



MARLANA R. VALDEZ
Director

STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT

FACILITY CLOSURE REPORT
MOUNT CLARE HOUSE
APRIL, 2009

Facility: Mount Clare House
117 S. Callendar Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
Program Director: Marvin Stone

Reported by: Nick Moroney
Juvenile Justice Monitor

Issue Monitored: Closure of Facility

Persons Interviewed: Program Director, Clinical Director, Operations Director,
Licensed Social Worker, Supervisors, Residential Staff, and
Youth.

Date of Report: April 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 31, the Department of Juvenile Services closed Mount Clare, a small group home that for the past twenty years had provided services for many challenging youth.

The Department gave four days notice of closure to the provider, the staff, and the youth. No reason for the closing was given.

Child-serving agencies have discretion to determine which service providers meet the needs of youth in their custody. In this case, a program with a strong track record of success with youth who have complex emotional and behavioral problems was closed with little notice, little time to provide for alternative treatment, and no explanation.

The Department should explain the decision to close.

The Department should implement procedures to prevent sudden and unexplained program closures especially when the closings disrupt the stability of long term staff and vulnerable children.

MOUNT CLARE HISTORY

Mount Clare served youth with complex treatment needs who had been unsuccessful in other residential programs. The program was a vital last opportunity to avoid placing youth in out-of-state programs or more restrictive settings. Mount Clare offered expert intervention in a homelike environment in downtown Baltimore City. Youth stayed in the program from nine months to one year. Some youth stayed until they were 21 years old if necessary.

Three agencies placed youth at the home – the Department of Juvenile Services, Department of Human Resources, and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Throughout its 20-year history, Mount Clare was a model of interagency collaboration and service integration.

DJS owns the Mount Clare House physical plant and licenses the vendor. Vendor and staff remained remarkably stable over the years. Staff members averaged almost 20 years of experience working with challenged youth.

In 2008, four Mount Clare residents completed high school and two went on to college. Another youth successfully transitioned into independent living.

MONITORING OF MOUNT CLARE

Mount Clare consistently received positive monitoring reports from the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit. Recommendations focused on the decaying structure and the need for physical plant improvements. The Department of Juvenile Services had completed some major improvements and some were pending at the time of closure.

The DJS Office of Program Evaluation inspected Mount Clare on November 20 and December 18, 2008, and on January 15 and March 11, 2009. No reports detailing areas of compliance and non-compliance were issued by the Department following these visits.

On March 31, the day Mount Clare closed, as staff were preparing youth for transfer, two monitoring reports based on the November, December, January and March visits were faxed to Mt. Clare. Each requested a corrective action plan, and no explanation for the lateness of the reports was provided.

CLOSING THE FACILITY

Mount Clare staff and other placing agencies were not officially informed of the closure until March 27. Representatives scrambled to find placements for the vulnerable youth in just a few days.

The two DJS youths were moved to a shelter. DHR located emergency placement for 3 youth and a tentative placement agreement for a fourth. An aunt of the only DHMH youth at Mount Clare was persuaded to take him in on March 31, but by the following day, the agency was again looking for a suitable placement for him.

On March 31, Mount Clare staff remained at the facility to help social workers and probation officers find emergency interim placements. None of the Mount Clare staff were offered opportunities for either temporary or permanent employment with the Department.

CONCLUSION

Child serving agencies are charged with acting in the best interest of children in their care. The decision to displace vulnerable youth and skilled employees on less than a week's notice is not in the best interest of those youth or the public.

The "Maryland Model" for juvenile services relies on small home-like facilities with highly trained staff located close to youths' homes and communities. Mount Clare was an example of what the Maryland Model envisions – a small home with experienced staff within Baltimore City.

Parents of a youth under DHR supervision recently praised the program. They said they saw amazing progress in a child who "had not smiled for 2 years."

A DHR representative said Mount Clare offered “a unique program and a unique philosophy” for youth who are emotionally fragile and behaviorally challenging. Mount Clare staff “never gave up on their kids no matter what ... the staff there made the program work” with “kids who would probably have gone out of state - I’m not aware of any other similar program in state for these kids.”

The Department of Juvenile Services should explain its decision to close Mount Clare.

The Department also should implement procedures to prevent sudden and unexplained program closures when the closings disrupt the stability of vulnerable children.