
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Background and Perspective

The Inspections and Evaluations (I&E) Division of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began an inspection of the District of Columbia (District) Department of Human Services (DHS), Youth Services Administration (YSA) in April 2003. YSA is the District's primary juvenile justice agency, and is responsible for a diverse portfolio of service providers and facilities. Consequently, the inspection is being conducted in two parts. Part One and this report cover YSA management, administrative services, and all operations at the Oak Hill Youth Center (OHYC) in Laurel, Maryland. Part Two will cover the remaining major components of YSA and will be reported on separately.

According to its 2001 annual report, YSA provides daily pre-trial and pre-dispositional secure and non-secure detention services to approximately 250 youths charged with delinquency. Each year, YSA also provides secure confinement, residential placements, and aftercare supervision and services for approximately 600 youths. The mission of YSA is to empower youths entrusted to its care to become lawful, competent, and productive citizens. YSA performs its mission by:

- providing an integrated system of care, custody, and services involving youth, families, and community;
- holding youths accountable in the least restrictive environment;
- establishing and implementing an individual service plan for each youth which assists in competency development, rehabilitation, and reintegration; and
- promoting public peace and community safety.

YSA is overseen by an Administrator (A/YSA) and has approximately 480 full-time employees. YSA's fiscal year (FY) 2003 operating budget was approximately \$53 million, and consisted of \$39 million in appropriated funds, and \$14 million in federal grants, intra-District funding, and social services block grants.

The inspection team (team) found many YSA employees to be highly motivated and dedicated to carrying out YSA's mission. Unfortunately, however, the team found very high employee turnover, particularly at the highest levels of management; poor management of operations and personnel; a significant number of youths testing positive for illegal substances while in YSA's custody; significant safety and security problems; a lack of promulgated, written policies and procedures; and very low employee morale. The team also found indications of widespread waste and possible fraud, a lack of adequate checks and balances, and a lack of accountability for the use of YSA resources. The team found no significant deficiencies in the education and medical units at OHYC. In fact, the OHYC Academy, which comes under the District of Columbia Public School System, appears to be very well managed and operating successfully.

INTRODUCTION

Scope and Methodology

OIG inspections comply with standards established by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, and pay particular attention to the quality of internal control.

The inspection focused on the management and operations of key areas, including compliance with District of Columbia Superior Court mandates, security, transportation, culinary services, medical services, social services, and case management services. The team also reviewed YSA's management of environmental health and safety procedures at OHYC. The team reviewed best practices recommended by the American Correctional Association (ACA),⁶ and the operations of secure youth centers in surrounding jurisdictions. The team conducted 123 interviews, issued an anonymous and confidential employee survey, and observed all work areas and key work processes. This report contains 45 findings and 95 recommendations.

The Inspector General (IG) also issued seven Management Alert Reports (MARs) on the following matters that the team found required the immediate attention of YSA management and District of Columbia government officials:

- employees operating government vehicles without valid state driver's licenses and government motor vehicle identification cards and YSA vehicles being operating with expired inspection stickers;
- serious breaches of security at entrances at OHYC due to a lack of adequate search procedures and the employment of security guards without completed criminal background checks;
- a lack of sufficient and reliable communication equipment which threatens overall safety and security and impairs the ability of Youth Corrections Officers (YCOs), transportation officers, treatment team leaders, and social services representatives to perform their jobs effectively;
- deficiencies in the female housing unit that impair the ability of YCOs to effectively maintain the safety and security of residents and to ensure their own safety as well. These deficiencies included a lack of proper security monitoring equipment, insufficient perimeter lighting, a lack of proper communication equipment, and

⁶ The team consulted "Standards for Juvenile Corrections Facilities," which was published February 2003 by ACA in cooperation with the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections (CAC). ACA and CAC are private, nonprofit organizations that administer the only national accreditation program for all components of adult and juvenile corrections. Their purpose is to promote improvement in the management of correctional agencies through the administration of a voluntary accreditation program and the ongoing development and revision of relevant, useful standards. Founded in 1870, the ACA is the oldest and largest international correctional association in the world. The standards set forth by the ACA provide administrators of juvenile facilities the opportunity to develop a plan for upgrading facilities and procedures in accordance with nationally recognized and respected benchmarks. The juvenile standards assist administrators in working effectively with the courts, legislatures, and the public. The juvenile correctional field is proceeding in a direction that provides more humane conditions in institutions, ensures the safety of staff and offenders, and provides programs and services necessary to assist juveniles in returning to society.

INTRODUCTION

- failure to provide all YCOs with keys to resident rooms, in the event of an emergency;
- serious fire safety deficiencies, including inaccessible fire extinguishers, a lack of fire drills, and a lack of posted evacuation plans;
 - illegal substances, such as marijuana and phencyclidine (PCP), smuggled into OHYC on a continual basis; and
 - documentation of 28 vacant and abandoned buildings at OHYC, many of which are unsecured and have been entered and vandalized.

Although most YSA employees were cooperative, responsive, and knowledgeable, the team found some managers less than helpful in providing requested information and explaining or clarifying OHYC operations.

Compliance and Follow-Up

The OIG inspection process includes follow-up with inspected agencies on findings and recommendations. Compliance forms with findings and recommendations will be sent to YSA along with this report of inspection (ROI). The OIG/I&E Division will coordinate with YSA on verifying compliance with recommendations in this report over an established time period. In some instances, follow-up inspection activities and additional reports may be required.