



**Dependency System: Scattered Sites Update.  
Report and Recommendations  
May 2023**

The Scattered Sites were mentioned in the July 2022 report on the Welcoming Center, (TWC). Since then, the Juvenile Justice Commission for Santa Clara County (JJC or “Commission”) has continued to track youth overstaying the initial 24-hour intake period, and has, as a result, determined to revisit these sites on an interim basis. The Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) was operating three Scattered Sites when a facilities inspection was done on October 27, 2022. These are leased, single-family homes in the community. They serve as an adjunct to the Welcoming Center and thus are part of the Continuum of Care. Youth are placed in a Scattered Site home when DFCS is unable to find a placement for a youth within 24 hours of arrival at the Welcoming Center, in effect serving as overflow when they can no longer stay at TWC. They are staffed around the clock by DFCS staff. Each site can accommodate up to three youth, but due to the acuity of the needs of the youth there are generally only one or two placed there at a time. When they are in use, there are typically two staff on duty from seven in the morning until eleven at night with one awake person on duty overnight. A uniformed Public Safety Officer (PSO) may also be present.

DFCS has been involved in a lengthy process to secure licensure of the Scattered Site homes with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). Currently, the homes are not licensed. DFCS is continuing to work with State officials to license them as emergency housing shelters (transitional shelter care facilities). Such a license will permit them to house youth in satellite homes for up to three days. The Community Care Licensing Division (CCL) of CDSS is aware of the existence of these sites as overflow from TWC. As indicated, the Scattered Site homes are not licensed facilities, and therefore do not fall under CCL monitoring. The Commission is concerned that even when the sites are licensed, youth will stay significantly longer than three days, as the County simply does not have enough homes for high acuity youth despite their efforts to continually refine and improve their crisis continuum of care by adding high acuity placements to meet the complex needs of the youth in care. The Commission has discussed these concerns with CCL. The County continues to work with CDSS, other County Departments, and the community to establish family-based homes in lieu of congregate care settings.

Many of the youth who are placed in a Scattered Site home have had multiple placements, have behavioral health conditions and engage in high-risk behaviors. Matching these youth with a permanent home poses a challenge because of their significant needs, hence the long stays in a Scattered Site home.

DFCS reports that it is working diligently with community-based partners and the Behavioral Health Services Department to support the development of the crisis continuum. The County has created specialized, therapeutically- based, foster homes, intensive, placement stabilization services, and is looking to build out a Short-Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP) to

ensure that the highest needs youth are placed in a timely manner within Santa Clara County. DFCS has continued to report that they are attempting to build out this continuum of care to include 30-50 specialized foster homes and foster homes that meet STRTP standards but are for individual youth. These homes are Intensive Services Foster Care Plus homes and are currently being developed with one youth placed at this time. During this time, when these resources are being expanded upon or in development, and youth are staying for extended periods, they are currently receiving behavioral health support from Wraparound, Intensive Stabilization Services, and Placement Stabilization Services, and mobile crisis response.

Two commissioners had the opportunity to visit the two homes at the end of October, one in Morgan Hill and one in South San Jose. These two homes were clean and mostly well maintained. The front yard of the South San Jose home had dirt as its front yard. The front yard of the Morgan Hill home was landscaped, and both were maintained to the standard of the neighborhood. Both also had backyards that were available for youth to use. Inside the homes appeared rather stark, with very little decoration therefore making it feel more institutional than homelike.

The house in Morgan Hill had a dartboard and corn hole game in its garage. There was a soccer ball in the backyard. A fire inspection report for licensure passed the home for use; however, the smoke detectors had to be installed in all rooms. DFCS staff stated that work had been ordered.

Whenever possible, youth continue to attend the school in which they were registered before being in placement. At the time of the Commission's visit, there was a 13-year-old living at the Morgan Hill home. This child was on an extended stay at this scattered site but was attending their special education program in Palo Alto. This required the youth being transported to and from the school by taxi. The long commute raised a concern for the Commission, but the child has finally been moved into an Intensive Services Foster Care + home (ISFC+) which is an STRTP-level foster home.

Staff appear to be well trained and to have a good rapport with the youth in their care. For example, they share family-style meals with the youth. The staff are trained and certified in Cornell University's Crisis Prevention Institute's model of crisis management. Staff and the PSO are trained to use the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) program. A DFCS supervisor makes visits to the scattered sites on each shift. The Commission is concerned that the presence of a uniformed Public Safety Officer creates more of an institutional feel and might even be perceived by some youth, especially youth of color, as being somewhat intimidating, despite the officer's efforts to connect with the youth.<sup>1</sup> The Commission understands that some of the youth placed at the scattered sites can present with high-risk behaviors such as aggression, running away and having a security officer might be necessary. However, to support a more homelike environment, the officer should be in plain clothes when on duty at the scattered sites.

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<sup>1</sup> The JJC discussed the effect of uniformed officers on minority youth in its December 2020 report *School Policing and School Resource Officers: Considerations and Recommendations*, available at <https://www.sccourt.org/documents/jjc/2020/JJC%20SCHOOL%20POLICING%20REPORT.pdf>.

As noted in our last report on the Welcoming Center, dated July 2022, even with only one or two youth placed at a site, it is still a group home model in that the staff rotates in and out on an 8-to 10-hour-shift work schedule. While DFCS tries to match the staff with the youth in care at the site, this is not always possible due to work schedules. Also, as there is no consistent staffing or youth population in these sites, there is little programming available for the youth. Programming is largely dependent on the needs of the youth with Wraparound or Behavior Health Services, usually accompanying the youth to the facility. While the model is for youth to stay in the site for only several days, some youth have stayed for several months.

When no youth are present in the homes or they are at school or asleep, it was reported the staff has other administrative duties such as filling out daily logs, completing incident reports, and completing any mandatory training. Staff are also responsible for items of upkeep around the facility. All assignments must be able to be started and stopped as it is frequently unknown when a youth will arrive at the home. Finally, if the home is empty staff may be assigned to other Social Worker I duties.

The Commission was able to review the incident reports (IRs) for the Scattered Sites from December 2021 to October 2022. From this review, the Commissioners learned that the long-term youth, described above, had numerous IRs at the start of placement. However, the youth eventually settled and had an extended time without any IRs. While this youth was at a SS off and on for nearly a year, the behavior clearly improved during this time and the child was eventually able to be placed.

IRs also revealed that youth running away is one of the biggest issues. Drug use, especially marijuana and tobacco, also seem to be a significant problem. Once the youth is in a runaway status, even if it is just over two hours, their property is inventoried and stored. Access to property on a youth's return to the site has been an issue in the past. But despite some youth having very difficult behaviors on occasion, behavior issues were generally well handled.

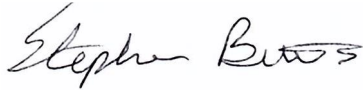
Recommendations:

The Juvenile Justice Commission recommends that:

- DFCS continue to pursue licensure of the scattered sites.
- The houses be made more homelike with the addition of pictures and other decorations.
- The Public Safety Officer not wear a uniform when at the scattered sites.
- DFCS continue to pursue its build-out of the Continuum of Care placements for high acuity youth.



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