

Thumbs up State OKs Children's Village

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Children's Village and the state don't always agree.

But this year, the Oakland County facility for troubled children easily passed its Michigan Department of Social Services (DSS) inspection. And both sides are happy about it.

In a report to the county's Health and Human Resources Committee, Children's Village Superintendent Kay Karla said the annual evaluation was favorable. Almost all the violations noted during a Jan. 23-Feb. 2 inspection have already been taken care of.

"I'm personally very proud. This has taken a lot of dedication by our staff," she told the group.

DSS consultant Michael Lynch, whose report was his second on Children's Village, agreed progress has been made.

"We have moved a long way," said Lynch, confirming that the findings of his "very thorough" investigation were favorable.

"The administration at Children's Village has been very cooperative. The agency has come a long way, and I'm really pleased."

FIVE YEARS AGO, problems at Children's Village almost resulted in a provisional license instead of a regular one. The situation led to a series of meetings between DSS and the Probate Court personnel who administer the facility.

"We had received a number of licensing complaints and were moving in the direction of a provisional license," said Bob Bee, director of DSS's Division of Child Welfare Licensing.

The division works with public and private child care institutions and child placing agencies. Among its concerns are day care centers, summer camps and foster homes.

Bee said programs like Children's Village which look up some youngsters present a special risk. And they need very careful monitoring.

"Looking up children with problems in and of itself can be a problem," explained

the director, adding that suicide is a possibility.

Bee said there often are disagreements between the licensing agency and those who receive licenses.

But both DSS and Children's Village have dedicated themselves to working out their problems.

"We've seen significant progress with the Oakland County Juvenile Court and their Children's Village program in the past few months," he said.

"They've responded very favorably to our recommendations. We see them in a position of taking immediate, timely, responsive actions with problems brought to their attention."

SUPERINTENDENT Karla said the annual evaluation cited violations in three areas — housing, personnel and care of children.

The 31 housing problems included door closers, burned out exit signs and TV wiring problems.

All but five have not been completed, but work orders have been submitted for them.

This year's report showed that decorative grill work in some buildings was not in "good condition" and poses danger to youth and staff. The grill work is being replaced by screening.

In the area of personnel, the report showed that there is not adequate staff on all shifts to cover all the floors. Karla explained that there are four vacancies, and that it is difficult to find people who want to work during the night.

"We're trying hard, but we do not have adequate staff yet. We need two additional people," she said.

On "care of children" the report cited problems in the area of control but not discipline.

The superintendent said much of the problem is due to a change in the type of children now being referred to Children's Village. The majority are emotionally disturbed and present behavioral/attitudinal problems which are difficult to work with on a daily basis, she explained.

"The population is running high, and the

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children we're getting have very severe emotional problems."

Oakland County Juvenile Court is in the process of transferring three staff members to Children's Village in order to provide additional counselors for the residents. For the first time, there will be a counselor for each building on the Pontiac campus.

Karla explained that her staff is also evaluating control measures used, their effectiveness and other methods that could be substituted.

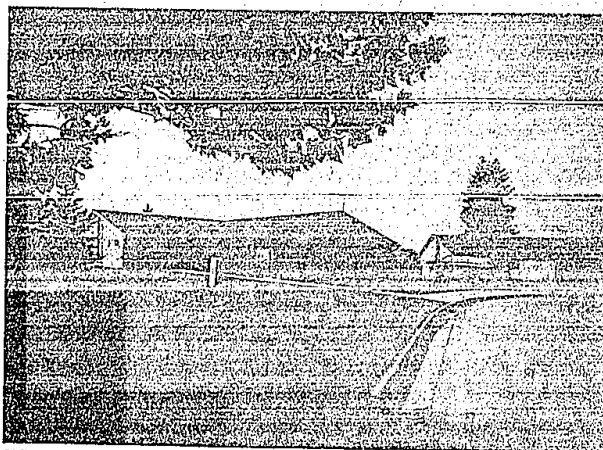
After hearing the report, several commissioners applauded the work done by the facility staff.

"I think you are to be commended for such fast work," said Commissioner Roy Rowland, R-Avon Township.

Oakland County Probate Court Administrator Barbara Consiglio also was pleased with the findings.

"We've made a lot more headway in working with DSS. And it has ended up in more favorable findings," she said, crediting also hard work by the Children's Village staff.

"It's been a long hard haul."



Children's Village is the Oakland County facility for troubled children.

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Sponsored by the Oakland ISD Department of Social Studies, Roeder is a Washington journalist who has specialized in reporting on money in politics. He began

freelance investigative reporting in 1968 as an undergraduate in Tallahassee, Fla.

His series of reports disclosing the white supremacist background of Judge G. Harrod Carswell was considered a major factor

in the Senate's rejection of Carswell's U.S. Supreme Court nomination. Since 1976, Roeder has reported almost exclusively on congressional campaign finance, developing systems for analyzing and reporting on money in elections.

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