



LOS ANGELES COUNTY

PROBATION OVERSIGHT COMMISSION

2024 ANNUAL INSPECTION REPORT

DOROTHY KIRBY CENTER

MARCH
2024



SUMMARY

The Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission (POC), in its mission to oversee and make recommendations to the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation), is completing the 2024 Annual Inspections of all of Probation's detention facilities, marking the fourth year of inspections.

The POC has found it of critical importance to provide substantial feedback to Probation, the Board of Supervisors (Board), and public stakeholders after each inspection of the conditions observed within the facilities. This summary presents the findings of the first facility inspected during this annual cycle: the Dorothy Kirby Center (DKC). Significant changes occurred at DKC since the last inspection due to the division of the premises into three distinct facilities: DKC-Placement, DKC-Camp, and DKC-Secure Youth Treatment Facility (SYTF).

While the POC collected a large amount of information at this inspection, takeaways were derived from the most impactful observations and interviews made during the day.

The following list represents key findings from the inspection of DKC:

- Within the last year, DKC has transitioned to serve three distinct populations including youth dispositioned to DKC as Suitable Placement, Camp, and SYTF. Probation leadership and staff working in each of the three separate settings demonstrated intentional strategies and distinct operations to meet the individual needs of the populations.
- Varied relationship quality with co-located departments: Partnership with LACOE reportedly improved over the last year through more regular communication and interdisciplinary meetings that occur once a month. Partnership with DMH was reported to have weakened over the last year citing communication issues with leadership and lack of clarity about roles.
- Underpowered implementation of the LA Model: Though it was reported that DKC has implemented the LA Model, many officers reported not being trained on LA Model and there was little evidence indicating full implementation of a therapeutic milieu, family engagement, homelike spaces, individualized programming, and regular and robust multidisciplinary team planning processes with co-located departments.
- Major Construction Projects Completed: Construction that caused many concerns in the POC's 2023 Annual Inspection of DKC is now complete, resulting in a safe, attractive physical environment and students attending school daily in their classrooms.

Similar to last year, the POC's primary inspection findings described within this report points out a continued need for the Probation Department to commit to the full installation of a practice model which emphasizes a youth-centered, rehabilitative, trauma-responsive, and teamwork-focused approach to serving youth in detention. Until there is a unified goal around what practice should look like, outcomes will continue to rely on the individual choices and behaviors of officers, rather than an intentionally created departmental culture of care.

BACKGROUND

The Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission (POC) was established in 2021 as a civilian-led oversight commission focused on systemic reform of the Probation Department. The POC advises the Board of Supervisors (Board) and the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation) about progress and challenges within Probation. The POC has considerable authority and responsibilities directly related to juvenile institutions. Specifically, Title 15 of the California Code of Regulations, section 1313 (f), requires the POC to conduct annual inspections of the buildings, grounds, and services delivered to the young people detained in each of the County's juvenile facilities on an annual basis. The Board also granted the POC specific authority to "as permitted by law... conduct unannounced inspections of any facility, and its non-confidential records, where any juvenile probationer can be held or where probationers receive services and "prepare reports on inspection findings" for the Board (LACC Sections 3.80.040(B) and 3.80.050(A)). The POC submits these annual reports to the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), a statutory agency that inspects for compliance of standards of detention facilities in California, by December 31st each year and shares the report with Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and the public. This report marks the fourth round of annual inspections conducted by this body.

METHODS

At the beginning of the 2024 Annual Inspection cycle, Probation ran six juvenile facilities: one juvenile detention center ("juvenile hall"), four juvenile camps, and two facilities solely dedicated to housing young people dispositioned to Secure Youth Treatment Facilities, including Barry J. Nidorf- SYTF and Campus Kilpatrick. DKC is counted here as one of Probation's camps, also known as a residential treatment facility. Since the previous POC Annual Inspection of the Dorothy Kirby Center, significant changes occurred on the campus. Previously, the Dorothy Kirby Center housed Camp Scott, the only all girls camp in Los Angeles County in one of the campus cottages with 10-person occupancy. In January 2024, the use of the name "Camp Scott" was phased out and replaced with "DKC Camp". In August 2023, DKC received its first girls and young women dispositioned to a Secure Youth Treatment Facility and dedicated one cottage with 10-person occupancy to house those young people. Given these changes, DKC now operates three distinct facilities within its walls, and each was inspected on this day.

For the DKC Inspection:

- Two POC Commissioners conducted the inspection. Two POC staff members provided support during the inspection.
- Dates for the inspections were coordinated with Probation leadership and leaders from the facility were aware in advance of the inspection.
- The BSCC does not have a required template for the inspection report. The POC developed a detailed facility inspection template that was updated this year and reviewed by Probation and the BSCC.
- Within the inspections template, key themes are included to ensure a thorough inspection of both physical structure and environment. The template also highlights the need to examine practices and the treatment of youth at the facility.
- The DKC inspection took eight hours to complete.

The information below depicts data gathered directly from the DKC inspection. It should be noted that the data is a “snapshot” of information recorded only to the day of the inspection. The data collected about the “facility’s rated capacity,” “population” and “staffing” (page 2) was provided to the POC staff directly by the facility’s Director or Administrative Director (AD); each of these numbers was directly reported in this report. The only two numbers which required calculation in this report were the “Staff to Youth Ratio” and the “Number of Graduates.” Staff to Youth ratio is calculated by dividing the number of total active staff by the total youth population. For clarification, these ratios do not reflect the actual staff to youth ratios per shift, but rather a broad staff to youth ratio for each facility. The findings stated in this report are a compilation of POC Commissioner and staff observations made while conducting the inspections.

FINDINGS

Inspection #1 – Dorothy Kirby Center (DKC): 1500 S. McDonnell Avenue, Commerce, CA 90040
Facility Rated Capacity: 92

| Youth Population ¹ (Physical)- Co-Ed. | Youth at Court/ Medical | Total Staff (Payroll) | Total Active Staff ² (DPO’s and GSN’s) | Staff to Youth Ratio (Number of Staff at time of Inspection / Youth Pop.) rounded to whole number | Line staff on Duty at time of inspection | Total Credentialed Teachers (LACOE) | Number of High School Students | Number of High School Graduates |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| 64 | 1 | 140 | 136 | 1:2 | 42 | 7 | 60 | 6 |

Access to Medical and Mental Health Services

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|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Juvenile Court Health Services (JCHS) | Services Offered: 7 days / week | Coverage: 6:30 AM -10:00 PM |
| Department of Mental Health (DMH) | Services Offered: 7 days / week | Coverage: 8:00 AM - 8:30 PM (Staff Shifts: 10-hour days, Sun - Wed or Wed - Sat.) plus 24-hour access to on-call DMH psychiatrist |

FACILITY AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Since the 2023 Annual Inspection of the Dorothy F. Kirby Center (DKC), significant changes took place to reorganize DKC into three distinct facilities: DKC Placement, Camp DKC, and DKC SYTF. DKC Placement remains in its original configuration of being a co-ed residential treatment facility. The facility was previously identified by Probation as the location that would house any female youth dispositioned to a Secure Youth Treatment Facility (SYTF) and one, 10-person occupancy cottage was designated to house young people with this disposition. In August 2023, DKC received its first young person dispositioned to SYTF. This cottage is considered its own facility and is referred to as DKC-SYTF. In years past, DKC housed girls dispositioned to Probation's only all girls' camp, Camp Scott. In January 2024, the single cottage that was functioning as Camp Scott was re-named "Camp DKC" and continues to receive girls dispositioned to camp under its new name.

The DKC campus is an open and tidy space with green grass lawns and concrete walkways. During the 2023 Inspection, significant construction was underway which disrupted the use of the lawns and the general operations of the facility, including the movement of youth to the school. All of the construction projects, including installation of air conditioners, Wi-Fi in construction remaining. A single white car is parked in the middle of the DKC campus which is a key component of a popular vocational auto class put on by Los Angeles Trade-Technical College (LATTC or "Trade Tech").

Each of the cottages at DKC can house up to 10 youth. The three girls' cottages open to their own small courtyard, while the other cottages open to the main lawn. Each cottage has communal living space with hard plastic couches and chairs where young people can watch televisions, play video games and engage in programs. Each cottage has a refrigerator and folding tables that can be pulled out to sit all young people comfortably for meals which are eaten inside the cottage. All cottages visited were clean and mostly free of tagging. The girls' cottages had some decorations up on the walls and the boys cottages were mostly plain. One commissioner remarked that the environment within the cottages did not appear to reflect a home-like environment.



¹Physical youth population and High School Student/Graduate numbers are discrepant due to differences in Probation/LACOE data gathering and reporting processes. In this case, LACOE reported that they have a system update delay that occurs when youth are released or on transit to another facility.

²Probation's reports of Active Staff and Line Staff on Duty includes individuals with work hardening, or light duty.



STAFFING

DKC leadership reported that the facility was not short staffed, though most probation officers interviewed remarked that the facility has staffing shortages. Some individuals said that they liked having an opportunity to work overtime on a regular basis due to shortages. Others remarked that it caused problems and stress when needing to carry out day-to-day tasks of managing a cottage. POC staff spoke to two DKC staff members working overtime during the inspection. One was a Group Supervisor Nights (GSN) who took the opportunity to stay for the AM shift after working the overnight shift. The officers interviewed during the inspection reported that there were no mandatory holdovers due to a sufficient number of individuals being willing to work overtime.

Two weeks prior to the DKC inspection, the Los Angeles Times published a story about the arrest of a Dorothy Kirby Center “probation officer accused of sex”³ with a boy in detention. The same officer was also accused of bringing contraband into the facility, which has been an ongoing concern for the department. A POC commissioner and staff asked leadership about next step plans to prevent such abuses from occurring in the future. It was reported that there was a plan in place for the next staff meeting to discuss grooming and ways for staff to identify abusive relationships such that they would be aware of and report any inappropriate behaviors between their colleagues and incarcerated young people.

³ [L.A. County probation officer accused of sex with jailed youth - Los Angeles Times \(latimes.com\)](https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-probation-officer-arrested-2023-08-15-story.html)

Young people within the facility overwhelmingly shared positive examples of interactions with probation officers at DKC, regardless of gender or cottage assignment. One youth said, “I feel like the staff here really listen and want to help you work on being better” and young people in multiple cottages boasted that they had the best staff in the facility as a result of the mentorship and encouragement they reportedly received from probation officers.

ROOM CONFINEMENT/HOPE CENTER

There are two Hope Centers at DKC, one dedicated for girls and gender expansive youth and one for boys. No young people were housed or present in either Hope Center on the day of the inspection. No young people were observed to be in room confinement in any cottages throughout the day. Program and Services calendars were prepared to accommodate youth in the event that anyone is sent to the Hope center, which is a commendable preparation not seen across county facilities.

GRIEVANCES

There were 24 grievances filed for the period of January 1, 2024 through March 27, 2024. Those grievances involved topics including issues about televisions and concerns about clothing not keeping youth sufficiently warm. Other older grievances from the summer of 2023 were also reviewed and aligned with findings from the POC’s inspection of Central Medical Hub in which it was discovered that insufficient staffing at some facilities prevented youth from being transported to medical appointments for x-rays and optometry. The DKC grievances reviewed indicated that youth were not taken to planned dermatology appointments and x-ray appointments during that same time period. One grievance from May 2023 resulted in a Suspected Child Abuse Report made to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). No grievances from 2024 indicated any missed medical appointments or suspected child abuse.

One commissioner interviewed young people regarding their understanding and use of grievances and the young people indicated that they were aware of the grievance procedure and of their ability to make complaints to the ombudsperson. One young person said he had filed grievances when their cottage TV went out and that they were responded to promptly. There was no report of any hesitation or concerns expressed by any young person throughout the day about how they would be treated or perceived for filing grievances within the facility.



DISCIPLINE AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOR REINFORCEMENT

At DKC, there appear to be two models in use which guide discipline. Probation leadership at the facility reported that the LA Model has been implemented at the facility and was the guide for Probation Officers for working with young people. This also integrated the use of a point-based incentive system for young people which was noted near the office and entrance of each cottage. When interviewing probation officers throughout the day, many reported no training in the LA Model. Others indicated having had training yet gave little indication of any specific practices that were enacted as part of LA Model implementation in cottages housing boys. All officers in the girls' cottages reported having LA Model Training and participation in trauma-responsive interventions associated with the model, such as co-facilitation of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT).

At school, Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) administrators described a different discipline model called Positive Behavior and Support (PBIS). PBIS is meant to increase pro social behavior by supporting youth through challenging behaviors by offering multiple opportunities and interventions to youth and teachers aimed at "rejoining". LACOE reported that this approach has proven helpful to avoid suspensions, decrease tensions, and encourage communication. LACOE administrators reported that they would like more alignment between PBIS and Probation's discipline practices. It was also reported that LACOE is interested in training their staff in additional restorative justice practices to further support young people at school, but no timelines were offered on any implementation goals.

SCHOOL

Commissioners and POC staff observed three classrooms and various classroom practices that seemed to be working – young people in all three classes were well behaved and there seemed to be an expectation on the part of everyone that the focus was on educational tasks. No observations were made of any young person actively trying to undermine or resist learning activities. Many of the young people had good things to say about most (but not all) of the teachers. They felt teachers were fair and knew them personally and wanted them to do well.

Administrators stated that the system of keeping youth in the same groupings both in their units and their classes had both benefits and serious challenges. The grouping reportedly reduced fighting and improved classroom management. The main challenge reported by LACOE with grouping young people by cottage assignment was that the decision was based solely on Probation's needs without consideration of educational needs, making it difficult for LACOE to adequately meet the individual needs of this diverse group of young people. It was reported that 40 of the 64 young people at DKC on the day of the inspection had an individualized Educational Plan (IEP). Three young people at the facility were reportedly receiving learning loss accommodations.

It was noted that the rigor of work in two of the classes was of the most basic level. Students were asked to copy and fill in the blanks in packets. While this may have been appropriate for some of the students,

it was noted that the rigor of work in two of the classes was of the most basic level. Students were asked to copy and fill in the blanks in packets. While this may have been appropriate for some of the students, it was not grade level work and was not the kind of work described in the Road To Success Academy⁴(RTSA) curriculum. While two of the classrooms had student work up on the walls that showed more challenging assignments, one classroom showed no evidence of grade level work.⁵

On the day of the inspection, Probation Education Services staff shared that the Rising Scholars program was set to start in approximately two weeks, therefore there were no dual enrollment students. There were three high school graduates enrolled in college, two of whom were young people in SYTF. These three were enrolled in an online sociology class.

KITCHEN AND FOOD

The kitchen at DKC was inspected and found to be clean and a hygienic environment for the preparation of food. All machinery appeared to be in good working order. During interviews with young people, many reported that the food at the juvenile hall was more flavorful and familiar than what they receive at DKC. A POC commissioner inquired about the difference between facilities and was informed that the contracts at the two facilities are different, which puts more limits on the vendors that DKC cooks are allowed to use for ordering supplies. They reported that they do have the same monthly menu as the juvenile hall and reported that DKC is on a five week cycle, meaning that every five weeks the menu is repeated. The cooks reported that they have been participating in test kitchen activities where different menus are cooked and sampled using a variety of supplies from different sources. They shared that young people are consulted for their feedback about the food on an ongoing basis and that the kitchen staff also monitor the amount of food that gets thrown away after each meal.

During the inspection, two meals were observed: lunch and dinner. At DKC, meals are meant to take place at a communal table. Years ago, young people and the probation officers assigned to the cottage would share a family style meal at these tables. In more recent years, since stoves were removed from the cottages, meals are served in individual trays. Both the lunch and dinner meals that were observed did not take place around a single table, rather young people were seen at various stations around the cottage, eating in front of televisions and video game consoles. At dinner, young people said that they often do have their meals together and signaled the folding table next to the refrigerator that is typically used. The young people reported that eating dinner in this way was a reward for multiple days without an incident within the cottage. One young person was given a box of chicken wings from an outside restaurant as a reward for good behavior. The youth interviewed at lunch and dinner meals overwhelmingly said that it was their preference to be able to eat while relaxing away from the table and enjoying their preferred media source. There were enough spaces for youth to eat comfortably.

⁴ [RTSA Impact-Report ExecSummary FINAL 8.30.22.pdf \(ucla.edu\)](#)

⁵ The findings within this paragraph were gathered and expressed by Commissioner Sean Garcia-Leys whose professional experience as a teacher and expertise assessing curriculums enabled the determinations regarding grade level work.

ACCESS TO MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Medical care at DKC is provided by JCHS which operates from 6:30am-10:00pm seven days per week. Youth reported that they have regular access to see a nurse as needed by asking a probation officer in their cottage to call JCHS or by putting in a written request to see a nurse. On the day of the inspection, youth also reported being transported to Central Medical Hub and LAC+USC Medical Center as needed with no delay. As described above in the "Grievances" section of this report, in the summer of 2023, there were grievances that indicated appointment delays for dermatology and x-rays which aligned with reports of cancelled appointments during the POC's 2023 Annual Inspection of the Central Medical Hub. There was no indication of any ongoing issue with medical appointment access.

Mental health care at DKC is provided by DMH which operates from 8:00am-8:30pm seven days per week with 24-hour access to an on-call psychiatrist who is available to respond to psychiatric emergencies. DMH provides individual therapy services, psychotherapy group services, and psychiatric services. Most young people reported that they were able to see their therapist at least once a week. It was mentioned by both youth and probation officers that there had been considerable turnover of DMH clinicians and supervisors in the last year. While visiting living areas, DMH clinicians were not observed in any cottages throughout the day.

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Commissioners and POC staff were provided programs and services calendars ahead of the inspection day. In alignment with the division of the facility, separate programs and services calendars track what is offered at DKC-Placement, DKC-Camp, and DKC-SYTF cottages. The calendars reflected substantial programming provided by community-based organizations (CBO), DMH, LACOE, and Probation including Educational Services and Youth Student Councils. The SYTF cottage calendar clearly emphasized age-appropriate differentiation from the programming available in other cottages including time allocated for college counseling, college classes, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certification training. DKC Placement and Camp calendars indicated strong time investment in psychotherapy groups.

On the afternoon of the inspection, the POC verified that the scheduled programming occurred across the cottages. One commissioner observed a program put on by The Unusual Suspects, a theater group. The program involved all of the youth in the cottage who were observed laughing and interacting with the providers and clearly enjoying the activity. The commissioner opted to not interrupt the activity to interview youth but probation officers interviewed reported that the provider consistently showed up, built rapport with young people, and that it appeared to them that youth genuinely enjoyed the program.

On other units where programming was not directly observed, young people and probation officers were interviewed about the programs and services offered according to the calendars. POC commissioners and staff were repeatedly informed that scheduled providers, including DMH clinicians and CBO providers showed up on time and as expected, made successful efforts to build rapport with youth, and were

respectful and engaging.

HARM PREVENTION PROGRAMMING AND INTERVENTIONS

Contraband was reported to be minimal at DKC. Over the last year, nets were installed on the patios of various cottages to prevent access to any contraband thrown over outer walls of the facility. Programming schedules across the three DKC facilities emphasized psychotherapy groups facilitated by DMH clinicians. These groups include substance abuse and Seeking Safety which integrates discussion of substance abuse as it relates to the experience of coping with post-traumatic stress symptoms. These services are available at least once weekly in every cottage in the facility.

Young people in the facility reported that they also receive individual substance abuse counseling services as needed with their assigned clinician. Young people reported that in many cases the substance abuse services provided were helpful to them in achieving their personal goals, which at least two shared was to maintain sobriety in detention and beyond.

Young people interviewed at DKC reported that they had not been trained on recognizing the signs of opioid intoxication nor Narcan deployment. Probation leadership reported that Narcan was not made available for youth use at the facility. Probation officers interviewed reported having training to identify opioid intoxication and Narcan deployment. The majority of officers asked showed that they were carrying Narcan on their utility belt in addition to having extra Narcan supplies locked in each unit.

JCHS reported that medication-assisted treatment is available at the facility as a harm prevention strategy offered to youth who may be struggling with opioid addiction. On the day of inspection, it was reported that two young people at the facility were on medication-assisted treatment.

AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships between co-located county partners within the facility were mostly positive. LACOE Administrators discussed the progress in relationship building and increased collaboration over the last year through interdisciplinary meetings. LACOE administrators expressed a desire to have more regular meetings with Probation and DMH in order to further align interventions and approaches for serving youth. It was reported that one interdisciplinary meeting happens monthly, which was described as a good starting point, and desire was expressed for meetings optimally to occur weekly.

Feedback received about relationships with DMH was mixed. Within the cottages, it was reported by probation officers that professional relationships with assigned clinicians included open communication, respect, and meaningful collaboration. There were concerns expressed throughout the day about recent losses of clinical staff and the destabilizing effect that clinician turnover has on the general functioning of a cottage. There were also reports that in the last months there had been ongoing strained relationships between Probation and DMH leadership at the facility when efforts to clarify counseling roles of probation officers and clinicians had reportedly collapsed after a series of unpleasant exchanges.

OLEORESIN CAPSICUM SPRAY

POC commissioners inquired about the presence and use of Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray within any of the three functioning facilities in DKC. It is understood that while OC spray is not used within any of Probation's residential treatment facilities, or camps, the officers in the one cottage housing girls dispositioned to SYTF could potentially carry and deploy OC spray as a use of force. It was reported by Probation Officers and administrators that no one in the facility carries OC spray, including the officers assigned to DKC-SYTF. At the time of the inspection, there was no published policy and procedures manual for DKC- SYTF, and the POC hopes that Probation will intentionally and explicitly exclude OC as a use of force option.

