as the Foster Youth Bill of Rights (FYBoR). When youth voice a concern, we work with the appropriate individuals (e.g., agency staff, DCFS Children's Social Workers [CSW]) who may assist in developing solutions.

At the onset of the Safer at Home orders issued by health authorities in March 2020, the Ombudsperson shifted the way visits are conducted to a social distancing approach, which we have continued through this reporting period. Our visit formats included: in-person while outdoors with masks on and physically distanced, via telephone, via video conference through the County's Microsoft Teams platform, and through e-mail communication. Regardless of the meeting format, we plan our visits to cover similar topics/areas, including: COVID-19 safety measures, personal rights, distance learning, activities, family connections, medical/therapy appointments, CSW/Probation Officer visits, and access to technology (e.g. cell phones, Internet, computers/laptops).

Prior to the pandemic, we also conducted in-person visits to DCFS youth placed in non-County contracted GHs from a list provided by DCFS. DCFS relies on these GHs for hard-to-place youth who have special needs (e.g., a disability) or when other County-contracted placement options have been exhausted. These youth tend to be non-verbal or have limited communication skills. These non-County contracted GHs are approved as service providers by the Regional Centers, which are community-based, non-profit agencies that contract with the California Department of Developmental Services to provide or coordinate services and support for individuals with developmental disabilities. For these youth, we adjusted and reached out to their respective CSWs and Regional Center Workers (RCW) via a joint e-mail. We inquired about their contact and client's well-being and if they had any concerns. This joint electronic communication provided an opportunity of additional information sharing with the CSW and RCW.

### *Requests for Assistance*

The Ombudsperson receives requests through a helpline, e-mail, in-person site visits, and televisits. 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 all types of outreach visits, and accordingly, presumes all requests to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.

When the Safer at Home Order began, the Ombudsperson extended the helpline hours to include weekends and longer hours, 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily, to provide more accessibility to youth as some of their resources may not have been available. Operating seven days a week aligned with the accessibility offered by California's Office of the Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO). At the end of July 2020, the Ombudsperson resumed its normal helpline hours, 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, as calls received during extended hours were minimal. This also aligned with the conclusion of the OFCO's extended hours.

### *Resolution of Requests*

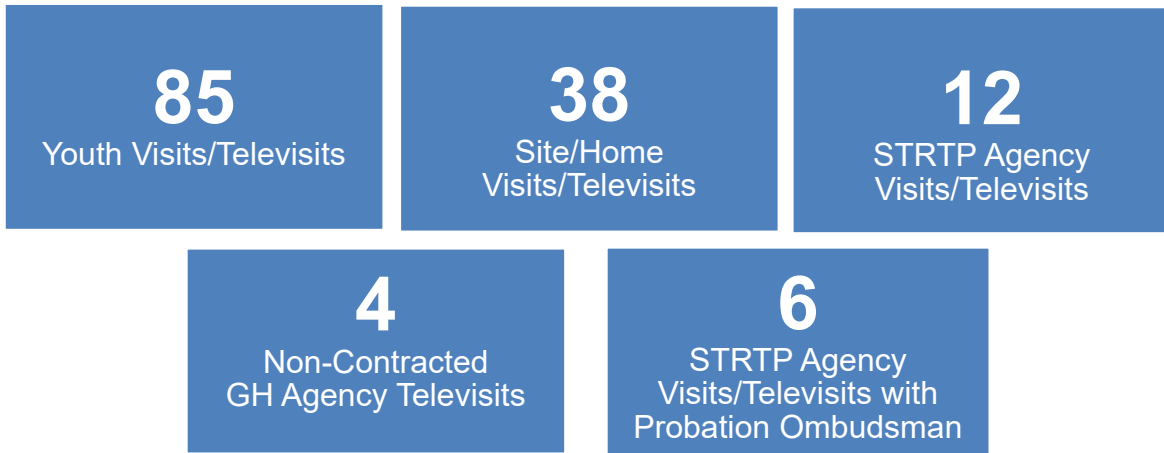
To properly address and resolve requests within the purview of the Ombudsperson, we communicate with and make referrals to DCFS, including but not limited to, CSWs, Supervising CSWs, Child Protection Hotline (CPH), Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Contracts Administration Division, Youth Development Services, and the Public Inquiry Unit. In addition, we collaborate with Probation's Ombudsman and Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance Unit to resolve issues. Lastly, we contact non-County entities such as STRTP/GH staff and management, Community Care Licensing (CCL), the OFCO, 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.

### **Detailed Activities**

#### ***Outreach***

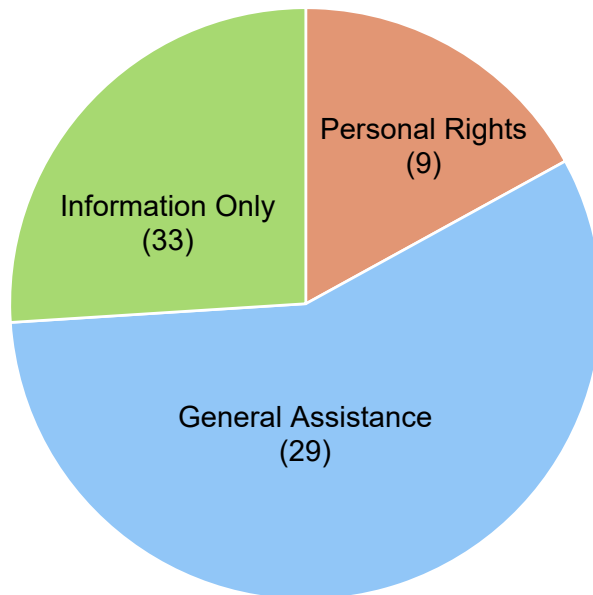
The following is a summary of outreach visits, both in-person and televisits, for this reporting period (detailed in Attachment I). The pandemic continues to have a significant impact on our ability to conduct in-person visits as we are not able to visit facilities unannounced, and agencies have had homes under quarantine due to staff and youth being exposed to or contracting COVID-19. In addition, televisit opportunities were limited as youth were fatigued with online schooling and other virtual commitments (e.g. family visits, case plan meetings, medical and therapeutic appointments).

To help mitigate these impacts, we prepared and planned for distribution of our new informational materials in the next reporting period. This includes providing each DCFS youth in the STRTPs with an informational letter, our Ombudsperson pamphlet, pen, and business card, and a copy of the new FYBoR. We will also provide agencies with a supply of our updated posters. In addition, we will speak with Agency staff and youth whenever possible during those delivery visits. These materials are intended to ensure all placed youth are aware of the Ombudsperson function and how to access it, and to empower youth to advocate for themselves by leveraging the recently updated FYBoR which was virtually launched statewide on November 17, 2020 (link to website for DCFS youth: [FYBoR](#)). The Ombudsperson was a work group member and actively participated in developing the updated FYBoR.



**Requests for Assistance**

The Ombudsperson received a total of **71 requests for assistance**, consisting of 65 calls, 3 direct requests during outreach visits/televisits, and 3 e-mails.



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

### ***Safety***

During this reporting period, there were no requests that involved personal safety concerns in the STRTPs.

### ***Personal Rights***

There were 9 (13%) requests relating to Personal Rights which included: Dietary Needs, Health/Medical, Dental Care, Allowance, and School Enrollment. For example:

- One youth called because she had not received her weekly allowance. The Ombudsperson contacted the agency to follow up. The agency stated that due to the pandemic there was an interruption in the timely delivery of allowance and residents would receive allowance by the end of that week. They were cognizant that they needed to make administrative adjustments to ensure delays would not occur in the future. A follow-up call was made to the youth to keep her apprised of the communication with the agency. Within a couple of days, the youth received her allowance, and no subsequent calls were received regarding this issue.

### ***General Assistance***

There were 29 (41%) requests for General Assistance which included: Issues with Policies/Rules, Residential Conflicts with Staff or Peers, CSW Contact, Personal Care/Belongings, Condition of Residence and Amenities, Independent Living Transition, Placement Change Status, and School-Related Needs. For example:

- During this period, the Ombudsperson received several calls from youth who expressed frustration and fatigue with the pandemic and limitations on their traditional activities. Several youth expressed during visits that gaming is one activity they can enjoy by themselves or with other residents while maintaining required social distancing, and that video games have helped them from being bored.

One youth complained that he was not allowed to use the video game system because he refused to go to the dentist earlier that day, and that this occurred while he was on winter break and had no schoolwork to keep him busy. The Ombudsperson spoke with staff who indicated his refusal was at the last minute and was disruptive. However, the staff also said the caller is usually compliant and his refusal to go to the dentist appeared to have been influenced by an older resident. The Ombudsperson suggested a compromise of limited gaming time instead of no gaming time as an alternate solution. Agency staff agreed and allowed the youth some

gaming time. This example is reflective of the willingness and need for agencies to work with youth to provide consideration and flexibility during the Safer at Home Order.

### ***Information Only***

There were 33 (46%) requests involving individuals seeking information (17 requests pertaining to the Ombudsperson and 16 requests that were non-Ombudsperson related). In such cases, we documented the requests, provided an answer, or directed the requester to an appropriate party to address their inquiry. We noted that several of the non-Ombudsperson calls were from DCFS youth who were familiar with the Ombudsperson from prior placement in a group home or STRTP, but who had since moved to a new placement (e.g., foster home, transitional housing, Supervised Independent Living.) These youth contacted the helpline for general assistance because the Ombudsperson is a known resource. In addition, a few calls related to concerns with a temporary shelter care facility and were reported to the CPH and CCL accordingly. Lastly, we received some requests from foster youth located outside Los Angeles County. We followed up on each youth request to ensure youth were connected to the appropriate entity to address their questions/concerns and received the assistance they needed.

## ***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 in-person and via televisits, 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, Ombudsperson, at (213) 253-0117 or via e-mail at [mday@auditor.lacounty.gov](mailto:mday@auditor.lacounty.gov).

AB:OV:PH:RGC:AMS:MD

Attachments

c: Fesia A. Davenport, Chief Executive Officer  
Celia Zavala, Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Bobby D. Cagle, Director, DCFS  
Honorable Michael Nash, Executive Director, Office of Child Protection  
Dr. Adolfo Gonzales, Chief Probation Officer  
Alain J. Datcher, Executive Director, Youth Commission  
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 OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPS  
AGENCIES VISITED FOR OUTREACH  
July 1 through December 31, 2020

IN-PERSON Visits by Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Sites Visited
<b>1st District</b>			<b>2</b>
San Gabriel Children's Center		X	•Azusa (2)
<b>2nd District</b>			<b>1</b>
Virtuous Woman		X	•Los Angeles
<b>3rd District</b>			<b>1</b>
Project Six dba The Help Group			•Van Nuys
<b>4th District</b>			<b>3</b>
Dream Home Care, Inc.			•Carson (2) •Torrance (1)
<b>Out of County (Orange County)</b>			<b>2</b>
Childhelp			•Costa Mesa (2)
		<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>9</b>
TELEVISITS by Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Site Locations
<b>1st District</b>			<b>4</b>
Heritage <sup>1</sup>			•Phillips Ranch •Valinda •West Covina
Hope House <sup>2</sup>	X		•El Monte
<b>2nd District</b>			<b>9</b>
Deliann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home <sup>1</sup>		X	•Los Angeles (3)
I am Safe, Inc. <sup>2</sup>	X		•Los Angeles (2)
Mindful Growth <sup>1</sup>			•Los Angeles
Wayfinder Family Sevices <sup>2</sup>	X		•Los Angeles (3)
<b>3rd District</b>			<b>7</b>
Penny Lane Centers <sup>1</sup>		X	•Arleta (1) •North Hills (5) •Northridge (1)
<b>4th District</b>			<b>1</b>
Heritage <sup>1</sup>			•Whittier
<b>5th District</b>			<b>8</b>
Five Acres (Main Facility) <sup>3</sup>			•Pasadena
Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services <sup>3</sup>		X	•Altadena
Heritage <sup>1</sup>			•La Verne
Penny Lane Centers <sup>1</sup>		X	•Granada Hills
Victor Treatment Centers <sup>1</sup>		X	•Pasadena (2) •South Pasadena (1)
White Family Home <sup>2</sup>	X		•San Dimas
		<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>29</b>
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>

NC = Non-Contracted Group Home Agency/Regional Center Providers

JO = Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman

<sup>1</sup> Televisit(s) via telephone call

<sup>2</sup> Televisit(s) via e-mail with Children's Social Worker and Regional Center Worker

<sup>3</sup> Televisit(s) via Teams

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPS  
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED\*  
BY TYPE**

July 1 through December 31, 2020

<b>1. Safety</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2. Personal Rights</b>	<b>9</b>
Dietary Needs	4
Health/Medical, Dental Care	3
Allowance	1
School Enrollment	1
<b>3. General Assistance</b>	<b>29</b>
Issues with Policies/Rules	8
Residential Conflict(s) with Staff	5
Children's Social Worker Contact	4
Residential Conflict(s) with Peers	3
Personal Care/Belongings	3
Condition of Residence and Amenities	2
Independent Living Transition	2
Placement Change Status	1
School-Related Needs	1
<b>4. Total - All Types</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>5. Information Only</b>	<b>33</b>
Ombudsperson Related	17
Non-Ombudsperson Related	16
<b>6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsperson</b>	<b>71</b>

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

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY OMBUDSPERSON FOR YOUTH IN STRTPS**  
**REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED\***  
**BY AGENCY**

July 1 through December 31, 2020

Agency Name	Supervisorial District(s) / Out of County	Total Number of Beds <sup>1</sup>	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Bourne, Inc.	5th	24	4	2	•Condition of Residence and Amenities •Placement Change Status
Childhelp, Inc.	Orange County, Riverside County	102	4	1	•Issues with Policies/Rules
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange County	77	1	2	•Dietary Needs •Independent Living Transition
Deliaann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home	2nd	20	3	2	•Children's Social Worker Contact •School Enrollment
Dream Home Care, Inc.	4th	18	3	4	•Dietary Needs •Personal Care/Belongings •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff •School-Related Needs
Five Acres	5th	76	2	1	•Children's Social Worker Contact
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care	2nd, 4th, 5th	48	8	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Hathaway Sycamores Child & Family Services	5th	43	1	1	•Health/Medical, Dental Care
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc. dba New Dawn	1st, San Bernardino County	12	2	1	•Issues with Policies/Rules
McKinley Children's Center/ McKinley Boys Home	5th	28	1	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Optimist Boys Home and Ranch	1st, 2nd, 3rd	75	5	1	•Issues with Policies/Rules
Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc.	4th, Orange County	24	4	2	•Dietary Needs •Personal Care/Belongings
San Gabriel Children's Center, Inc.	1st	12	2	3	•Residential Conflict(s) with Peers (3)
St. Anne's Maternity Home	1st	32 (plus 18 beds for children under age 3)	1	4	•Issues with Policies/Rules (2) •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Independent Living Transition
Trinity Youth Services <sup>2</sup>	1st, San Bernardino County	135	3	1	•Dietary Needs
Victor Treatment Centers	5th	39	5	6 <sup>3</sup>	•Allowance •Children's Social Worker Contact •Condition of Residence and Amenities •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Personal Care/Belongings •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Virtuous Woman	2nd	6	1	2	•Children's Social Worker Contact •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services <sup>4</sup>	2nd	48	2	2	•Issues with Policies/Rules (2)
Wayfinder Family Services	2nd	28	1	1	•Issues with Policies/Rules
<b>Total</b>				<b>38<sup>5</sup></b>	

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

<sup>1</sup> Licensed capacity; active bed count varies

<sup>2</sup> Includes one (1) Probation only STRTP

<sup>3</sup> Four (4) requests were from two (2) youth

<sup>4</sup> Includes Community Treatment Facility

<sup>5</sup> Does not include 33 Information Only Requests