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April 5, 2022

TO: Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell, Chair
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
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, 2021**

This report summarizes the Los Angeles County (County) Auditor-Controller's Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPs¹ (Ombudsperson) Program activities for the period of July 1 through December 31, 2021.

Summary of Activities

The Ombudsperson conducted in-person **outreach visits to 215 youth** ranging in age from 9 to 19 years old. We visited 211 youth residing in STRTPs and 4 in group homes (GHs). In total, this comprised outreach to 70 STRTP and Group Home (GH) sites/homes operated by 34 agencies, including:

- **64 sites/homes** operated by 30 STRTPs²
- **6 sites/homes** operated by 4 GHs
- We visited **5** of the 30 STRTP agencies in coordination with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman.

¹ Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs.

² Among approximately 81 sites/homes operated by 32 STRTP agencies including two Community Treatment Facilities.

The Ombudsperson received **212 requests for assistance** (requests) via the helpline (i.e., calls and e-mails), and during in-person outreach visits. During this reporting period, we noted a significant shift in how we received requests. The majority were from in-person visits, and many youth (49 out of the 95 who needed assistance during in-person visits) had multiple requests. Separately, requests during this period 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 (now known as the Ombudsperson for Youth in STRTPs) at the recommendation of the 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.

Youth Outreach

A primary Ombudsperson responsibility is to meet with DCFS youth in STRTPs and non-contracted GHs, talk to them about their 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 once every six months. Site visits are typically scheduled but may also be unannounced. We provide DCFS youth and STRTP staff with information and materials 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 [CSWs], Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and school personnel, state, and other child welfare partners) who can assist in developing solutions.

During this reporting period the Ombudsperson conducted all in-person visits while adhering to public health guidelines. For sites subject to quarantine orders or which otherwise limited in-person visits, or when youth were unable to meet, we still traveled to the sites and dropped off our materials and copies of the FYBOR for the youth.

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 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. The 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 visits, we spoke to those who could communicate, and left materials for all DCFS youth.

Additional Outreach

During this reporting period, the Ombudsperson extended its outreach to enhance Program awareness beyond the youth, and to include County and other child welfare partners. During the resolution of requests process (described below), the Ombudsperson communicates with a variety of staff/agencies to address youth concerns. Because DCFS CSWs and Supervising CSWs (SCSW) are essential partners to help resolve some concerns, the Ombudsperson conducted virtual outreach/presentations to all 20 DCFS Regional Offices. We were given time during each office's General Staff Meeting to share the history and function of our office, how we assist youth placed in STRTPs, ways we connect and communicate with youth, information about the FYBOR, and our contact information as a resource. Through these meetings we reached approximately 2,150 attendees in total. After our presentations, several CSWs contacted us for assistance with their youth placed in STRTPs. Overall, we received positive feedback and with the virtual platform, we can schedule annual presentations to all Regional Offices or upon request.

Further, we met with the following child welfare partners to share information about our Program:

- Alliance for Children's Rights
- Board of Supervisors' Children's Deputies
- California Office of Foster Care Ombudsperson (OFCO)
- Children's Law Center
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Los Angeles
- DCFS Board and Commission Relations/Public Inquiry Unit
- DCFS Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Unit
- DCFS Policy Institute
- LACOE
- Youth Commission

These outreach opportunities allowed us to share, learn, and discuss ways to collaborate to best serve and support foster youth in STRTPs. For example, during our meeting with the DCFS Policy Institute we discussed the need to ensure policies reflect the FYBOR and include the requirement for CSWs to discuss the FYBOR with their youth at the time of placement, replacement, and every six months at a developmentally appropriate level. We subsequently worked with DCFS to update the Placement Responsibilities Policy and the revised version now provides clear instructions to CSWs to review the FYBOR as described above.

Requests for Assistance

The Ombudsperson receives requests through a helpline, e-mail, and in-person site visits. 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.

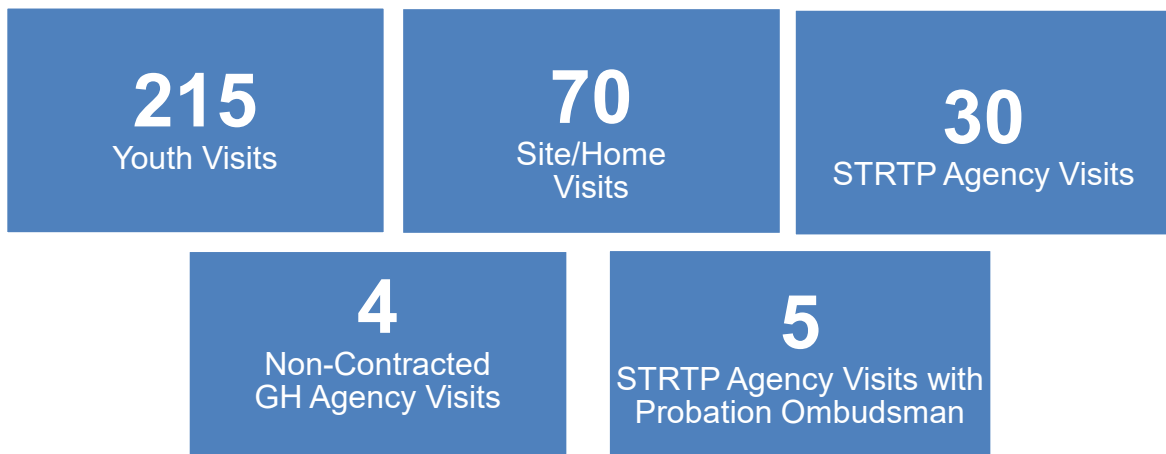
Resolution of Requests

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 CSWs, SCSWs, the Child Protection Hotline (CPH), Out-of-Home Care Management Division (OHCMD), Contracts 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. Finally, we may contact attorneys, CASAs, and entities such as STRTP/GH staff and management, Community Care Licensing (CCL), OFCO, school personnel, LACOE, 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 vary as the requests may be part of a larger or more complex issue that is not wholly within the Ombudsperson's purview, but all requests regardless of the duration to resolve them receive follow-up.

Detailed Activities

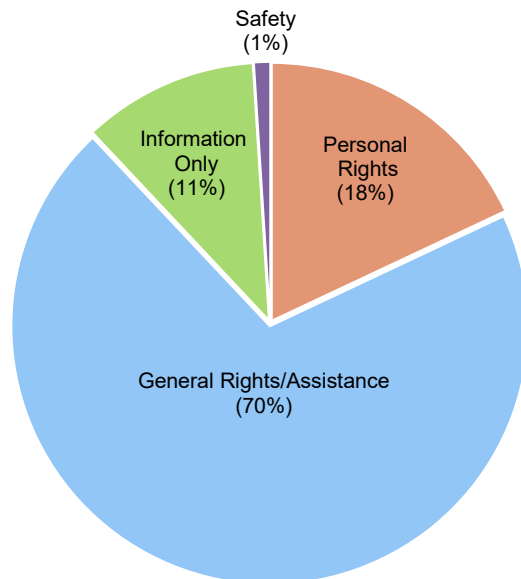
Outreach

The following is a summary of youth outreach visits to STRTPs for this reporting period (detailed in Attachment I).



Requests for Assistance

The Ombudsperson received a total of **212 requests for assistance**, consisting of: 15 e-mails, 34 calls, 163 direct requests during in-person outreach visits. As indicated, 49 of the 95 youth who made requests wanted assistance in more than one area, which resulted in the 163 total requests.



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

Safety

During this reporting period, there were three (1%) requests that involved safety concerns.

During an outreach visit, a youth shared that at her prior placement her caregiver was angry with her for not doing her homework and hit her on the arm with a belt. This youth's current STRTP placement indicated that this incident was already reported and investigated. However, as a mandated reporter, the Ombudsperson reported it to the CPH, which confirmed receiving the prior report.

During a visit to another site, a youth reported that approximately two weeks earlier a staff hit him with a closed hand. The Ombudsperson also reported this incident to the CPH. Immediately thereafter, the staff was removed from working with the youth and later resigned from the agency. The Ombudsperson followed up with the youth to check on their well-being, and they shared they were doing better.

We received an e-mail from a former employee of an agency alleging abuse and administrative improprieties. The alleged misconduct occurred a few years prior to the date of the report. We contacted the CPH and were informed that the allegations had already been reported to and addressed by CCL and DCFS' OHCMD, as well as the Emergency Response Command Post.

Personal Rights

There were 37 (18%) requests relating to Personal Rights which included: Family/Social Contact, Medical/Health, Dental Care, Allowance (Clothing/Weekly), Clothing Needs, School Enrollment, Dietary Needs, and Religious Activities. For example:

During an outreach visit, a youth expressed the need for an emotional support animal. The youth consulted with a clinician in her prior placement about requesting a therapy animal, and she needed to obtain a letter of support to proceed with the process. However, in her current STRTP placement, she was told she could not have an emotional support animal. As we began to research policies concerning support animals, the agency linked the youth with a local animal rescue where she could volunteer once or twice per month to feed and walk the dogs and spend time with them. We consulted with the State OFCO who recently handled a similar request and provided the information necessary to support that youth in STRTPs can have emotional support animals.

In the interim, the youth moved to a resource home that had a dog, which she felt met her needs. Even though she was no longer placed in the STRTP, we followed up with her to share the information that moving forward she could advocate for an emotional support animal in other placement settings if she had the need documented. She was turning 18 shortly afterward and hoped to be accepted into a Transitional Housing Placement Program – Non-Minor Dependent. At that time, she planned to pursue getting an emotional support animal. We provided her with Department of Animal Care and Control and Pasadena Humane Society event flyers that occasionally waived adoption fees. Lastly, we followed up with the STRTP to ensure they were informed that youth can have emotional support animals should all the necessary documentation be provided.

General Rights/Assistance

There were 148 (70%) requests for General Rights/Assistance which included: Independent Living Transition, Issues with Policies/Rules, any CSW concerns, Residential Conflicts with Staff and Peers, Placement Change Status, Personal Care/Belongings, Condition of Residence and Amenities, School-Related Needs and Attorney Contact/Concern. For example:

During this reporting period, there was an increase in requests relating to Independent Living Transition. As part of our outreach strategy, we created an open dialogue about the FYBOR (which apply to DCFS involved youth up to age 21), and the rights around independent living, preparing for adulthood, and money management, all of which are of great interest to youth in STRTPs. We encouraged youth-led conversations as a rapport building tool, and we found that they wanted to learn more about these topics which resulted in more requests for assistance and ultimately identified needs in other areas.

Within the category of Independent Living Transition, there were a variety of requests including: opening a bank account, information about transitional housing, jobs and work programs, funding for senior year school expenses, linkage to DCFS' Independent Living Program (ILP) and/or ILP Coordinators.

Pursuant to California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 391 and in support of Board of Supervisors' motions from August 10, 2021 and January 11, 2022, during this semi-annual period, we began incorporating into our visits with transition age youth routine inquiries about whether they have copies of their vital documents such as birth certificates and Social Security cards. These inquiries led to requests from several youth for assistance obtaining their documents.

These requests highlight the ongoing need to ensure foster youth have access to identifying documentation and vital records to support their transition from the dependency system. We will continue to work with youth and DCFS to ensure that rights relating to this are upheld.

Information Only

There were 24 (11%) requests involving individuals seeking information (9 requests pertaining to the Ombudsperson and 15 requests that were non-Ombudsperson related). For all these requests, we documented the requests, provided an answer, or directed the requester to an appropriate party to address their inquiry.

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 agencies 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, Ombudsperson, at (213) 253-0117 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

AB:OV:RGC:AMS:MD

Attachments

c: Fesia A. Davenport, Chief Executive Officer
Celia Zavala, Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Brandon Nichols, Interim 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
Board and Commission Relations/Public Inquiry, DCFS
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, 2021

Visits by Supervisorial District	NC	JO	Number of Site Locations Visited
1st District			14
Eggleston Youth Center		X	•Baldwin Park (2) ¹ •Pomona
Garces Residential Care			•Claremont
Heritage			•Phillips Ranch •Valinda •West Covina
Hope House	X		•El Monte (3)
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn			•Walnut
San Gabriel Childen's Center			•Azusa (2)
St. Anne's Family Services		X	•Los Angeles
2nd District			20
Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems		X	•Los Angeles (4)
Deliann-Lucile Corporation dba Delilu Achievement Home		X	•Los Angeles (3)
Dream Home Care, Inc.			•Carson (2) ²
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care			•Carson ² •Gardena •Hawthorne
Fred Jefferson Memorial Homes for Boys			•Compton (2)
Humanistic Foundation, Inc. dba New Concept			•Los Angeles
Mindful Growth Foundation			•Los Angeles (2)
Virtuous Woman, Inc./Project Destiny Home of Hope			•Los Angeles (2)
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services			•Los Angeles
3rd District			3
Optimist Boys Home & Ranch, Inc.			•Mission Hills
Project Six dba The Help Group			•Van Nuys
Rancho San Antonio			•Chatsworth
4th District			6
Dream Home Care, Inc.			•Torrance
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care			•Long Beach ²
Heritage			•Whittier
Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc.			•San Pedro •Torrance
Starview Adolescent Center Community Treatment Facility			•Torrance
5th District			15
Bourne, Inc.			•Altadena (2) •Pasadena (2)
Five Acres			•Pasadena
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care			•Lancaster (4)
Hathaway-Sycamores Child & Family Services dba The Sycamores			•Altadena
Haynes Family of Programs		X	•La Verne
Heritage			•La Verne
Hillsides Home for Children			•Pasadena
McKinley Children's Center/McKinley Boys Home			•La Verne
White Family Care Services		X	•San Dimas
Out of County	County		12
Mary's Shelter dba Mary's Path	Orange		•Santa Ana ¹
Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc.	Orange		•Placentia
Childhelp	Riverside		•Beaumont
Eggleston Youth Center	San Bernardino		•Ontario •Upland
Fields Comprehensive Youth Services	San Bernardino		•Rancho Cucamonga •Upland
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn	San Bernardino		•Chino
Shirley's Home	San Bernardino	X	•Ontario
Small Steps	San Bernardino	X	•Rialto
Trinity Youth Services	San Bernardino		•Apple Valley •Yucaipa
TOTAL			70

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

JO = Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman

¹ Visited twice

² Includes distribution of materials even if youth unavailable to meet

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

BY TYPE

July 1 through December 31, 2021

1. Safety	3
Physical Harm/Safety	3
2. Personal Rights	37
Family/Social Contact	11
Health/Medical, Dental Care	11
Clothing Allowance	8
Clothing Needs	2
School Enrollment	2
Dietary Needs	1
Religious Activities	1
Weekly Allowance	1
3. General Rights/Assistance	148
Independent Living Transition	53
Issues with Policies/Rules	34
Residential Conflict(s) with Staff	12
Children Social Worker (CSW) Concern(s)	11
School-Related Needs	10
Placement Change Status	8
Personal Care/Belongings	6
CSW Contact	5
Condition of Residence and Amenities	3
CSW Change	1
Attorney Contact/Concern	2
Residential Conflict(s) with Peers	2
Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, & Expression (SOGIE)	1
4. Total - All Types	188
5. Information Only	24
Non-Ombudsperson Related	15
Ombudsperson Related	9
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsperson	212

**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, 2021

Agency Name	Supervisory District(s) / Out of County	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Bourne, Inc.	5th	4	19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (4) •CSW Concern(s) (3) •Issues with Policies/Rules (3) •CSW Contact (2) •Independent Living Transition (2) •Family/Social Contact •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Personal Care/Belongings (prior placement) •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers •School-Related Needs
Childhelp, Inc.	Riverside County	1	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Concern(s) •Family/Social Contact •Independent Living Transition •Placement Change Status •Physical Harm/Safety •School-Related Needs
Dangerfield Institute of Urban Problems	2nd	4	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (4) •Clothing Allowance •Family/Social Contact •Placement Change Status
Dream Home Care, Inc.	2nd, 4th	3	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (4) •Issues with Policies/Rules
Eggleston Youth Center	1st, San Bernardino County	8	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (8) •Health/Medical, Dental Care (4) •Issues with Policies/Rules (2) •CSW Concern(s) •Family/Social Contact •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Fields Comprehensive Youth Services	San Bernardino County	2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Attorney Contact/Concern •Independent Living Transition •Personal Care/Belongings
Five Acres	5th	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Issues with Policies/Rules (3) •Personal Care/Belongings
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care	2nd, 4th, 5th	8	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (3) •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2) •School-Related Needs (2) •Physical Harm/Safety •Family/Social Contact •Issues with Policies/Rules •SOGIE
Hathaway-Sycamores Child & Family Services dba The Sycamores	5th	1	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (3) •Placement Change Status (2) •School-Related Needs (2)
Haynes Family of Programs	5th	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (2) •CSW Concern(s)
Heritage	1st, 4th, 5th	5	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Transition (10) •Health/Medical, Dental Care (4) •Family/Social Contact (3) •Issues with Policies/Rules (3) •School-Related Needs (3) •CSW Concern(s) (2) •Attorney Contact/Concern •Clothing Needs •CSW Contact
Hillsides Home for Children	5th	1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Issues with Policies/Rules •Physical Harm/Safety (prior placement)

Agency Name	Supervisory District(s) / Out of County	Number of Sites	Number of Requests	Types of Requests*
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn	1st, San Bernardino County	2	1	•Independent Living Transition
Mary's Shelter dba Mary's Path	Orange County	2	21	•Issues with Policies/Rules (10) •Clothing Allowance (7) •CSW Concern(s) •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Independent Living Transition •School Enrollment
McKinley Children's Center/McKinley Boys Home	5th	1	4	•Clothing Needs •Condition of Residence and Amenities •CSW Change •Religious Activities
Mindful Growth Foundation	2nd	2	2	•Independent Living Transition (2)
Optimist Boys Home & Ranch, Inc.	2nd, 3rd	4	2	•Independent Living Transition •Issues with Policies/Rules
Penny Lane Centers	3rd, 5th	8	1	•Independent Living Transition
Project Six dba The Help Group	3	1	2	•Independent Living Transition •Issues with Policies/Rules
Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc.	4th, Orange County	4	7	•Family/Social Contact (2) •Issues with Policies/Rules (2) •Independent Living Transition •Placement Change Status •School Enrollment
San Gabriel Children's Center, Inc.	1st	2	3	•Family/Social Contact •Independent Living Transition •Issues with Policies/Rules
St. Anne's Family Services	1st	1	10	•Condition of Residence and Amenities (2) •Children Social Worker (CSW) Concern(s) (2) •Independent Living Transition (2) •Personal Care/Belongings (2) •Issues with Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Peers
Trinity Youth Services	1st, San Bernardino County	3	11	•Independent Living Transition (3) •Placement Change Status (3) •CSW Contact •Dietary Needs •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Issues with Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
White Family Group Home	5th	1	3	•Issues with Policies/Rules •Residential Conflict(s) with Staff •Weekly Allowance
Virtuous Woman, Inc./Project Destiny Home of Hope	2nd	2	7	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff (2) •CSW Contact •Independent Living Transition •Issues with Policies/Rules •Personal Care/Belongings •School-Related Needs
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	2nd	2 ¹	1	•Issues with Policies/Rules
Zoe International dba Zoe Home for Youth	5th	1	1	•Residential Conflict(s) with Staff
Total			188²	

*Requests are categorized based on the initial allegations or needs as described by the youth/caller.

¹ Includes Community Treatment Facility

² Does not include 24 Information Only Requests