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## THE WELCOMING CENTER INSPECTION REPORT

JULY 2022

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## **Introduction**

The Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC or Commission) is required by Welfare and Institutions Code §229 to inspect facilities situated within Santa Clara County that hold youth under the age of 18, at least once a year. To fulfill this requirement, the Commission visited the Welcoming Center twice over the last year, once on June 7, 2021, right after it opened, and again on April 5, 2022. This report covers the period from the opening of the Welcoming Center on May 17, 2021, through May 2022.

## **Background**

In the spring of 2021, the County of Santa Clara's (County's) Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) transferred the management of the county-run receiving center for children (Keiki Center) to Seneca Family of Agencies (Seneca). Seneca had spent many months searching for a site for The Welcoming Center (TWC). The current facility is in a mixed industrial/single home neighborhood in West San Jose. The facility is leased by Seneca Family of Agencies. The Welcoming Center is licensed by the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing as a transitional shelter care facility. Seneca is contracted by the County to provide a continuum of services including TWC, behavioral health assessments, and professional foster care homes.

DFCS reported in March 2022 that, "[S]ince becoming operational on May 17, 2021, the Welcoming Center has provided care for 150 unique children and youth while a home-like setting could be located. There has been a total of 270 enrollments of children entering the Welcoming Center, with 25 children admitted on more than one occasion."<sup>1</sup>

## **Facility**

According to "Information Regarding the Welcoming Center" (Seneca Family of Agencies, February 19, 2021), The Welcoming Center is described by Seneca as a therapeutic, home-like setting that supports young people as they navigate the trauma of a placement change or home removal crisis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DFCS Report to the Santa Clara County Children, Seniors and Families Committee, March 24, 2022, "Update on the Welcoming Center Evaluation and Steps to Transfer Program Operations to the County"  
[https://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail\\_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=&MeetingID=14000&MediaPosition=&ID=109871&CssClass=](https://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=&MeetingID=14000&MediaPosition=&ID=109871&CssClass=)

<sup>2</sup> "Information Regarding the Welcoming Center", Seneca Family of Agencies. February 19, 2021

The facility is licensed by the State of California and is monitored by Community Care Licensing. The facility is licensed to accept children from birth to eighteen years of age for 24 hours or less, while their placement is being coordinated by DFCS. The Welcoming Center is licensed to hold up to 15 youth while their transition is being arranged. The Welcoming Center programming provides individualized assessment, safety planning, and therapeutic intervention by professional staff. Seneca offers DFCS an “unconditional intake and discharge policy to insure stabilization of the youth. Seneca is located in 18 counties in both northern and southern California as well as in Washington State.”<sup>3</sup>

A written contingency plan applies if the Welcoming Center temporarily exceeds 15 children. However, the Director of the facility reported that since opening the maximum number of youth at the Center at any one time was 15, which included two sibling groups of four.

The Welcoming Center is a large two-story home with parking to the side and in front. Across the street from the Center is a large multi-story parking lot. The home sits between two single family homes. The facility includes both bedrooms and dayrooms on the first and second floors. There are four bedrooms for youth - two upstairs and two downstairs - which provide separation of youth of different ages and needs. There are appropriate bathrooms on both floors. Two bathrooms are reserved for the youth. On each floor is a family room with a large screen television. There was also a plethora of books and boardgames. Soothing fun framed pictures on the walls and comfortable chairs and couches. The JJC found the environment to be warm and friendly. Each bedroom had two single beds and a desk and chair. An outside patio with long tables, bikes, and a basketball hoop provides outdoor activities. The JJC found the facility and grounds to be clean and in good repair.

For food and snacks, there were baskets of fruit and cereals in the cupboards. A small refrigerator was in the kitchen and a large refrigerator in the garage. Staff and youth may prepare food together for youth. The Center director reports that “[W]e provide a variety of healthy meal options to children and youth in our care to meet needs related to preferences, familiarity/comfort, ages, and health.” To this end, “we order and maintain a varied supply of shelf stable food (soups, cereals etc.), fresh and frozen pre-packaged meals (salads, sandwiches, wraps, sushi, etc.), and fresh fruits and vegetables. On occasion, staff may decide to order food to be delivered – for example, to engage in a ‘pizza and movie night’ with children.”

The Director reports that neighborhood relations are excellent. The home is locked, and entry is gained by ringing the doorbell and being let in from the inside. Social workers and law enforcement officers may bring youth to the Center. Occasionally a returning youth arrives alone. The entry rooms are bright and clean, and the walls hold packets of materials and signs. At the time of the JJC’s last visit there were two youth in residence, both teens.

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<sup>3</sup> “Information Regarding the Welcoming Center,” Seneca Family of Agencies. February 19, 2021

## **Programing**

All Seneca staff are trained and practice a model of intervention called “Unconditional Care,” which is outlined in great detail in the previously cited “Information Regarding the Welcoming Center” manual. The goals are to minimize trauma and stabilize youth entering foster care or experiencing placement disruption. According to Seneca, this is done by assessing a child’s needs and strengths to inform social workers’ placement decisions, and by facilitating a successful transition for youth into home-based care through thoughtful collaboration and communication among all involved parties.

At intake, the youth are assessed by a trained therapeutic professional, any property brought on site by the youth is inventoried, and the youth is provided with an outline of their rights and duties while in the home. Seneca uses the Crises Assessment tool created by Praed Foundation. The child’s record is kept securely in Seneca’s health record system, which can be accessed by other Seneca team members. Clinical staff also have their offices in the Welcoming Center facility. After a youth leaves the Center, clinicians also provide a three-day follow-up evaluation on each child.

All youth are provided a physical health screening by a Seneca nurse, who has access to the EpicCare system, the County hospital electronic health records (EHR system). This provides for viewing medical records for youth enrolled at TWC, in order to assist with proper care. The examination room contains a locked medicine cabinet and a locked refrigerator for medications that need to be cooled. There are three nurses that rotate through the Center from 10 am through 6 pm, seven days a week. There is always a nurse on-call 24/7 for consultation. Youth receive a more extensive medical exam at the County’s SPARK (Supporting Protecting and Respecting Kids) Medical Clinic. The SPARK Clinic is open daytime business hours Monday through Friday. A youth arriving in the afternoon or evening goes to SPARK the following day. Youth arriving in the morning might go to SPARK that afternoon. Youth arriving on a weekend may go to placement first and then be taken to SPARK by a caretaker. Medications may come with the youth. Written policies are in place on the use of self or nurse-administered medications. The nurse also coordinates any medical appointments a youth may need, as well as supervising contact with a psychiatrist.

The Welcoming Center Policies and Procedures are online and updated through the use of SharePoint. There are within the “Unconditional Care” model numerous de-escalation techniques that are part of the Seneca behavioral conduct interventions. Staff describe the Center orientation as a milieu-based, stabilization model. Seneca staff describe milieu-based as a term to indicate that counseling and therapeutic interventions are embedded in all aspects of the stay at the Welcoming Center. This includes a focus on physical and emotional safety within the structured environment (milieu), giving youth options around activities, and engagement with staff. Seneca may use community providers such as Pacific Clinics, previously known as Uplift, if a mental health emergency occurs. There is not one staff member appointed to oversee the youth’s treatment, but a team of staff members interacts with the youth.

## **Overstays**

Commissioners talked with one youth who had been at the Center for over 90 days. The youth had been going to school on-line but would be attending in-person school the following week. Transportation is available for youth to attend school or other events. Youth staying at the Center for over 24 hours have to be reported to the state and documented. Youth having placement challenges have an Individualized Care Plan (ICP). In addition to schooling and activities at The Welcoming Center, they are provided with outside activities such as trips to the library, mall visits, a hike, or an ice cream outing. Planned activities at TWC ensure that engaging, age-appropriate, and safe activities are available for youth. This planning is the responsibility of the Program Supervisor.

The California Community Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services oversees The Welcoming Center since it is a licensed facility. Seneca notifies CCLD of any overstay on a regular basis and when a youth transitions out of The Welcoming Center in order to document the total length of the child's stay. These reports and conversations were confirmed by CCLD staff. If a child's overstay exceeds a day or so, Seneca's program manager advises the CCLD analyst by email prior to the discharge. Staff also reports to CCLD weekly the status of any overstays and possible placement options shared by DFCS. Additionally, CCLD receives a monthly report which includes all youth who have overstayed that month.

## **Staffing**

The Welcoming Center staffing currently consists of 28 positions, of which two counseling positions are open and unfilled. The Center is overseen by a Program Director with two assistant Directors, one of whom is directly responsible for the Clinicians. The Assistant Program Director oversees two program supervisors, each of whom oversees as many as eight youth counselors. There is always an assigned Facilities Manager on site. That position may be held during a shift by a Program Supervisor or other staff. At the time of the JJC visit the Facilities Manager assigned to the front desk was a Program Assistant. A flow chart of personnel is attached. Seneca's Welcoming Center staff is not responsible for child placement, which is DFCS's responsibility.

## **COVID-19**

The impact of COVID-19 on The Welcoming Center youth was minimal in that only one youth was identified as testing positive. That youth ran away before staff could develop a plan of care for him. Seneca staff were all vaccinated and boosted unless they had a medical or religious exemption. There was a sign in/out register for each visitor so contacts could be traced. With the Omicron variant there were more positive staff results, and staff had to remain isolated. COVID-19 also impacted the implementation of the family notification process, and searches to identify family members substantially decreased. However, in the Welcoming Center model, the Department of Family and Children's Services remains responsible for placement, not Seneca. Staff and youth were masked in the home unless they were eating. Commissioners wore masks during both visits to the facility.

## **CCLD Annual Inspection**

On May 25, 2022, CCLD conducted an unannounced visit to the Welcoming Center to conduct the required annual inspection. The Licensing Program Analyst (LPA) reported that “[T]here were no Title 22 deficiencies cited during this inspection.” Three minor technical violations were cured before the LPA left the facility.<sup>4</sup>

On the same date the LPA met with a Seneca administrator to close an incident report from March 2022. After conducting interviews into the incident, “[T]here were no Title 22 deficiencies cited.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Data**

The Commission was advised that data is being gathered by Resource Development Associates (RDA) to demonstrate the efficacy of this facility. However, RDA’s data is not yet available. Also, when a report is received, it will only be qualitative data, determined through hosting focus groups of internal and external stakeholders, on their satisfaction with the facility.

For now, SSA’s Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) is in the first phase of data analysis, beginning with data that are already being collected from the programs currently in operation. ORE is also gathering cohort data to provide a synthesis of this information and identify any trends. According to ORE their evaluation uses a longitudinal cohort model, comparing a group of children who entered foster care between July 1 and September 30, 2021 (Cohort 1) with those who entered one year prior, July 1 to September 30, 2020 (Baseline). Cohort 1 included children who were cared for at the Welcoming Center, while the Baseline included children cared for at the Keiki Center prior to the Welcoming Center becoming operational.

This data looked at a cohort of only 41 children and concluded that “[P]reliminary data has shown that there are positive outcomes in the short term since the Welcoming Center’s inception in 2021. [T]he average number of days a child stayed at the Keiki Center in the Baseline Cohort (4.5 days) was five times as many days when compared to the number of days a child in Cohort 1 stayed at the Welcoming Center (.84 days). And [T]he average number of days a child overstayed was nearly eight times as many days at the Keiki Center in the Baseline Cohort (14.1 days) compared to the Welcoming Center in Cohort 1 (1.8 days).”<sup>6</sup>

However, the data regarding overstays did not point out at least one very long-term resident at the Welcoming Center and was silent on the adolescents staying at the scattered sites. (See discussion of scattered sites below.) Thus, while the Welcoming Center program may be

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<sup>4</sup> Facility evaluation Report, 5/25/2022

<https://www.cclld.dss.ca.gov/transparencyapi/api/FacilityReports?facNum=435390025&inx=3>

<sup>5</sup> Facility evaluation Report, 5/25/2022

<https://www.cclld.dss.ca.gov/transparencyapi/api/FacilityReports?facNum=435390025&inx=4>

<sup>6</sup> DFCS Continuum of Care Quarterly Report, May 2022

providing youth with a better experience than the county-run shelters, there is no data at this time to support or negate an improved outcomes or to discern a trend.

The JJC has continued to request that the County keep and provide data on the outcome trends of this, and other, programmatic changes. While many changes have occurred in practice over the last eighteen months, it is difficult to assess whether they have achieved the stated goals of keeping families together while providing for the safety and well-being of the children referred to the County.

The numbers, however, do reflect the substantial drop in children being taken into protective custody during the July-September 2021 period. The reduction of children coming into protective custody has continued until the present, with only 40 children coming into protective custody from January through May 2022. This reduction continues, while there has been no reduction in the number of children referred to the Child Abuse and Neglect Center (CANC).

### **Scattered Sites**

While Seneca's contract with DFCS does provide various levels of specialized foster care, under the County's Continuum of Care, these homes are generally full and not available to accept youth in less than 24 hours from the Welcoming Center as was originally planned. In order to move youth out of TWC in a timely manner, the County has continued to operate a series of scattered sites for youth for whom a placement cannot be found in a day or two. This has greatly reduced the number of youth who overstay 24 hours at the receiving center (now TWC).<sup>7</sup>

The number of scattered sites fluctuates depending on the number of children placed in them at any time. The sites are staffed by DFCS employees, many of whom have years of experience working with high-acuity needs youth. When there are not youth in the sites, these individuals have other duties assigned to them. In recent months two to three sites have been in use.

The JJC has visited several of the scattered sites in the past and found them to be physically appropriate for the housing of youth.<sup>8</sup> However, 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 a day 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. The hope is that the youth will stay in the site for only several days, but some youth have stayed for several months. While this is a very small percentage of the youth who are in care, a better and more permanent solution needs to be found for these high-acuity-needs youth.

As the scattered sites are not licensed, DFCS has submitted applications for Transitional Shelter Care Facilities (TSCF) license for the current scattered site home locations. This will transition the current satellite homes into licensed TSCFs consistent with California's Continuum of Care Reform. While having these homes licensed is desirable, the state design for placements still will

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<sup>7</sup> DFCS Continuum of Care, Quarterly Report (Mar. 2022), <https://socialservices.sccgov.org/sites/g/files/exjcpb701/files/documents/COCS-quarterly-report-March-2022.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Dependency System: Receiving, Assessment, and Intake Functions Report and Recommendations, <https://www.sccourt.org/documents/jjc/2020/CCC%20REPORT-FINAL.pdf>



limit placement in the TSCF to 3 days. While this will allow some youth to be placed in an appropriate home like setting, there is still a small population of youth who presently stay much longer.

As many of the youth who spend time in the scattered sites are children in need of intensive mental health services, DFCS has also applied for a Short-Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP). The proposed STRTP home will allow for foster youth assessed as needing a higher level of care to be placed immediately. Currently, there are no local STRTPs. A STRTP operated by the County will provide specialized care for up to two youth. For those youth placed into the proposed STRTP, the timeframe expectation for transitioning to a less restrictive placement is six to nine months. DFCS also reports that they are in the process of expanding their capacity to place youth in other specialized foster homes.

Again, the JJC's concern, looking at the number of children who have remained at the scattered sites over the last year, is that this may not be enough capacity to meet the needs of all youth in County care. The unmet need for this specialized care has been the subject of earlier JJC reports. (See FN 8)

### **JJC Equity and Justice Statement**

Children of color are disproportionately represented in the dependency system. Of the 1,176 children receiving DFCS services in May 2022, 87.34%, were children of color. These children are being disproportionately damaged by the societal circumstances that result in system involvement, and they are disproportionately damaged by the insufficiency of optimal placements.<sup>9</sup>

### **Commendations and Recommendations**

#### **Commendations**

The Juvenile Justice Commission commends DFCS for their continued efforts to provide the type of placement necessary for youth who, due to their high needs, are in placement in non-family home settings for extended periods of time.

The Juvenile Justice Commission commends Seneca for providing a home-like environment where youth brought into care can feel safe and secure. Despite many challenges, Seneca has opened a new program with management that has been consistent and stable.

#### **Recommendations**

Despite DFCS's efforts, the scattered sites remain unlicensed. Any placement used by the Department should be licensed.

As stated in its previous report, the JJC continues to recommend an increase in the availability of placements for our high-acuity youth, by increasing the number of STRTP and intensive treatment resource family homes.

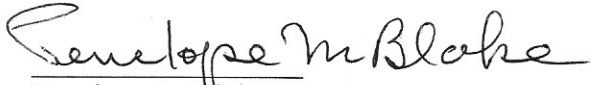
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<sup>9</sup>Department of Family and Children's Service May 2022 Fact Sheet, [https://socialservices.sccgov.org/sites/g/files/exjcpb701/files/documents/factsheet\\_202205.pdf](https://socialservices.sccgov.org/sites/g/files/exjcpb701/files/documents/factsheet_202205.pdf)

**Approved by the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission on July 12, 2022**



Victoria Burton Burke, Commission Chair



Penelope M Blake, Continuum of Care Committee Chair

## Appendix

### Welcoming Center Organization Chart.

