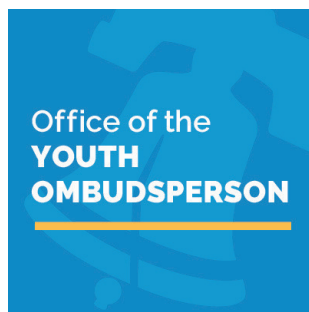




Office of the
Youth Ombudsman
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW





2023 YEAR IN REVIEW





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Looking Forward

A Letter from the Youth Ombudsperson

It has been an exciting inaugural year as the City of Philadelphia's first-ever Youth Ombudsperson of the newly created Office of the Youth Ombudsperson (OYO). In alignment with his commitment to ensuring the safety of Philadelphia youth in child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health residential placement facilities, Mayor Jim Kenney created this office via executive order in November of 2022. The office was established to review the effectiveness of the City of Philadelphia's oversight of placement facilities that receive city funding.

I started on April 3, 2023. In the first 90 days, I worked on a complaint, met with leadership within city departments to begin the collaboration process, met with Child and Youth Ombudspersons across the country to learn industry best practices, connected with local advocates about the latest issues in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems, engaged with media outlets interested in covering the mission of the office, launched our website to share important content and spread the word about the office, and developed and implemented a hiring plan.

I welcomed our Administrative Assistant in July and our Ombuds team, a Deputy Youth Ombudsperson and two Associate Youth Ombudspersons, in September of 2023. Together we launched our social media, created mission, vision, and race equity statements that fuel our work, developed internal oversight and investigation protocols, worked with city agencies to develop protocols for interdepartmental collaboration, partnered with youth and advocates to create our Know Your Rights trainings and surveys, published important substantive blog posts on timely issues relevant to our work, and so much more.

I am so proud of what we accomplished this year and know that there is much more work to be done. I am hopeful that with continued collaboration with city agencies, youth with lived experience, and community partners, we will continue to both promote and ensure the safety and well-being of youth in congregate care.

I look forward to expanding the team and growing our resources to continue to meet the large but necessary mandate of this office outlined in the mayor's executive order and called for by youth and advocates across the city.

Oversight provides the checks and balances necessary to make sure governments operate with efficiency and integrity to best serve the public. It is both my personal and professional promise to continue serving within the truest definition of the word.



TRACIE JOHNSON, ESQ
Youth Ombudsperson

BUILDING THE OFFICE

02

History of the OYO

Philadelphia has a history of youth facing harm and rights violations in residential placements, which encompasses foster care group homes, juvenile detention facilities, and Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs). In June of 2018, a Youth Residential Task Force was created to make recommendations on how to reduce reliance on youth residential placements, as well as improve the safety and quality of placements. This task force was comprised of stakeholders in the child welfare, behavioral health, juvenile justice, and education fields.

In November of 2019, the Youth Residential Task Force published a report with 19 recommendations with the stated goals of ensuring that youth: (1) enter placement in fewer numbers due to successful community-based alternatives; (2) stay in placements close to home, in smaller settings, whenever possible; (3) have their personal safety protected while in placement; (4) benefit from quality care and full family support during and after placement; and (5) receive appropriate education services while in placement. One of their specific recommendations was to establish an independent youth services Ombudsman office to “receive and investigate concerns from youth and families about safety or services.”

In 2020 and 2021, youth advocates from Juvenile Law Center reinforced this recommendation when they presented testimony to Philadelphia City Council and the Philadelphia Department of Human Services. They spoke of the harm that they and their peers had experienced in residential placements and explained that their ability to report these harms or prevent further harms was limited. They expressed that an Ombudsman office could allow for transparency, provide a direct access point for youth in residential placements, and hold systems accountable for when youth are hurt, neglected, or unsafe.

Timeline of the OYO

June 2018

Youth Residential Task Force established

November 2019

Youth Residential Task Force published report with recommendations

2020/2021

JLC Youth Advocates shared their placement experiences with City Council

Early 2021

Councilmember Helen Gym introduced legislation to create the OYO

November 2022

Mayor Jim Kenney signed the executive order that created the OYO within the Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

April 2023

Tracie Johnson, Youth Ombudsperson, was hired

September 2023

Additional OYO staff joined team



Juvenile Law Center Youth Advocate Testimonials



“ At the juvenile placement facility I was in, one person a day would be restrained. I’ve also seen youth in shackles, If kids don’t have a safe way to share a concern, things are going to escalate for that child in placement. When I did come back to regular schools, I felt really unprepared. I was behind. When I was in placement I could tell the work wasn’t on grade level. Some kids would speak up and ask why we were going worksheets. Those that spoke up weren’t taken seriously. An Ombudsperson could help improve education for youth in placement. ” - **Angela**

“There’s no real mental health services or support when youth get there. It doesn’t solve our problems. It creates more. Instead, it seems more like a system more about getting money for having kids in placement than actually using the funds to help the young person. ”

- **Anahi**

“While in a group home, there were times when I did speak up about the violence and mistreatment, and nothing changed, The mistreatment and violence continued to happen. Many adults didn’t hate me, maybe, but they disliked me because they disagreed that I was speaking the truth, and I was standing up for what was right... I wanted someone who would always defend me. When I realized that no one was listening to me, I lost hope and was silent.” - **Duane**

“The placement prescribed me medicine as a child that was too high in dosage and made me lightheaded, dizzy and made me throw up. I told this to my Philly CUA worker who then told me the medicine was for my own good. I could have used this office when I was over medicated, and when I didn’t receive appropriate support in placement, and when I left. No child or youth should have to do this alone, but I did. I was a kid. I deserved better.”

- **Aqilah**

“ While I was in juvenile placement, I experienced discrimination because I’m a LGBTQIA youth. Discrimination and mistreatment in these facilities is a constant problem that no person or child should ever have. Sometimes it happens because of our race, orientation, or sexuality and no one ever really knows. ”

- **Ishale**



Onboarding the OYO Team

The OYO is comprised of a Youth Ombudsperson, two Associate Youth Ombudspersons, and an Administrative Assistant.



Tracie Johnson, Esq.
Youth Ombudsperson

Tracie Johnson (she/her) is the Youth Ombudsperson for the City of Philadelphia. Tracie has been the Youth Ombudsperson since 2023, previously serving as a Staff Attorney on the Youth Justice Project sponsored by the Hive at Community Legal Services (CLS). Tracie first worked with CLS as a certified legal intern on the Youth Justice Project and later as an Equal Justice Works Fellow, where she worked to create career pathways for women and girls of color who face barriers to employment and higher education because of their juvenile and adult criminal records. Prior to law school, Tracie worked as a Communications Associate at Philadelphia VIP through the Philly Fellows Program. She then volunteered in the legal intake department of the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania. She also worked as a Community Outreach Coordinator at a communications and design firm, Social Impact Studios. Tracie received the Philadelphia Bar Association Public Interest Section Law Student Award for her law school in 2017. Upon graduating, she received the Sarah J. Love Memorial Award, the Henry Kent Anderson Human Services Award, and the Integrated Trial Advocacy Program Award. Tracie earned her J.D. from Temple James E. Beasley School of Law in 2018. She received her B.A. from Ursinus College in 2013. Tracie is a member of the Pennsylvania Bar.



Ciara Sheerin, MA, LMSW
Associate Ombudsperson

Ciara Sheerin (she/her) is an Associate Youth Ombudsperson at the OYO. Ciara has been in this role since 2023. Prior to joining the OYO, she was the Youth Justice Policy Analyst at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, where she worked collaboratively to develop reform-oriented policy initiatives and public reports. Prior to that position, Ciara worked as a mental health social worker at the Philadelphia Department of Prisons. While obtaining her MSW, she interned with the Goldring Reentry Initiative, where she worked with adults during their reentry transition from the Philadelphia jails back to their communities. Ciara received her Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Arts in Criminal Justice from Temple University, and her Master of Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Criminal Justice at Temple. She is a Licensed Social Worker in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



Gabi Haeuber (she/her) is an Associate Youth Ombudsperson at the OYO. Gabi has been in this role since 2023. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice in 2023 with a Master of Social Work, specializing in social policy and child welfare. During this program, Gabi interned at a Community Umbrella Agency, the Youth Justice Project at Community Legal Services, and with the Systems Change team at the Center for the Study of Social Policy. Gabi was also a fellow and co-development director of the University of Pennsylvania's Youth Advocacy Project, an interdisciplinary fellowship providing mitigation and reentry supports for young people prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system in Philadelphia. Prior to receiving her MSW, Gabi worked as a Legal Assistant at Covington & Burling, LLP. She received her B.A. from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Gabi Haeuber, MSW
Associate Ombudsperson

OYO Support Staff

The OYO support staff includes Izhanae Williams (she/her), the OYO Administrative Assistant.



Mission, Vision, & Race Equity Statements

Mission Statement

The OYO is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of Philadelphia's youth in child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health residential placement facilities. The OYO does this through impartial oversight, effective evaluation of systems and protocols, authentic partnerships with youth with lived experience and expertise, and meaningful collaboration with city agencies, youth advocacy groups, and community leaders.

Vision Statement

The OYO envisions a city where youth are free to live, learn, and grow; where youth have access to habitable housing, sustainable wages for their families, a free and appropriate education, and continued resources, stability, and social safety nets needed for them to thrive. The OYO envisions a transformative world in which the systemic social issues that often lead to child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health involvement no longer exist.

Race Equity Statement

The OYO envisions a city that meets the unique needs of youth and their families, reduces the use of youth residential placement facilities, and eradicates the underlying systemic reasons that Black and Latinx youth are disproportionately sent into placement. The OYO promotes the health, safety, and well-being of youth in placement, and addresses embedded and intersectional biases and stereotypes that put Black and Latinx youth at increased risk of experiencing rights violations while in placement.

Through strategic partnership with youth, advocates, and city leaders, the OYO will implement evidence-based solutions that allow youth to be both safe and successful in their communities. This collective action will ensure that the City of Philadelphia is a place where all youth, regardless of their backgrounds or life experiences, have access to the rights, opportunities, and advantages that every Philadelphian deserves.



Authority & Jurisdiction of the OYO

The OYO responds to complaints regarding the safety and well-being of Philadelphia youth in residential placements, commonly known as “congregate care” in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems. These settings include group homes, psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTFs), non-PRTF institutions, state-run detention centers for youth who are delinquent only, and emergency shelters for youth who are dependent only.

The OYO’s oversight is limited to residential placement facilities that are licensed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and are operated by, contracted with, or under the regulatory authority of the City via the Office of Children and Families (OCF), the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS), and/or Community Behavioral Health (CBH).

The OYO looks to ensure compliance with Chapter 3800 of the Pennsylvania Legal Code. These regulations govern youth rights and protections of child residential day and treatment facilities as well as other local, state, and federal laws that apply to youth in congregate care. While our scope is limited to safety and well-being concerns involving Philadelphia youth, if a facility has systemic issues that impact Philadelphia youth, the OYO has jurisdiction.



Scope & Stages of an Investigation

After the OYO receives a complaint about an issue/concern at a congregate care facility, we promptly follow up with the complainant. We then conduct an official interview with the complainant and begin to gather evidence to understand the full extent of the complaint. We also record and track the complaint in our secure case management system.

To assess whether the complaint falls within our scope, we confirm that there is a well-being or safety issue concerning a youth in a congregate care/residential placement facility that contracts with the City of Philadelphia. Once the scope is established, we begin working with the appropriate city agency to initiate an investigation. We review facility policies, city contracts with the facility, state licenses and inspections, and more. We also identify any violations of local, state, or federal laws, statutes, and regulations.



The OYO oversees and monitors the city agencies' investigative steps. We review the city agencies' investigatory policies, procedures, practices, and performance tools, review facility data, observe meetings and interviews with staff and youth in facilities, and visit the facility in question. The OYO also evaluates the corrective actions taken by the city agencies to ensure facility compliance and provide enforcement recommendations. The OYO compiles assessments in a comprehensive evaluation report. We review observations with City leaders and share evaluations of agency protocols, as well as engage in ongoing monitoring as necessary.

OYO Protocols & Policies

The OYO team has created a Case Practices and Operating Procedures Manual to introduce the office, define its role, and encourage transparency around the office's protocols. This manual was published on the OYO website.

Additionally, the OYO team has compiled an internal OYO Employee Handbook and built protocols to guide upcoming site visits to facilities.



OYO Website

Our website launched in April of 2023 – we keep it up to date with blog posts, issue briefs, resources, trainings, public reports, and more. You can also find our online complaint form on our website.

Take a look when you have a chance!

Social Media

The OYO has several active social media accounts that launched in September of 2023, including an Instagram account and a Twitter profile.

Our social media content includes educational materials about the office, the complaint/grievance process, youth and family rights, duties of city agencies and residential placement providers, and all other matters relevant to youth experiences at residential placements.

We also proactively share resources and events that community stakeholders and partners provide. We want our social media to share positive messages and narratives that empower, prioritize, and uplift youth voice and lived expertise.

  **FOLLOW US
ONLINE!**

@PHLYouthOmbuds

Blog Posts & Issue Briefs

October Blog Post

In October, the OYO participated in Youth Justice Action Month (YJAM), which is cohosted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN), and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ). The OYO responded to this year's theme, "Justice is ___," by writing a blog post that introduced and published the OYO's Know Your Rights trainings. These trainings will be presented to youth in residential placements to empower them with the knowledge of what their rights are, who the OYO is and how we can help, and what our processes look like. More information about these trainings has been shared in the Community Education section.

December Blog Post

The OYO recognizes that the holidays can be difficult for youth in care, and in particular, youth in residential placement facilities. In response, the OYO has written a blog post that identifies these challenges and provides recommendations regarding how residential placement facilities and city/state agencies that contract with these facilities can support youth and families during the holiday season. The blog post, titled *Supporting Youth in Residential Placement During the Holidays*, explored how the holiday season can be difficult for youth in placement as it may be a reminder of memories that they will miss out on making at home this year or it could trigger some difficult memories from the holiday season at home.

As system stakeholders, we often try to support youth through traditional gift-giving, holiday parties, and meals, and while these are well intentioned, they do little to provide true support to youth in placement during this season. As such, the OYO laid out a series of recommendations ranging from day/weekend passes home to best practices for supporting youth in the facility.

December Issue Brief

The OYO plans to release a three-part issue brief series to address three immediate recommendations (the first two of which were made by the Youth Residential Task Force in their 2022 Annual Report): (1) Reducing the Use of Placements; (2) Improving the Safety, Quality, and Education of Placements; and (3) Implementing Effective Aftercare. Upon assessing the need of the community, the OYO determined that there is a substantial immediate need for resources and information about aftercare services. As such, the OYO released the first part of this issue brief series in December, called *Aftercare for Youth Returning Home from Congregate Care Facilities*. The OYO defined aftercare, outlined the scope of the problem, delved into the current aftercare methods used across the child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems, and provided recommendations that can be used to implement effective aftercare.

COMMUNITY → EDUCATION

04

Know Your Rights Trainings

The OYO has published facility-specific Know Your Rights trainings (located on the OYO website) to be presented to youth in child welfare system group homes, juvenile detention facilities, and psychiatric residential treatment facilities.

Part of the OYO's work includes ensuring that youth and families are aware of their rights inside residential placements so that they are empowered to advocate for themselves and identify allies to whom they can report rights violations. Youth have the greatest insight into what is happening inside residential placement facilities each day, so ensuring that they know their rights and can recognize when their rights are being violated is essential to the OYO's work. These Know Your Rights trainings will empower youth to take ownership over their care and treatment, as well as educate them on where to turn for help when their rights are being violated.





Stakeholder Trainings

In the new year, the OYO began facilitating trainings for families, community members, city agencies, and various additional stakeholders across the city to provide information and resources surrounding:

1. The role, mission, vision, and processes of the OYO;
2. The rights of young people in residential placements; and
3. The duties of providers & city agencies pursuant to Executive Order 5-22.

These trainings will guide and improve stakeholder engagement with the OYO, establish important connections with youth and families in the community, and allow for the exchange and development of resources. OYO staff are available for both in-person and virtual trainings.

If you're interested in having the OYO facilitate a training for your organization or office, please reach out to our office!

Someone from the OYO team will get back to you shortly to acknowledge receipt of your request and obtain specific information that will help us tailor the presentation to meet your individual needs.

COLLABORATION



Connecting with Youth Partners & Advocates, Community Stakeholders, City Agencies, and Youth Ombuds Offices

05

The OYO has been working hard to build connections with youth partners and advocates, community stakeholders, relevant city agencies, and other youth ombuds offices. Many of these offices and organizations supported the creation of the OYO and are the reason for its establishment!





Connecting with Youth Partners & Advocates

In October of 2023, we sat down with alumni and current youth advocates from Advocates for Youth Justice at Juvenile Law Center (JLC), whose tireless advocacy led to the creation of our office! They shared their experiences in placement and discussed the support and oversight that they wished had existed when they needed it most. They talked to us about the importance of affording youth the opportunity to be heard, and shared with us some recommendations for how our office can help keep youth safe. Additionally, they informed us that it is essential for the office to maintain confidentiality, participate in trauma-informed trainings, and provide multiple ways for youth to share concerns with the office. We really enjoyed our conversations with them and have made efforts to incorporate their feedback and recommendations into our practice!

We had several follow-up meetings with these youth advocates throughout November of 2023 to receive feedback on

our Youth Rights Survey, which we plan to provide to youth in facilities in the coming months. More information about these surveys has been shared in the Facility Programming section below. No members of the OYO team creating this survey have personal experiences with the facilities that we will be surveying. As such, we are leaning on the lived expertise of the JLC youth advocates to ensure that our survey questions are accessible, youth-friendly, and cover all relevant topics to allow the OYO team to get a full picture of any rights violations occurring in the facilities. Additionally, conversations with the JLC youth advocates have included discussions about the format and length of the survey, anti-retaliation measures, relationship-building with young people, and the physical space where the survey will be facilitated, such as the privacy of the space, the participation of facility staff members, and the number of young people who will take the survey at a time.



Connecting with Community Stakeholders

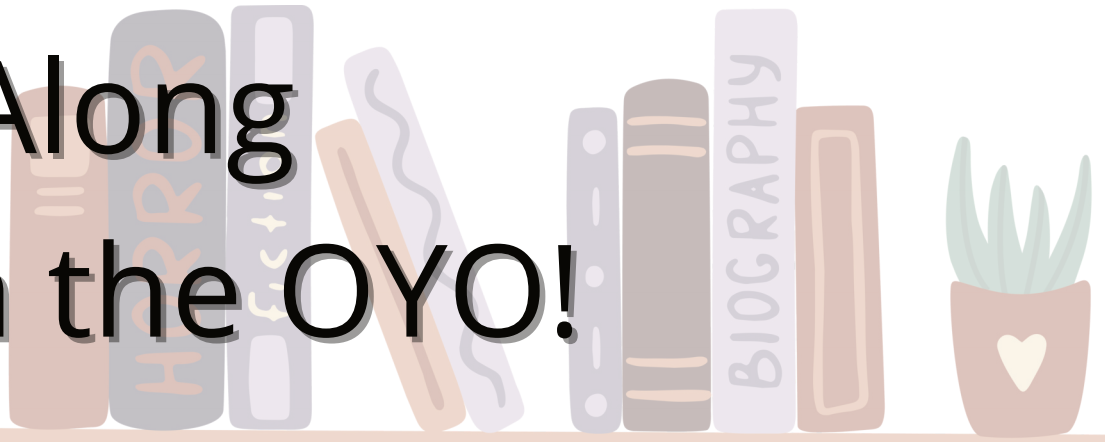
The OYO team recognizes that the office can be the most effective in accomplishing its goals and mandates by working in partnership with community stakeholders who have been engaged in this work on all levels for years. As such, the OYO has collaborated with various community stakeholders throughout the last several months to incorporate their expertise into our work. Children First, Education Law Center, and Juvenile Law Center have provided the OYO with lists of recommended questions to ask facility staff and youth during the OYO's site visits. We also asked Education Law Center to provide feedback on the education section of our Youth Rights Survey to ensure that we had a comprehensive and accurate list of questions about youth educational rights in residential placements. Our collaboration with these and other community stakeholders has been robust and will continue to grow and develop as we begin to conduct community stakeholder trainings.

Several members of the OYO team attended a Juvenile Law Center event in September of 2023 that unpacked the impact that child removal has on children and families of color. The conversation between Dorothy Roberts and Jessamine Chan centered advocacy through storytelling and the importance of authentically amplifying the voices of communities that have been hyper-surveilled and overpoliced. After the event, we had the distinct pleasure of connecting with several alumni from Advocates for Youth Justice at JLC.

On November 15 and 16, 2023, the entire OYO team attended an in-person, two-day convening at Drexel University called "Dual-System Youth: Mapping an Agenda for Research and Policy." This convening was a collaboration between Evident Change and the Drexel University Juvenile Justice Research and Reform Lab. It brought together leading researchers, experts, practitioners, funders, and individuals with lived experience at the intersection of the youth justice and child welfare systems. Participants listened to several panel discussions, including one comprised solely of folks with lived experience, and then spent the remainder of the convening in working groups to build out an actionable research agenda based on identified solutions.



Read Along with the OYO!

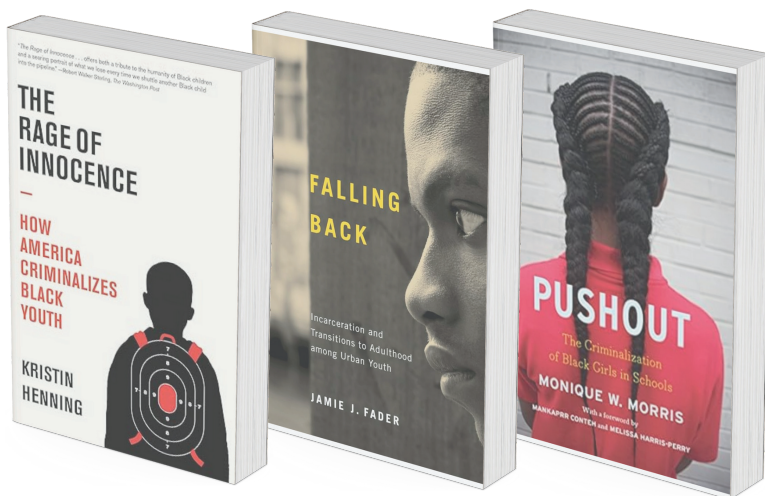


From left-right: *The School for Good Mothers* by Jessamine Chan; *Marketing Schools, Marketing Cities: Who Wins and Who Loses When Schools Become Urban Amenities* by Maia Bloomfield Cucchiara; *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World* by Dorothy Roberts

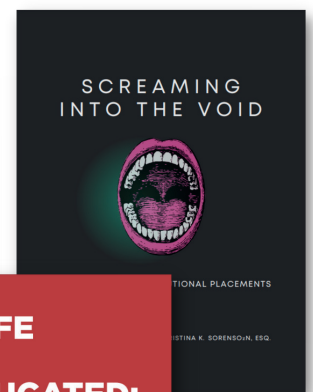
Our team is constantly learning and growing. We wanted to share some of the reports and books, both non-fiction and fiction, that are helping us do that!

Check out these reports below:

- *Screaming into the Void* (available on *Juvenile Law Center's website*)
- *Broken Bridges: How Juvenile Placements Cut Off Youth from Communities and Successful Futures* (available on *Juvenile Law Center's website*)
- *Unsafe and Uneducated: Indifference to Dangers in Pennsylvania's Residential Child Welfare Facilities* (available on *Children's Rights and Education Law Center's websites*)



From left-right: *Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth* by Kristin Henning; *Falling Back: Incarceration and Transitions to Adulthood Among Urban Youth* by Jamie Fader; *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Monique E. Morris.



Connecting with City Agencies

In May of 2023, Tracie Johnson began meeting with leadership within DHS and DBHIDS, who connected her to the performance management and quality assurance teams that audit, oversee, and evaluate providers and follow up on allegations of abuse and neglect. With the assistance of the City Law Department attorneys who helped write the Executive Order and draft the Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs), the OYO is currently working with DHS and DBHIDS to develop interdepartmental collaboration protocols that outline the process and flow of information-sharing regarding investigations and service concerns.

Once the protocols are finalized, the OYO will sign the MOUs and data-share agreements. The OYO team has also met with representatives and leadership from the Defenders, the DAO, the Courts, Probation, and more to discuss issues concerning youth in placement.

In December of 2023, the Philadelphia Office of Criminal Justice invited the OYO to facilitate a training at the new Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC). The audience was comprised of JAC police officers and Youth Support Partners from the Managing Director's Office (MDO). The presentation provided an overview of the OYO and highlighted how the office will overlap with the JAC as it relates to the continuum of services for youth who enter the juvenile justice system. The OYO views the JAC as another opportunity for youth to access community-based services and police-assisted diversion. We are excited to join the JAC Strategic Workgroup/Advisory Board and connect with youth and families who have complaints about their rights in residential placements.



Connecting with Youth Ombuds Offices

The OYO understands that this office was modeled on other youth ombuds offices across the country and believes that this history and the values upheld by ombuds offices can help to provide role definition and guidance.

According to an article* written in The Imprint in 2021, similar youth-specific ombuds offices (focusing on foster care and/or juvenile justice) have been established in approximately twenty-two states. Some states have had these offices for a decade or two, while other places, like Philadelphia, have created these offices only recently. In an effort to build on this foundation and avoid re-inventing the wheel, the OYO has been in touch with a number of Youth Ombuds in different states, including those in Texas, California, Colorado, Ohio, Florida, Michigan, and Maryland. These other offices have provided materials, guidance, and resources to the OYO team that have helped us build out the OYO's Know Your Rights presentations, Youth Rights Survey, facility visit protocols, data collection processes, and community engagement materials.

The OYO has also connected with Office of Advocacy and Reform (OAR) for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to discuss the needs of youth in congregate care across the state. The OAR is an arm of the governor's office that functions similar to an ombuds office, serving as an access point for youth and families in Pennsylvania.



The United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) lays out guidelines and best practices for all ombuds offices. As an office, the OYO strives to abide by the four guiding principles of independence, impartiality, confidentiality, and credible review. In her role as Youth Ombudsperson, Tracie Johnson attended the USOA's Annual Conference in September of 2023. She continues to attend standing meetings comprised of other USOA Youth Ombuds.

*<https://imprintnews.org/foster-care/states-create-independent-ombuds-offices/57239>



DATA COLLECTION 06

Partnering with IDEA

The Office of Integrated Data for Evidence and Action (IDEA) is a unit within the Managing Director's Office that maintains the City's integrated data system, allowing the city to link data across departments and improve the efficiency of programming and services to Philadelphians. The IDEA team has shared free data analytics tools available through the city to help the OYO team track data. The OYO is excited to request relevant data profiles from the IDEA team, create an MOU to begin making use of the team's integrated data system, and partner on future projects.



Data Tracking

The OYO tracks data from multiple sources: (1) reports directly to the OYO; (2) reports to the OYO from other city agencies; (3) population census counts from the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center; and (4) OYO survey results. The OYO's data goals include: (1) public transparency about our work; (2) tracking disparities and trends in rights violations; and (3) accountability. Ultimately, we hope that the data that we collect will help to identify prevalent disparities and other trending issues in youth serving systems, serve as a basis for recommendations for improvements, and keep the public informed about our work so that we can best serve and remain accountable to Philadelphia youth and families.



Public Transparency

The OYO plans to release data findings and trends in our annual report, to the greatest extent possible while ensuring youth deidentification under all applicable health and safety mandates. The OYO believes the public should be aware of trends that we see in complaints, such as which facilities receive many complaints, which facilities receive repeated complaints for the same issue, and which facilities receive some of the most egregious complaints.

Additionally, as will be discussed below, the OYO believes that the public should be informed about disparities in the data, such as if certain youth demographic populations are disproportionately impacted by rights violations reported to the OYO. The public should also have access to information regarding our work and the work of the agencies whose investigations we monitor and oversee, such as case timelines, actions taken, and outcomes.



Tracking Disparities & Trends

The OYO is building our data capacity from scratch with the goal of ensuring that our data captures trends and disparities through an intersectional lens. Youth serving systems are complex in nature and the data tracking of youth across these systems tends to be disjointed and lacking. For example, research and data capacity for tracking dual system youth is minimal and often non-existent. Further, while there has been movement in recent years to track disparities, data systems usually lack the ability to track intersectional disparities. For example, race and ethnicity are often tracked separately, so we may know how many youth are Latinx and how many youth are Black, but we may fail to capture Black Latinx youth.

Another example of this is that we may know how many youth identify as multiracial, but not specifically what that means, which may fail to capture disparities. This issue is prevalent across data demographics, where demographic characteristics may be presented as singular data points, rather than as intersectional identities. The OYO's data goal is to be able to present findings such as X% of our complainants from the juvenile justice system are Black-Latinx boys, or Black girls make up X% of dual child welfare-juvenile justice system youth within the OYO's caseload.

Accountability

Part of the OYO's data tracking includes tracking case timelines, steps taken, and outcomes, which will be shared in the annual report. The OYO hopes that tracking this information and making it available to the public will hold our office, as well as other city agencies, accountable for our response times, actions taken in response to complaints and founded allegations, and outcomes of cases.



07 CASE HIGHLIGHT

The OYO was contacted by the parent of a youth who was residing in a residential treatment facility under contract with Community Behavioral Health (CBH). The parent shared a number of concerns, including that the facility had punitively limited her access to her child, failed to notify her of an incident involving the use of an improper restraint on her child, and given items that she had purchased for her child to other youth in the facility. The OYO notified the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS) of the parent's concerns and requested that CBH open an investigation into the matter. Upon investigating the allegations, CBH required the facility to put a corrective action plan (referred to as a Quality Improvement Plan, or QIP) in place to correct the identified issues. After 30 days, CBH visited the facility to conduct a review of the QIP and ensure that all of the action items had been thoroughly and appropriately implemented.

The OYO reviewed, monitored, and evaluated this investigation and joined CBH's visit to the facility. As such, we can confirm that the facility implemented certain changes that will have long-lasting effects on the experiences of other

youth residing at the facility. In response to the investigation, the facility updated its protocols to include a reassessment of individual communication plans at each monthly Service Plan Team meeting. Additionally, the facility implemented a sign in/out sheet to document all personal items that come to/from the facility for the youth. Finally, the facility also provided a refresher training presentation to staff on the expectations surrounding proper significant incident reporting procedures.

Over the course of the case, the OYO evaluated the practice, performance, and policies of the facility and CBH, and will provide recommendations through a final evaluation report. As an established access point, the OYO collaborated with CBH, DBHIDS, the Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF), the residential treatment facility, and the youth's parent to address the parent's concerns, facilitate clear and transparent communication between all parties, and prioritize youth rights, safety, and well-being.

LOOKING FORWARD

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The OYO team is excited to participate in a series of strategic planning and goal setting workshops facilitated by the City of Philadelphia's Innovation Lab throughout the first half of 2024.

The OYO plans to submit its budget proposal in conjunction with the OIG on June 5, 2024. The team is looking to expand its budget to better meet the office's mandate outlined in the executive order. An expanded budget will allow the OYO to eventually become its own independent office, like the OIG, that operates under the direct command of the Mayor of Philadelphia. It will also allow the OYO to expand its team model to include full-time communications support, internships, and volunteering opportunities, and increase its case volume and capacity.

Additionally, the OYO expects to utilize a case management system to develop and maintain a central database of complaints, incidents, and grievances related to youth residential placements. Through the use of this case management system and sophisticated data analytics software, the OYO will be able to analyze short- and long-term data to identify issues that may be affecting quality of service for youth in residential placements. Further technological updates will act as quality assurance measures to cut down on time spent on administrative needs and data maintenance.

The OYO hopes to elevate family and youth voices. It is the OYO's goal to create a youth advisory council comprised of young people with lived experiences and involvement with the child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems. This continued partnership will incorporate youth voice and expertise into all aspects of the office's work. The OYO also recognizes that young people thrive when the providers and trusted adults in their lives work together to promote their growth, safety, and well-being. To that end, the OYO is interested in liaising with parents and creating safe, supportive circles for families to share their concerns, stay connected to their children, and access the supports and services that they need to successfully reunify with their children.

Keep reading to see some exciting office developments to look forward to!



Community Tabling

To inform the work of the office, the OYO is required to periodically liaise with youth advocates and professional organizations who have contact with youth in residential placements. The team must also develop, publish, and deliver materials and guidance to engage with and educate youth, families, providers, and others about residential placement processes, available avenues for assistance, youth rights and protections, and other matters relevant to residential placements and the youth experience. As such, we plan to table at community events to spread the word of our office and share our community education materials and resources. We welcome advocates to email us and invite us to table at their events.

Facility Programming

There are over 70 providers that contract with DHS and/or DBHIDS to provide residential placement services to Philadelphia youth in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems. These providers are located across Pennsylvania, with one provider located outside of the state. The OYO is required to develop, publish, and deliver materials and guidance to youth in placement and conduct additional data gathering at residential placements through surveys and other facility monitoring.

The OYO team has all of the necessary background checks, clearances, and trainings required to be able to enter facilities and engage with youth. The team has developed a travel plan to ensure that we can engage with youth, staff and leadership consistently and regularly and expects to begin facilitating programming, including our Know Your Rights trainings and Youth Rights Survey, within facilities in spring of 2024.

Annual Report & Town Hall Meeting

Keep an eye out for the OYO's first annual report and town hall meeting!

The OYO is required to publish an annual public report about the activities of the OYO, which may include recommendations issued, the implementation status of those recommendations, de-identified resident survey results, and any issues or trends that have been identified. The OYO will be releasing this report in late summer or early fall of 2024 following the close of the fiscal year on June 30th. The OYO is also required to hold at least one public meeting a year with the opportunity for public comment. The OYO expects to host this public event in the spring or summer of 2024.





Office of the Youth Ombudsman

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OYO Complaint
Form

