

Juvenile Justice Commission County of Santa Clara

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Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission Inspection Report

Bill Wilson Center – Quetzal House Group Home May 2010

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 4, 2010, The Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) conducted an announced visit of Quetzal House for the purpose of a routine inspection pursuant to the State of California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 229.5. Quetzal House is an adolescent group home for girls owned and operated by the Bill Wilson Center, a non-profit corporation. This home is licensed by the State of California Social Services Department as a Level 12 group home for girls aged 11- 17 with a maximum capacity of 8. Quetzal House has operated for approximately twenty years and has been at its present location in Mountain View for three years. Four Commissioners visited Quetzal House, at which time interviews were conducted with the Bill Wilson Director of Residential Services, the Quetzal House Program Manager, one of the home's Residential Counselors, and the residents. In addition, the Commissioners inspected the physical property. The findings and observations of the inspection and interviews are detailed in the following report.

II. POPULATION

At the time of the May 4th visit, there were 3 girls, ages 13, 16 and 17 living at Quetzal House. This is significantly below the capacity of 8. When questioned regarding the population it was remarked that Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) has been making an effort to keep families together, and to find relatives with whom to place children, leaving fewer children assigned to group homes. In addition, previous Quetzal House residents have graduated to transitional housing which allows for a more independent living experience. The Director noted that Quetzal House is not considered a long term placement but rather a place where youth can stabilize before moving to a more permanent, less restrictive placement. In the last year

an ethnically diverse total of 19 girls have been placed at Quetzal House and the average stay is between three to six months but some have stayed as long as a year.

Two of the current residents are dependency placements and one is an emergency placement. Prior to the time at which a new resident is placed at Quetzal House by DFCS, a pre-placement interview is conducted and the needs of the potential new resident, as well as any safety issues, are evaluated. The impact of the new resident on the current group home population is likewise assessed. Quetzal House has the right to refuse a placement but rarely does. Its mission is to provide a stable, home-like environment and counseling for girls who exhibit high risk behavior such as truancy, who are chronic runaways, or who have failed in previous placements. These youth are likely to have mental health problems (e.g. anxiety, depression, post traumatic stress disorder or bi-polar disorder) as the result of trauma or abuse in their past.

The residents have Social Workers and Child Advocates, whom they see regularly, and all have legal representation through Legal Advocates for Children and Youth (LACY).

A girl graduates out of the program following a long period of transition planning by a team that includes the Program Manager, Counselors, Social Worker and the child. It is only by an approved licensing exception that a girl is allowed to stay in the house after her 18th birthday. This can happen if the girl is waiting for a housing referral or if she has not yet graduated from high school but can show that she will before she is 19.

The plan is always that the girls will develop skills to prepare them to live in an independent setting as a young adult.

III. STAFFING

The Program Manager has been at Quetzal House for four years. Her main responsibility is managing the group home. Her other responsibilities include counseling and case management. Her educational background is a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology. Her working hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., but she is on call 24/7.

There are six full-time Residential Counselors at the home. Their responsibilities include supervision, activity planning, enforcing house rules, supporting the residents' treatment plans, and maintaining the facility. They are required to have a Bachelor's Degree. Most of their degrees are in Social Work or Psychology. One Counselor has a Master's Degree. Their hours are 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. If needed, sometimes they work from 1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

There is a Counselor who provides overnight coverage from 11 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. and has similar qualifications to the Residential Counselors. The overnight Counselor supervises students through the night, reviews files, inventories food and performs some

housekeeping tasks. The overnight Counselor is a long term employee having been there for six years.

In addition to their college degrees, these counselors receive on-the-job and in-service training. Before they begin working, they receive forty hours of orientation. These hours include in-service training on mandated reporting, crisis management and shadowing someone who is doing the same work they will do. Counselors must have twenty hours of Continuing Education classes a year.

IV. FACILITY

Quetzal House is a detached two-story home located in a tree-lined residential neighborhood about two blocks east of downtown Mountain View. Most of the single family residences on the street are well maintained. The staff said they have a very good relationship with the neighbors. They have participated in block parties and there have never been any problems.

Both the front and rear yards have well-maintained lawns and borders. There is a ramp in the rear of the house for wheel chair access.

The ground floor of the house contains the main entrance, the living and dining rooms, the kitchen, the staff office, a bathroom, one bedroom and the laundry area. The rooms were light, airy and comfortably furnished.

In the kitchen, there was a bowl of fresh fruit, the cupboards were well-organized and well-stocked, as was the refrigerator. Menus were posted. Commissioners were told that the residents accompany the Counselors when they go to the grocery store. They sometimes help with food preparation, and on “cultural nights” the girls demonstrate how to make specialties from their cultures.

The second floor has the 3 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, and a counseling room. Currently each girl has her own bedroom. The rooms were simply furnished and clean.

Quetzal House has a finished basement that is used for storing supplies and emergency food stores. On occasion, the basement room is used for group activities.

No safety or health concerns were noted during the physical inspection.

V. EDUCATION AND PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Currently, there are three children living at the group home. Their ages are: 17, 16 and 13. The 17-year-old has a learning disability and is a junior in a continuation high school in San Jose. She has an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The 16-year-old, a

sophomore, is attending a high school located in the northeast part of Santa Clara County due to special learning needs that the neighborhood school district could not address when she first arrived. As a result, the neighborhood school district transports this student to her school. She has an IEP. The 13-year-old is attending 8th grade at the neighborhood middle school and is working at grade level in her academic subjects. The group home's staff transports the 16- and 13-year-old students to and from school.

The residents receive help with homework at Quetzal, if necessary. They also have access to a computer. In the case of the students with IEPs, the Program Manager maintains contact with school personnel as needed.

Currently, the students do not participate in extracurricular activities at their schools. However, the oldest student does participate in choir during the school day.

The Program Manager told us the students participated in several recreational activities. The group home purchased a Y membership so the girls are able to participate in swimming or aerobic activities. They have gone ice skating, and discount tickets were available to them so they could see a Sharks game and attend PG13 movies and other events.

Residents at the home have worked at various locations including a daycare center, Togo's, Marshall's and Safeway. A percentage of the money they earn (30%) is put into a savings account for them.

VI. MEDICAL SERVICES

All residents are taken for physical examinations and immunizations when they first come to Quetzal House. The residents receive routine medical care at Valley Medical Center or from the physician at the County's Receiving Center. They receive dental care at Valley Medical Center. The Residential Counselors supervise the taking of medication, and all medication is kept in a locked cabinet in the office. If a child needs urgent medical care, the Program Manager is notified, and the child is taken to Valley Medical Center.

A focus of this year's Juvenile Justice Commission inspections is the reproductive health issues faced by youth in the court system. Commissioners asked if the residents of Quetzal House have access to reproductive health information. The Commissioners were told that the girls participate in a variety of groups that discuss topics that include reproductive health. They are: "Power through Choices," "Power," a Girl Scout program entitled "Got Choices," and a national program entitled "Let's Talk." Each program teaches the importance of making good decisions. The Commissioners were told that the girls feel comfortable talking with the Counselors about reproductive health. When a child comes to Quetzal House their birth control needs are assessed. An appointment is made at Planned Parenthood for counseling so they understand their options. Pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease (STD), and human immunodeficiency

virus (HIV) testing is done. The decision on contraception, should the question arise, is made by the youth and her physician. If youth choose to have a 3-month birth control shot they receive a \$50 cash incentive each time.

VII. MENTAL HEALTH

A mental health assessment is done prior to admission to the group home. A psychiatrist at the Bill Wilson Center assesses needs for medication. The children are generally placed at Quetzal House by the Receiving Center or by court order. Many of them have mental health issues such as PTSD or other trauma-related conditions from their early childhood environments. Youth receive individual counseling twice a week and participate in group counseling based on their needs. Each resident has an individualized mental health treatment plan.

VIII. BEHAVIOR

There are rules in the house that guide the residents' behavior. The Quetzal House has a code of conduct that is based on trust, respect and safety. The general rules are a.) keeping a safe environment; b.) respecting others and oneself; c.) asking for help and offering help to others.

Each youth washes her clothes and cleans her bedroom. The girls have chores and help staff with cooking and housekeeping tasks. There is a reasonable dress code.

There is a weekly allowance for youth depending on their level of participation in maintaining a clean house, participating in scheduled activities, and completing their chores. Most importantly they must meet the behavior standards of the house. There is policy to reduce their weekly allowances if they use racial slurs, verbal threats, physical threats, swearing, ignore rules etc.

The girls are not allowed to go anywhere without staff permission or staff accompaniment. No outside visitors are allowed to enter without the Manager's approval. They are allowed to talk to neighbors, but only with proper supervision. Family visits must be approved by the Social Worker. Visits are coordinated and may be supervised depending on safety concerns for the residents.

Quetzal House has been a home to many chronic runaways. Residents have on occasion left the home without permission. The first response when this occurs is for staff to go after the resident themselves, and this approach has been successful in some cases. If a child leaves, there is a protocol that is followed. The police and appropriate agencies are notified. It is only rarely that the rule-driven consequences and appropriate counseling fail to change the child's behavior. If rule-driven consequences and counseling fail, an alternative placement is identified.

The Resident Handbook includes rules that relate directly to safety. Among them are the prohibitions against weapons, drugs, alcohol, gambling, name calling, physical or verbal abuse of staff or other residents, leaving the house alone, and gang activity. Searches of purses and bags are conducted upon admission and return from off-site visits, and rooms searches may occur at any time.

The house has grievance procedures if youth have concerns, and grievances that are denied may be appealed. No grievances or complaints have been filed in the last year.

The Resident's Handbook that describes all the rules and regulations is in English. Quetzal House has staff who speak Spanish and they say they can translate the manual if the need arises. It would be advisable to prepare a Spanish version in advance.

IX. SAFETY

All of the staff members are certified in CPR every year and in First Aid every three years according to the Program Manager. Fire drills are held on a monthly basis and there are "safety meetings" between the staff and residents to explain procedures in the event of an emergency. Quetzal House has an emergency disaster plan and an evacuation plan. These guidelines are posted throughout Quetzal House in conspicuous places as well as emergency telephone numbers. The Fire Department does an annual inspection of Quetzal House and recently conducted an inspection and issued a Fire Safety Permit. There are fire extinguishers located in all three levels of the house (the basement and the first and second floors). In addition, there is a fire pull box, and there are smoke detectors in every room. On every floor, there are diagrams of fire escape routes.

X. FEEDBACK FROM YOUTH

The Commissioners spoke with all three residents of Quetzal House. One girl remarked that she very much liked living there because the staff was so caring. There was always someone to talk to and all of the Counselors were very, very good. One girl mentioned that she won't run away from the house because she would not want the Counselors to worry about her. When asked about the handbook, one of the girls said that she was given a copy the day she arrived and the Counselors went over it with her immediately.

Quetzal House is located several blocks from downtown Mountain View. The girls told us that on weekends they walk to the downtown area with staff. There is also a movie night where the Counselors and residents go to the movies.

All of the girls said that they were happy with the food that was provided, and they liked having the ability to suggest meals. One of the girls said that she would like to be a Social worker or a Counselor when she gets older.

None of the girls had any complaints or even any suggestions for improvement. They spoke about the groups that they participate in and said that they helped a lot.

XI. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

1. Quetzal House Resident's Handbook, which includes among other things, Program/House Rules, an outline on chores and a daily checklist, the grievance procedure and form, and an explanation of the Level System and a listing of Personal Rights.
2. Fire and Life Safety Permit, dated 3/8/2010. Expiration date 5/1/2011.
3. State of California Department of Social Services Group Home License
4. City of Mountain Business License # 46770 with expiration date of 12/31/2010.
5. Emergency Disaster Plan for Child Care Center – Bill Wilson Center Quetzal House

XII. COMMENDATIONS

1. Quetzal House should be commended for providing “contract” opportunities for the girls to meet personal goals. This teaches responsibility and accountability and provides youth-defined rewards.
2. Staff should be commended for the creating a safe and caring environment, as expressed by the girls themselves.
3. Quetzal House should be commended for providing so many group counseling opportunities for the girls through the Bill Wilson Center.
4. Staff should be commended for maintaining contact with program graduates.
5. Staff should be commended for maintaining and rotating out an impressive emergency food supply.

XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Staff should be commended for providing a clear, well-written, firm but fair, caring resident handbook. However, we would like to see it translated into Spanish.

XIV. SUMMARY

Based on the information gathered during this inspection, the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission reports that Quetzal House has met the standards and requirements for a group home.

Approved by the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission on June 1, 2010.

Pam Serrano, JJC Chairperson

Date

Mary Ryan, Inspection Committee Chair

Date