

Monitors' Visit to St Jude's Ranch for Children, General Residential Operation (GRO) / ID #200105

Facility Description:

St. Jude's Ranch for Children (SJRC) is located at 1400 Ridge Creek Lane in Bulverde, TX. St. Jude's is comprised of four cottages that house youth, an administration building, and one house that functions as an on-campus school charter school. Upgrades to recreational grounds and equipment had been donated to SJRC prior to the Monitors' site visit.

SJRC is licensed to serve up to forty-five children, both male and female, ages zero through seventeen. The program provides multiple services including foster care, transitional living services, assessment services, and respite care.

Facility Standards Compliance and Abuse or Neglect Findings

The monitoring team reviewed SJRC's standards compliance history from May 1, 2018 to May 1, 2020, revealing that the State evaluated 116 Standards. The State issued six citations for non-compliance and provided twenty-three instances of Technical Assistance (TA).

The State did not issue any confirmed findings of abuse or neglect between May 1, 2018 and May 1, 2020.

Monitoring Visit

Awake-Night Visit

The Monitors conducted a two-and-a-half-day, on-site visit to SJRC in late January 2020. The monitoring team arrived unannounced at approximately 11:00 pm and began the site visit with a forty-five minute awake-night supervision walk-through. Access to the facility was obtained after several failed attempts to make contact with SJRC staff. The monitoring team arrived at a locked gate to enter the campus, which required an access code to open. Signs on the gate included contact numbers, which the monitoring team called but were unable to make contact. The monitoring team then tried to call the emergency contact listed in the CLASS system on the facility page. After about several calls over ten to fifteen minutes, two staff members appeared and walked towards the gate with flashlights. The monitoring team identified themselves and informed SJRC staff of the purpose of the visit. The staff opened the gate and admitted the monitoring team.

The monitoring team divided into two groups and immediately began to tour the four cottages and interview SJRC's awake-night staff. The awake-night staff present in the cottages provided a walk-through of their assigned house, during which staff articulated and demonstrated how they perform 30-minute bed checks and document the checks on a pre-timed log. Staff reported that youth who need close supervision are either checked more frequently or sleep on the couch located in the living room. Cottages appeared clean and orderly. Two cottages, St. Elizabeth

and St. Christopher, consist of a living area, dining and kitchen area, and three bedrooms. Two of the bedrooms share a bathroom located between the bedrooms and accessible through a door in the bedrooms (Jack-and-Jill style). Each of these cottages were housing six children the night of the visit. Cottages A and B are adjoined but operated as separate cottages. These two cottages consist of a main living area, a kitchen and dining area, and five bedrooms. Each bedroom is equipped for two children, and each bedroom has a private attached bathroom. Cottages A and B each were housing eight children the night of the visit.

Monitoring Team Interviews and File Reviews

On site, the monitoring team reviewed:

- Twenty children's files, and
- Twenty-four employee files.

On site, the monitoring team conducted:

- Eleven PMC child interviews,
- Ten staff interviews,
- Four awake-night staff interviews, and
- One administrator interview.

Ten of the eleven children interviewed expressed they like living at SJRC, and one responded that it was "okay." Additionally, all eleven children reported feeling physically safe living on the campus and reported that there is no one on the campus who makes them feel unsafe. Four children reported there are sometimes fights among children on the campus. None of the children reported being or seeing another child hit or spanked by staff. None of the children reported being restrained by staff while residing at SJRC. The majority of children interviewed (nine) were familiar with the Foster Care Bill of Rights. Ten of the children were aware of how to call the Abuse and Neglect Hotline and the Foster Care Ombudsman.

The majority of children reported they attend the on-campus charter school, operated by University of Texas Charter Schools. A few of the children reported they attend one of the Boerne ISD campuses.

The file reviews and interviews revealed the following trends:

1. Placement Summary Reports: The monitoring team only found Placement Summary reports in two of the twenty-four child files. The Placement Summary report is one method DFPS communicates a child's sexual victimization and child sexual aggression history information to a facility when the State places a child. The interview with the administrator revealed this document is often not provided by the State.
2. Shared Restrooms: Although no children expressed concern or problems, the monitors noted during the tour that some of the bedrooms have a shared restroom (Jack-and Jill). These restroom arrangements have been found to be an opportunity for children to be victimized by other children in other GROs.

The monitoring team did not identify any instances of abuse or neglect or other standards violations requiring a report to SWI.