



**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
ACTING AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

September 9, 2014

TO: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: John Naimo *Resigned Campbell for*
Acting Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2014**

This memorandum is to provide you with information about the Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2014.

Background

The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH) by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The Ombudsman provides a confidential and informal process to resolve concerns that arise from children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to issues received through a toll-free hotline, via e-mail, and through periodic site visits. The hotline number and e-mail address are on the Ombudsman poster, which is required to be displayed in every County-contracted GH. In addition, during site visits children are encouraged to call the hotline if they need assistance resolving GH problems.

Upon receiving a complaint, the Ombudsman will discuss the issue with the resident or caller, and determine an appropriate course of action. The Ombudsman may contact any party, including DCFS personnel, GH providers, or others, as needed, to gather additional information and suggest a reasonable and fair solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

According to the DCFS Child Welfare Services – June 2014 Fact Sheet (located at <http://www.lacdcfs.org/aboutus/factsheets.html>) there are approximately 1,111 Los Angeles County children living in 180 GHs located within and outside the County.

Summary of Hotline Calls

Children are encouraged to call the Ombudsman hotline if they need assistance resolving GH problems. During this reporting period, we received a total of 103 calls. For comparison, the Ombudsman hotline received 94 and 85 calls, respectively, in the prior two reporting periods.

Below is a summary of hotline calls:

Personal Rights' Concerns	Number of Calls
Allowance	3
Clothing	2
Food	5
Living Conditions	1
Respect	9
School/Community/Religious Services	4
Work/Job Skills	1
Subtotal	25
Personal Concerns	
Discipline	1
Discrimination	1
Emotional Issues	1
Intimidation	1
Physical Harm (See example below)	4
Relationship	1
Subtotal	9
"Other" Concerns	
Childcare	1
Community Pass	1
Hygiene	2
Issues with/Need to Contact Social Worker	9
Licensing	1
Outings	1
Peer Concerns	2
Placement	2
Visits	1
Subtotal	20
All Concerns Above – Total	54
GH-Related General Information Calls – Total	23
Non-GH Related General Information Calls – Total	26
Total Calls	103

A total of 54 calls specific to the Ombudsman's role, including for personal rights' concerns, personal concerns, and "other" concerns were resolved during this reporting period. In order to resolve some of the calls/issues outside the purview of the Ombudsman, various communications and referrals were made to DCFS' Children's Social Workers, Child Protection Hotline, Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Public Inquiry, and Youth Development Ombudsman. Furthermore, the Ombudsman frequently coordinates with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, State Community Care Licensing, GH staff/management, and occasionally other counties to ensure the caller's concerns are fully addressed, and that proper agencies are notified.

The Ombudsman hotline also sometimes receives allegations of physical harm. The following example pertains to an allegation received during this reporting period from a Probation youth residing in a GH that houses both Probation and DCFS children. This example is provided to detail the coordination between the Ombudsman and various agencies in addressing such reports. The Probation youth alleged he was punched in the face (physical harm) while competing with other residents to answer the telephone. The youth also alleged that a GH staff person would not let him eat anything, and that problems with food quality (stale) and quantity (not enough food) were typical.

Probation-placed youth are outside the Ombudsman's scope, and are served by the Probation Ombudsman. However, because the youth called the Ombudsman Hotline, we immediately contacted the DCFS Child Protection Hotline to cross-report the allegation. In response, DCFS dispatched an emergency worker to the GH. In addition, the Ombudsman notified the Probation Ombudsman and the DCFS Out-of-Home Care Management Division. When the investigation was completed, Probation notified the Ombudsman that the allegation of physical harm was unfounded. However, due to other issues with this GH, the County terminated the contract and all Probation and DCFS youth were moved to other placements.

For the above-mentioned 49 calls seeking general information (23 GH and 26 non-GH related), the Ombudsman was able to provide an answer or direct the caller to the appropriate party.

During this reporting period, the calls received pertained to the following GHs:

Group Home	Supervisorial District / Out of County	Number of Calls
B & I	1	1
Maryvale	1	5
Moore's Cottage – Pomona	1	6
Trinity Youth Services	1 San Bernardino County	3

Group Home	Supervisorial District / Out of County	Number of Calls
Delilu Achievement Home	2	1
Fred Jefferson Memorial Home	2	2
Children Are Our Future	3 5	3
Children's Homes of Southern California	3	2
Penny Lane	3 5	4
Vista Del Mar	3	1
Bayfront Youth and Family Services	4	1
Dream Home Care	4	1
Heritage – Whittier	4	1
Careprovider Children and Family Services	5	2
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	5	8
Fleming & Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent - Lancaster	5	2
Murrell's Farm Boys Home	5	1
Rosemary Children's Services	5	4
Florence Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange County	1
Mary's Shelter Dependent Program	Orange County	2
Childhelp USA – Beaumont	Riverside County	2
Aiming High Treatment Centers	San Bernardino County	1
	TOTAL	54

The following are examples of hotline calls received and resolved within the purview of the Ombudsman:

- A youth stated she was not comfortable with her son staying with one of the daycare staff at the GH. Allegedly, her son only cries with this staff and not with any others. She felt her rights were violated. The Ombudsman contacted the Program Director (Director) to explain the situation. The Director met with the staff, and moved the staff who was the subject of concern to the evening shift, so that she would no longer be interacting with the toddler. The resident was satisfied with the resolution, and reported that she now feels comfortable with her toddler's caretaker.
- A youth stated that, although he has computer access at the GH, he does not have his own e-mail account. He is unable to submit online job applications without an e-mail address. When the Ombudsman spoke with the GH Unit Director (Director) regarding an e-mail account for the youth, the Director informed the Ombudsman that there is a procedure in place. The residents apply for a job with the GH e-mail address, and the reply e-mails are forwarded to the resident through the GH. However, in this particular incident, the youth wanted to use his own device/own e-mail address which is not allowed for safety reasons. After speaking with both the youth and the Director, the Ombudsman determined there was a lack of communication. The discussion and a subsequent visit to the GH opened lines of communication between the Director and the resident, and the youth was satisfied and felt comfortable to approach the Director for future needs.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and GH staff with information about the Ombudsman function. DCFS GH monitoring reports are reviewed, and visits are prioritized based on concerns reported by residents or information obtained from the Sybil Brand Commission, Commission for Children and Families, and DCFS Special Audit Committee meetings. In addition, calls received from GH residents may trigger additional announced or unannounced visits.

During this reporting period, the Ombudsman visited 31 GHs, including some providers with multiple sites. The Ombudsman provided 197 DCFS-placed children with information about available services through verbal presentations and flyers/brochures. During these visits, GH residents had the opportunity to ask questions and share their concerns. If needed, the Ombudsman looked into their issues, and followed up with the residents.

The following GHs were visited:

Group Home	Number of Sites	Site Visit Location(s)	Supervisory District(s) / Out of County
Bayfront Youth and Family Services	1	Long Beach	4
Bourne	2	Altadena (2)	5
Boys Town California, Inc.	1	Trabuco	Orange County
Casa Editha Foundation Inc. dba Ava Lyn's	1	Pasadena	5
Childhelp USA	4	Beaumont (1), Costa Mesa (3)	Riverside County, Orange County
Cunningham's	1	Los Angeles	2
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	1	La Verne	5
Delilu Achievement Home	1	Los Angeles	2
Diakonia	3	Rialto (3)	San Bernardino County
Eggleston Youth Center	3	Baldwin Park (3)	1
Five Acres	1	Altadena	5
Florence Crittenton Services for Children and Families	1	Fullerton	Orange County
Junior Blind of America	1	Los Angeles	2
Lifecircle Unlimited, Inc. dba Lifecircle	1	Pacoima	3
Little People's World	4	Compton (2), Banning (1), Cherry Valley (1)	2, Riverside County
Maryvale	1	Rosemead	1
Orange County Children's Foundation	1	Placentia	Orange County
Paragon Center	1	Placentia	Orange County
Sand Hill	1	Los Angeles	2
Vista Del Mar	1	Los Angeles	3
TOTAL	31		

Conclusion

During the next reporting period, GH visits will continue. Also, joint outreach visits are being scheduled with the Probation Ombudsman at GHs with both Probation and DCFS youth. This increases awareness and clarity of GH resources for both populations. In addition, six new Ombudsman poster designs were created by the Chief Executive

Office's Graphic Arts Section, and are currently in production. Lastly, we purchased pocket-size flashlights and calculators with the Ombudsman hotline phone number imprinted on them. These items will be provided to DCFS GH residents when outreach visits are conducted to encourage ongoing communication with placed youth, and to ensure that they have ready access to the Ombudsman's contact information when needed. These enhancements will continue to promote the Ombudsman Program and raise awareness of resources available to DCFS youth.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Children's Group Home Ombudsman, at (213) 893-0551 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

JN:RGC:GZ:LTM:md

c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Philip L. Browning, Director, DCFS
Jerry E. Powers, Chief Probation Officer
Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Commission for Children and Families
Out-of-Home Care Management Division, DCFS
Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance, Probation
Probation Ombudsman
Public Information Office
Sybil Brand Commission