



Juvenile Justice Commission
2025 Annual Group Home Inspection

Facility Name: Canyon Oaks Youth Center

Facility Capacity: 12

Address: 400 Edmonds Road
Redwood City, Ca. 94062

Phone Number: (650) 839-1810

Date of Inspection: July 14, 2025

Date of Last Inspection: August 12, 2024

Annual Population: Average 9-10

Population at time of Inspection: 4

Contact Person: Victoria Valencia, Head of Service, Clinical Services Manager

Facility Commission Inspection Team: Ameya Nori, Jennifer Blanco, Niklas Klemmer

School Commission Inspection Team: Karin Huber-Levy, Shakeel Ali, Niklas Klemmer, Jiya Venkatesh

Presiding Juvenile Court Judge: Hon. Susan Irene Etezadi

Facility Overview

Canyon Oaks Youth Center (COYC) opened in August 2003 as a Level 14 group home. To comply with the policy changes of AB403 (Continuum of Care Reform, 2015), COYC converted to a Short Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP) facility, receiving their permanent STRTP license on June 1, 2019. COYC is a co-ed facility with 12 beds, located at the Cordilleras site in Redwood City, and operated by the Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS) Division of San Mateo County Health. The program serves seriously mentally ill and emotionally disturbed boys and girls, ages 12-18. Serving as an alternative to psychiatric hospitalization for youth in crisis, the program's "crisis beds" are used to stabilize out-of-control, dangerous behaviors so that youth can be returned to the community as quickly as possible. The program also serves the most challenging youth that require out-of-home treatment for a longer period of time. Intensive individualized services are provided to these youth, engaging families as working partners in the treatment process. Youth in COYC can also be AB12 youth (extended foster care). The program is designed to work closely with all levels of service providers within BHRS and the referring

agencies of Children and Family Services, Juvenile Probation, and local Special Education Departments, to provide effective and well-integrated services.

Before placement, residents are certified by the County's Interagency Placement Review Committee as youth who require residential treatment services at an STRTP that provides intensive mental health services. The objective of the program is to help youth reduce symptoms, gain stability, and transition into the least restrictive setting in which they can succeed. The typical resident spends one year at Canyon Oaks.

COYC is guided by a program philosophy that provides placement for youth who face serious emotional and behavioral challenges: they strive to ensure that youth are not discharged as a result of their prior or current challenging behaviors. This is referred to as a 'no eject, no reject' philosophy. If the treatment team is unable to meet a youth's needs safely or adequately, a treatment plan is made for the youth to be transferred to a facility that can better meet their needs. A plan is made for a youth to return to COYC once they have been stabilized. The ultimate goal is always to return the youth, in the least amount of time possible, to the least restrictive setting in which they can succeed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Commendations

We visited the Canyon Oaks Youth Center on July 14, 2025, interviewing two staff members: Supervising Mental Health Clinician Victoria Valencia, and Residential Counselor (RC) III Thomas Kilgore. Ms. Valencia has been at COYC for over 20 years, and Mr. Kilgore has been at COYC for six years.

The facility itself is run by a group of staff members who are very dedicated to the youth they serve. Staff do everything possible to provide a space that is healing and therapeutic to the youth they serve.

COYC boasts an impressive lineup of programming, including partnerships with Square Pegs ranch for equine therapy, and the Riekes Center for general programming.

We would like to especially commend the work of former teacher George Rehmet. Mr. Rehmet was a very valuable asset for COYC, and the youth and staff at COYC continuously praised him. Mr. Rehmet left Canyon Oaks at the end of the last school year, and as of the date of inspection, there has been no appointment of a new teacher.

Concerns & Recommendations

Our inspection team had very few concerns about COYC. The facility has a fully functional commercial kitchen, and a chef on staff, however they contract with San Mateo County Medical Center, to receive their food. We recommend that the COYC fully utilize their kitchen and chef, and ensure all food for youth is cooked on-site.

Access to Youth

JJPC Commissioners are permitted to interview and view the records of youth who have been placed at COYC by Juvenile Probation/court. COYC confirmed that all youth placed at COYC since the date of the 2024 inspection have been referred by their school district. Accordingly, the 2025 inspection team did not have access to youth records or conduct any interviews with youth during this inspection.

REPORTS

Fire Inspection Report: ✓ Yes No Date: 4/8/2025
Comments: satisfactory, no violations

Resident’s Handbook: ✓ Yes No Date: 7/14/2025
Comments: No major changes since prior inspection cycle

Licensing Inspection: ✓ Yes No Date: 5/25/2024
Comments: Rating: No deficiencies, carf-accredited STRTP

AREAS REVIEWED

Quality of Life

- ✓ Physical Buildings
- ✓ Meals/Nutrition
- ✓ Mental Health
- ✓ Physical/Dental Health
- ✓ Religious Services
- ✓ Programming
- ✓ Visiting
- ✓ Sexual Abuse Prevention
- ✓ Personal Rights
- Grievance Logs
- ✓ Ombudsman information

Programming

- Education
- ✓ Vocational/Employability
- ✓ Community Service
- ✓ Individual/Group Counseling
- ✓ Substance Abuse
- Other: _____

Persons Interviewed

- Youth
- ✓ Director
- ✓ Youth Supervisor/Staff
- Food Services Staff
- BHRS
- Other: Sarah Notch, SMC Office of Education

YOUTH GENERAL INFORMATION

Target population of youth: Canyon Oaks Youth Center primarily serves emotionally disturbed youth aged 12-18 years old. It has a maximum population size of 12 youth. Youth can be referred to Canyon Oaks via three pathways: 1) Juvenile Probation, 2) Children and Family Services, 3) School Districts in conjunction with the IEP process. Over the last few years, the number of youth referred to COYC via Juvenile Probation has decreased to zero. Past inspection reports showed that there have been zero referrals by Juvenile Probation for at least the last 4 years.

Prior to arriving at Canyon Oaks, each youth served will have been certified by the County's IPRC (Interagency Placement Review Committee) as requiring residential treatment services at an STRTP facility providing intensive mental health services. Canyon Oaks takes youth whose challenges are appropriate for the type of therapy they provide, which is dialectical behavior therapy. For example, they do not take on youth with intellectual disabilities. Youth need to have at least a 5th grade level reading ability.

Age range of youth: 14-16

Ethnicity of youth:

3 - Latinx

1 - Filipino

Youths' home counties & number of youth per county:

4 - San Mateo County

STAFFING

Describe staff including numbers, background, ethnicity, language:

Staff include a Supervising Mental Health Clinician (1), Mental Health Program Specialist (1), Psychiatric Social Workers/Marriage and Family Therapists (2.5), Creative Arts Therapist (1), Occupational Therapist (1), Psychiatrist (.25), Residential Counselors (19 plus per diem relief staff) and a Medical Office Specialist (1). The 19 full-time Residential Counselors (RCs) provide care and coaching for residents and provide for their safety. Residential Counselors are the primary caregivers for residents and are on-site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Canyon Oaks also has 13 'relief' RCs who are called on when full-time RCs need to take time off. Canyon Oaks currently has a full-time bilingual (Spanish-speaking) therapist on staff.

Educational requirements for staff: All clinicians have at least a Master's degree. RCs are required to have at least a Bachelor's degree, and several have Master's degrees as well.

Training provided for staff: All staff receive a minimum of 40 hours of training every year, including the year they're hired, as required for STRTPs. At onboarding, RCs and clinicians receive direct training from more senior staff, e.g., 8 hours of shadowing, in addition to using the Relias online training system (a state-approved system for STRTPs) for start-up training. Ongoing training includes trauma-informed, cultural, suicide prevention, and County-required training. There is also a separate 40 hours (2 ½ days) training (similar structure) for clinicians. Clinicians also have required training of 36 hours every two years to maintain their license. Proact Advantage training for hands-on situations includes trauma-informed care, cultural competence, and psychotropic medications, however the facility became hands-off (staff are not allowed to touch youth unless in a life or death situation) many years ago.

Staff to Youth Ratio:

Awake: RCs are on duty seven days per week: four for the morning shift, and six for the afternoon shift (10am to 6pm). In addition, during weekday work hours, the four staff clinicians/therapists are on site, plus the Head of Services and Supervisor for Direct Care.

On average, given the current population of 4, there is a 5:4 ratio of staff:youth.

Sleeping:

3 RCs are always awake and on-duty for the overnight shift, making it a 3:4 ratio for staff:youth.

How is staff backup handled during graveyard shift?

The 'relief' RCs are available to backup staff during the grave-yard shift. Several relief RCs prefer working grave-yard shifts. Normally, three RCs are staffed overnight, and even if the facility was at capacity with 12 youth and only two RCs were able to work, the facility would still be in compliance. Clinicians are onsite Monday through Friday. In addition to RCs, either the Head of Service or Supervisor for Direct Care, both clinicians, are always on call 24/7, including during grave-yard shifts and on weekends to respond in the event that law enforcement must be called on site, e.g., for a 5150 call when a youth is a danger to themselves or others. Only the Head of Service or Supervisor for Direct Care are authorized to call law enforcement.

Describe staff turnover, including frequency and reason:

Staff turnover is not an issue for Canyon Oaks. Most staff have been at COYC for 15-20 years, and most supervisors, around 20+ years. Staff clinicians turn over more frequently, which the Director described as typical when serving youth like the residents of Canyon Oaks. Staff

clinicians tend to be clinicians early in their career who are still working on their licensing, and after a few years at Canyon Oaks, once they are licensed, most move on to other types of clinical work.

Describe general staff and youth interactions:

We were unable to meaningfully observe staff and youth interactions because of the restrictions on access to youth.

CONDITIONS OF BUILDING AND GROUNDS

Give a general description of the property:

The building is a one-story structure on the edge of a wooded area on three sides and a fire station and mental health hospital on the road leading up to it. There is a walled court inside the entrance. The building looks neat and maintained from the outside. The interior courtyard contains an area of artificial turf (installed last year), benches and tables, a freshly resurfaced basketball court, and planting boxes. Generally the recreation area looks more inviting than at our visit last year. There are several small vegetable/flower beds that have been planted and are tended by the residents. Up the hill on the property are storage sheds and a garden in development. The building and property are relatively small, however this is not unreasonable given the small number of youth in residence.

Give a general description of the main facility including housekeeping and sanitation:

There is a wing that has a lobby, two classrooms and a therapy room. There is a dining room with a connected kitchen and a pass through window at which food is served for pick up by the residents. There is a hall with bedrooms on either side that leads to a living room area furnished with armchairs and bean bag sofas, exercise equipment, a bookcase, large screen TV, and a chalkboard wall. The area with the large screen TV, chalkboard wall, and bean bag sofas includes a memorial area designed by residents to honor a long-time and beloved RC who passed away last year. On the other side of the living room, there is another hall with bedrooms on either side. At the end of that hall is an office for the therapists, a laundry room, a safety room, and a therapy room. A janitor comes in every day Monday through Friday. The facility looked clean and well organized. A generator for power outages has been installed.

Lawns: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: Artificial turf is new.

Playing Fields: v Acceptable Unacceptable.

Blacktop: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Paint: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Roof: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Drains and Gutters: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

General Appearance: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Condition of Interior of Building

Walls: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Windows & Window Coverings: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Paint: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Floors: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Ceilings: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Restrooms/Showers:

Plumbing Fixtures: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: One bathroom was out of service, however it was set to be repaired soon after our visit. The other bathroom with the shower was still operational.

Drains: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Air Vents/Heating/Windows: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Smoke Alarms: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Storage of Cleaning Fluids/Chemicals: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Recreation/Sports Equipment: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:

Hallways Clear/Doors Propped Open: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:

Sleeping Rooms: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:

Beds: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Personal Storage: Graffiti Present: Yes ✓ No: _____

Art, Books, Personal Items Allowed in Rooms: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Ample Blankets: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Study Area: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Adequate Lighting: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Temperature: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Graffiti Present: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF YOUTH

Note: We based these ratings on the glances we got of youth as we passed them in common areas. We were unable to get a good look at the personal appearance of youth, however they all seemed fine, clean, and well hygenic.

Appearance: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Showers: Acceptable Unacceptable:

Condition of clothing (clean, fit, etc.): Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

Clothing appropriate to current weather: Acceptable Unacceptable: _____

YOUTH ORIENTATION

What is the intake process for the facility?

The Interagency Placement Review Committee notifies the Head of Service when they have a youth to recommend for admission. The youth's social worker or school guidance counselor provides information about the youth. The Head of Service interviews the youth wherever they are at the time (hospital, YSC, home, school) to get a sense of the child; typically this takes place outside of Canyon Oaks for a first visit. The child would then be brought to Canyon Oaks by the parent, guardian, school counselor, social worker, or probation officer.

Are youth oriented to the house rules and procedures? Yes No **Explain:**

Yes, youth are given a copy of the handbook, and usually assigned a staff member to assist them with transitioning into the facility. In some cases, other youth may act as mentors for new youth in the intake process.

Are house rules and grievance procedures posted? Yes No **Explain:** These are posted in the hall.

What is in place to ensure that these rules and procedures are understood by youth?

Youth Bill of Rights is pinned in large poster form in a hallway,

Are clothing and possessions inventoried on arrival and departure? How are youth's clothing and possessions protected or stored?

Clothing and possessions are inventoried on arrival. This provides an opportunity for staff to screen what youth bring into the facility. Drugs, gang colors, and inappropriate/revealing clothing are examples of items confiscated by staff.

Natural Disaster Drills: Fire: Yes No **Date of Last Drill:** _____

Earthquake: Yes No **Date of Last Drill:** _____

Interviewed Youth: Yes No - explained in "Access to Youth"

Evacuation Plan(s): Yes No

MEALS/NUTRITION

Kitchen: Acceptable Unacceptable:

Do the youth share in preparation of meals? Yes No: Occasionally, during "Chef's Choice", youth have the opportunity to prepare meals, however for the most part, food comes from San Mateo Medical Center.

Are meals served family style? Yes No:

Are youth permitted to converse during meals? Yes No:

Are staff present and supervising during meals? Yes No:

Are weekly menus posted? Yes No:

Are servings ample, nutritious, appetizing? Yes No:

Weaker youth protected from having food taken from them? Yes No: Not an issue at COYC.

Are snacks and beverages available? Yes No:

How does the facility meet special nutritional needs?

When a special need is identified, e.g., diabetic, vegan, appropriate meals are prepared as needed. Additionally, youth that dislike the day's menu are often accommodated by the on-site chef, and they may receive a sandwich/something else they like.

Length of time allowed to eat?

Mealtimes:

Breakfast: 9-10:30 am summer/ 7:30-8:45 school year **Lunch:** 12:10 - 2:30 pm summer/12:20 PM school year **Dinner:** 5 pm all year (unless they are off-site)

MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Access to Medical and Dental Services: Acceptable Unacceptable:

Each youth has a physical within 30 days of admission. They can choose to go to their own primary care physician if they have one. Otherwise they are taken to the teen medical clinic in San Mateo.

Access to Mental Health Services: Acceptable Unacceptable:

The most common mental conditions of the residents are depression, anxiety, PTSD, and trauma. Some have bipolar, other psychotic disorders. Clinicians check in with them all the time. They have meals with them. They check in with the school teachers every other week to see how they are doing academically. Individual and family therapy are provided.

Individual Counseling: Acceptable Unacceptable:

The trauma-informed psychosocial skills-based/therapeutic attachment model focuses on increasing each resident's ability to form and sustain more gratifying and supportive relationships within the program, their family, and the greater community. Through the development of an individualized, strength-based, family-centered Needs Appraisal and Service Plan, the program facilitates acquiring skills necessary for youth to reunite with their family or move to a less restrictive setting/lower level of care. Each youth is provided with a minimum of one hour of individual psychotherapy per week and one hour of family therapy per week. Additional psychotherapy sessions are offered as needed depending on emergent needs and phase of treatment, reflective of the youth's needs as indicated in their Needs Appraisal and Services Plan and their BHRS treatment plan.

Group Counseling: Acceptable Unacceptable:

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy groups are offered 3 days/week, focusing on the acquisition and generalization of dialectical behavioral skills to improve functioning in areas of mindfulness, emotional regulation, distress tolerance and interpersonal effectiveness. The goal is to learn to reduce self-harmful behavior, interpersonal conflicts, emotional lability, impulsivity and aggression. They have two groups by age: one for 12- to 14-year olds, the other for 15- to 18-year olds. Groups meet twice a week for 90 minutes. They have art therapy twice a week for 45 minutes and occupational therapy three times a week for 45 minutes.

Substance Abuse Counseling: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:

The AOD Counselor provides counseling from Monday through Thursday at 4pm-8pm and Friday at 9am to 1pm. AOD counseling is also integrated with individual counseling therapy. If youth in residence are in need of it, AA groups are brought onsite, or youth may attend sessions with an outside group. AOD counselor takes youth out on hikes and trails in surrounding wilderness and connects with the entire group, regardless of substance abuse history.

PROGRAMS

Recreation (type, amount, etc.): ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:

There is a weekly trip to Square Pegs, a local ranch in Half Moon Bay, for equine therapy (two sessions: a.m. for up to two residents; p.m for up to 4 residents). There are therapeutic walks. The facility has completed a contract to provide access to programs at the Riekes Center for Human Advancement in Menlo Park. Residents also go to museums, parks, and movies. Youth are also permitted to go home whenever they choose; some return home for visits several times per week.

Exercise (daily schedule, amount, etc.): ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:

Despite the youth not having a PE teacher, RCs and other staff compensate with plenty of opportunities for the youth to exercise, including hikes in the trails surrounding Canyon Oaks.

Access to Religious Services: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:

Victim Awareness Classes: Yes ✓ No: This is not relevant to this population. Youth at COYC who are at risk for trafficking are identified for Rape/Trauma Services and will have a team assigned to work with them through a non-profit organization who also provide trainings for COYC staff. They have used them a lot this year.

Gang Awareness Classes: Yes ✓ No: COYC mostly does not house aggressive/abusive youth due to many of the other youth facing assault/sexual trauma in their past, however RCs and therapists are able to offer this service if it comes up.

Sexual Harassment Classes: Yes No: Same as above.

Parenting Classes: Yes No: However, if a youth is pregnant or has a child, staff would arrange appropriate classes for them.

Vocational Classes: Yes No: The occupational therapist tailors classes for youth as needed with the goal that all youth be employable in a vocational pathway in the future.

Work Program: Yes No: Some residents may have jobs that pay (either on facility or off-site)

Internet Access and Use of Technology:

Youth do not have access to their cellphones unless they are above 18. They are provided with laptops for school and other technology with supervision.

YOUTH DISCIPLINE

Describe the discipline process of youth:

COYC no longer uses the Color System. The staff cannot force any intervention on the youth even if they are carrying drugs.

COYC utilizes a phase system which is detailed in the Resident Handbook. Each phase has a set of criteria that measures the client's engagement in treatment. The Handbook also sets out specific disciplinary procedures along with the therapeutic interventions, and limit-setting techniques employed by staff. A list of strategies and techniques developed to aid staff in planning interventions is also detailed in the Handbook.

Describe incident reports:

We were unable to review incident reports because of restrictions on access to youth records described above, however staff told us there were minimal, usually only for law enforcement calls, fights/aggression, etc.

Describe interactions with law enforcement:

We were not able to access the details, but were informed by the Director that there were contacts with law enforcement in the past year, as is typical at Canyon Oaks and required by law for reporting of 5150s (risk of harm to self or others) and runaway youth (it is not a locked facility; youth under 18 years of age who leave without consent are considered runaway and missing persons reports are filed).

GRIEVANCES

Grievance Process: Acceptable Unacceptable:

The San Mateo County BHRS grievance process is set out in the Resident Handbook. Upon admission to COYC, all youth and their parents/caregivers or authorized representatives are given written information about the grievance processes. Staff reviews the written material with them and a copy of the State-mandated Clients Rights is visibly posted in the lobby area, with contact information for BHRS - Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) and Community Care Licensing (CCL). BHRS Problem Resolution Request Forms are also openly available in the lobby area. Youth, caregivers, or authorized representatives may file grievances with BHRS-OCA, or they may report them directly to the Head of Service or Supervisor for Direct Care. Any grievances received in person or by telephone that are resolved by close of business the next day following receipt are exempt from the requirement to send a written acknowledgement and resolution letter, however they still are logged and included in reports to the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS). If the youth is not satisfied, they can report their grievance to the Office of Consumer Affairs and OCA will investigate. Youth can also call Community Care Licensing at any time. In addition to grievances filed, OCA also sends out a satisfaction survey to youth and their families twice a year.

Number of grievances this year:

9 - Mostly staff complaints, mainly about the same staff member who has been further counseled/trained.

COMMUNICATION

Access US Mail? Yes No:

Postage Free? Yes No

Incoming/Outgoing Mail (screened? Confidential?): Yes No:

Someone who is authorized for contact with the youth will open mail to check for contraband. They do not read the message.

Access to Telephone? Yes No: They can only call people on their approved contact list.

Visiting Schedule: Flexible, based on the needs of the youth and their families. Usually week to week and parents arrange their visits with the youth's therapist.

Do all youth have access to visitations? Yes No:

Under what circumstances would visitation be restricted?

The court may restrict visits. The youth can say if they don't want to see a person, including a parent.

Are visitation logs kept? ✓ Yes No: Visitation schedules are only kept for one week. There is no long-term tracking of visits.

Adequate Space: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable: Numerous spaces in the facility for visitations, visitors may not enter dormitories.

Staff Supervision: ✓ Acceptable Unacceptable:
Canyon Oaks staff do not supervise visits. The youth's social worker may.

Privacy Provided: ✓ Yes No:

Games or Activities Provided: ✓ Yes No:

Outings & Recreation: ✓ Yes No: Numerous surrounding trails for hikes, oftentimes to celebrate milestones (ie sobriety), staff can take youth on outings based on youth choice (one youth chose Santa Cruz Boardwalk).