Group Homes Report
February 2018

Report Overview

TheJuvenileJusticeCommissionin2017continuedtomonitorimplementationofamajor transitiondictatedbytheenactmentofAssemblyBill403in2015. ThisContinuumofCare (CCR) legislation transforms congregate care for dependents and wards in the stateofCalifornia.

While the goals of CCR are laudable, implementation has been fraught with delays and challenges, resulting in uncertainty in the system for congregate care providers, regulators, and administrators, as well as risk for children whose placements may be disrupted. Economic realities, particularly for high cost areas such as Santa Clara County, complicate an already complex undertaking.

In 2017, the JJC maintained a dual focus on monitoring a) conditions in congregate care facilities serving wards and dependents and b) implementation of CCR. In doing so, the JJC communicates and consults with the Social Services Agency, the Juvenile Probation Department, the Court, the Board of Supervisors, and other oversight bodies.

The JJC’s findings and continuing concerns are presented in this report.

Authority

The Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) is a state-mandated, court-appointed authority. The JJC’s purpose is to inquire into the administration of juvenile law in Santa Clara County. The JJC is dedicated to the promotion of an effective juvenile justice system operated in an environment of credibility, dignity, fairness, and respect for the youth of Santa Clara County. Among its duties, by authority of the California Welfare and Institutions Code, the JJC is responsible to oversee congregate care facilities that serve wards or dependent minors in the County.¹

¹WIC 229.5 (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a juvenile justice commission may inquire into the operation of any group home that serves wards or dependent children of the juvenile court and is located in the
Continuum of Care Reform (CCR)

On October 11, 2015, the Governor signed into law Assembly Bill 403, a primary goal of which is to reduce reliance on congregate care as a long-term placement setting, in favor of supportive – and better supported – family settings. Effective January 1, 2018, minors were to be transitioned out of group home placements either to resource family (foster) homes or, if necessitated by short-term, specialized treatment needs, to Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs). Maximum placement duration in STRTPs is to be six months. Options available to former group homes are to obtain accreditation and state approval as STRTPs, to transition to Transitional Housing Programs (THPP) for youth at least 16 years of age, or to close.

Population and CCR Implementation Status

Dependents:

Of the 1098 dependent children in Santa Clara County, 128 children were in DFCS group home placements, and 81 were in Transitional Housing programs on October 1, 2017. (See data in Appendix 1.) Eighty-nine (89) of the 128 children in group homes were in facilities located within Santa Clara County, leaving 30% placed out of county.

Implementation of CCR has been challenging for California and its counties. Recruitment of sufficient resource families, individual assessment of every child’s needs, and qualification and licensing of STRTPs have been more difficult than anticipated.

Initial licensure of STRTPs is provisional, and provisionally licensed STRTPs have twelve months to achieve accreditation and obtain BHS contracts. As of January 2018, only two STRTPs in Santa Clara County had been provisionally licensed by the California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Program (CCL). Two additional group homes had submitted applications as STRTPs. Of the four, three had been awarded contracts for provision of required mental health services by the county Department of Behavioral Health Services (BHS), covering an anticipated need for 58 beds. These beds are not reserved for Santa Clara County youth.

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The Santa Clara County Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFCS) has filed for license extensions to fall 2018 for several group homes to allow more time for CCR implementation and transition. With respect to transition, the Department is expanding efforts to recruit resource families, expedite their qualification, and better support them through wrap-around and other services. The Commission notes that best practices support relative placements as the preferred alternative. Santa Clara County’s rate of relative placement (29%) falls below the state-wide figure of 33%, which may suggest an opportunity to address both recruitment challenges and the children’s outcomes.3

Probationers:

With respect to wards, the Santa Clara County Department of Probation reported eight probation youth in group home placements as of January 19, 2018. Four of these youths were in out-of-county sex offender specific programs at two facilities, both of which have received extensions to transition to STRTP licensure. The remaining four youths were in out-of-state programs, in Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Utah. The Utah facility is the first out-of-state program to be licensed as an STRP. Youth are placed in out-of-state programs when high-level needs cannot be met by in-state programs and/or as an alternative to a DJJ commitment.

Probation reported its greatest challenge implementing CCR as the lack of home-based options available to take Probation youth with high needs.

JJC Oversight Approach

The Commission’s Group Homes team broadened its approach in 2017 beyond annual inspection. Its focus included and continues to emphasize the following:

a. Continuing to participate in monthly DFCS, BHS, and Probation sponsored meetings on CCR implementation
b. Monitoring CCR implementation by requesting updates at JJC public meetings, implementation meetings, and in informal discussions.
c. Reviewing placements in all congregate care facilities for wards and dependents, including also group homes for developmentally disabled dependents, and THPPs
d. Conducting several informal facility visits to assess conditions and determine whether full inspections are indicated
e. Reviewing CCL reports and consulting with CCL and other system partners to identify patterns of problems at residential facilities in which wards and dependents are placed
f. Coordinating with other county JJC’s to obtain visibility into the substantial number of out-of-county placements of Santa Clara County minors
g. Monitoring and seeking improvement in programmatic and educational services provided in congregate care facilities
h. Continuing to pursue previously identified concerns regarding fire safety, inasmuch as fire inspections of group homes are required only on initial licensing.

3 Ibid.
Commissioners visited the following group homes between October and December 2017:

- S.T.A.R. Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP)
- Gateway House, Advent Group Ministries
- The Nest, Advent Group Ministries
- Better Living Home (for children with developmental disabilities)
- Unity Care Group Home #8

Commissioners developed a) a new tool to aid documentation of informal group visits, Appendix 2 to this report, and b) supplementary questions for facilities for the developmentally disabled.

The Commissioners who conducted the five facility visits found each one adequate. There was consensus that education, counseling/therapy, and programming require greater attention at group homes in general.

Commissioners also reviewed CCL data on group homes that were inspected by the JJC in the recent past, found deficient, and referred to CCL, including the two California Anchor Residents homes. These two homes received intensified scrutiny, including 15 to 18 CCL visits each in 2017, as well as JJC follow-up. CCL assessed Civil penalties for several violations. A pattern of improvement is evident, and the most recent CCL visit found “no Title 22 deficiencies observed or cited at this time.”

Conclusions

This is a time of transition and challenge for all system participants affected by enactment of AB403 to effect Continuum of Care Reform. The Commission is mindful that major legislative change often engenders uncertainty and disruption for regulators, service agencies, and providers, who struggle to manage change and reconcile conflicting and sometimes unrealistic requirements and various legitimate interests. Nonetheless, one would have hoped for a smoother transition, given a generous implementation period of three years for both the state and the counties. The confusion and uncertainty among group home operators, on whom care of the County’s dependents and wards depends, is of particular concern.

The Commission remains optimistic about implementation over the next year, which will require strong and confident leadership at DFCS and dedicated staff work throughout the system, particularly in the face of an imperfect roll-out by the State. The JJC will scrutinize and follow progress closely.

A primary concern is the recruitment, qualification, retention, and support of strong resource families in sufficient numbers. Santa Clara County faces extra challenges from inadequate reimbursement rates in an area with a high cost of living and exceptionally high housing costs. Economics aside, providing foster care to children who have suffered trauma is an intense and demanding undertaking, whose success requires that the County ensure the availability and accessibility of wrap-around and other support services to address the social and emotional needs of children welcomed into these resource families.
Children currently in group homes, who do not require or qualify for STRTP care but for whom resource family placements may be unavailable, may be at risk of further traumatization. They should neither be transitioned prematurely to THPP placements nor default to stays at the Receiving, Assessment, and Intake Center (RAIC), which is itself in an uncertain transition and is not licensed or equipped to support children for extended stays.

As noted, placements in STRTPs for children requiring intensive therapeutic services are limited to six months duration. The Commission is concerned about plans for children in STRTPs who may not be ready at the conclusion of six months to make a successful transition to a resource family or THPP.

Commendations

The Commission commends:

- The efforts of staff throughout the system to serve the best interests of dependents and wards, despite regulatory and systemic change and uncertainty.

- The five group homes visited, where staff appeared committed to the welfare of the children and Commissioners did not observe conditions that indicated the need for a full inspection at this time.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends:

1. DFCS should intensify resource family recruitment and retention efforts, with emphasis on relative placements wherever possible.

2. As an integral part of the recruitment and retention effort, and to support the success of families willing to welcome Santa Clara County dependent children into their homes, DFCS should fully explore and augment support services and programs for resource families.

3. DFCS should ensure flexibility in STRTP length of stay, in keeping with DFCS’ goal of assessment, placement, and support based on an individualized, child-centered model. The legislative limit of six months may not be appropriate to meet the needs of every child placed in an STRTP.

4. Behavioral Health Services should monitor closely its contracted bed capacity, to ensure sufficient places for Santa Clara County dependents and wards in STRTPs, in a dynamic environment.

5. Santa Clara County agencies and departments should improve coordination with each other and communication with group homes and other providers to minimize confusion and misinformation, especially during the transition.
Report approved by the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission, February 6, 2018

Jean Pennypacker, Commission Chair

Carol Rhoads, Group Homes Report Chair
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Please consult the methodology for detailed placement type definitions.

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**Table Note:**
- Please consult the methodology for detailed placement type definitions.
- State Source: CYS/CMS 2017 Q3 Extract.
- Database Version: 2.00 Datebase Version: 6CDF89C3

**Santa Clara County:**
- Agency Type = Child Welfare
- Children in Foster Care
Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission
Group Home Visit Report

Basic Information
Facility Name: ________________________________
Address: ________________________________
Contact Person: ________________________________ Phone Number: ________________________________
Date of this Visit: ________________________________
Commissioners Present: ________________________________
Fire Inspection Report: □ Yes □ No Date: ________________________________
CCL Data Reviewed: □ Yes □ No Date: ________________________________

Facility Capacity: ______ Current Population: Age range of juveniles: ______
Juveniles’ home counties: ________________________________
Emergency Plan: □ Yes □ No Date of Last Drill: ________________________________
Comments: ________________________________

Staffing
Number of Staff: ________________________________
Background/education: ________________________________
Training provided for staff: ________________________________
Staff to minor ratio: Awake: ______ Sleeping: ______
Impression of staff and minor interactions: ________________________________

Condition and Safety of Grounds and Building Exterior
Description/condition of property: ________________________________
Exceptions Noted: ________________________________

Condition, Cleanliness, and Safety of Interior of Building
Common Areas: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Kitchen: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Bedrooms: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Bathrooms: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Garage: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Hot Water Heater/Heating/Windows: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Smoke Alarms: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Storage of Cleaning Fluids/Chemicals: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Recreation/Sports Equipment: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Study Area: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________
Adequate Lighting: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable: ________________________________

Intake and Individualized Plans
Intake process: ________________________________
Oriented to the house rules and procedures: □ Yes □ No ________________________________

House rules and grievance procedures posted: □ Yes □ No # Grievances last 12 months: ________________________________

Individual Program Plan for each minor within 30 days: □ Yes □ No ________________________________
Meals/Nutrition
Food supply ample and nutritious: □ Yes □ No
Menus posted: □ Yes □ No
Meals served family style: □ Yes □ No
Snacks and beverages available: □ Yes □ No
Special nutritional needs provided for: □ Yes □ No

Programs & Services
Recreation/Activities: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Exercise: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Access to Religious Services: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Access to Medical Services: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Access to Mental Health Services: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Individual Counseling: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Group Counseling: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Substance Abuse Counseling: □ Acceptable □ Unacceptable:
Other:

Discipline of Minors
Describe the discipline process of minors:

Comments:

School
Schools residents attend:
Students able to participate in school-based extra-curricular activities:
Access to Computers/Internet:
How truancy is handled:
Communication between school and staff:
Comments:

Interviewed Minors: □ Yes □ No

Observations and Concerns

Follow-up Recommendations

Commissioner(s) preparing this report: ____________________ Date: ____________