

Report in Brief

Date: December 2018

Report No. A-06-17-07007

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Why OIG Did This Review

The Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) program, which is overseen by HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), served between 7,000 and 8,000 children annually from fiscal year (FYs) 2005 through 2011. In FY 2012, the number of children served in the program increased to 13,625. In FY 2014, ORR served 57,496 children. In FY 2015, ORR served 33,726 children.

We selected for review BCFS Health and Human Services (BCFS HHS), a UAC program grantee, because it received the highest amount of UAC program funding during FY 2015.

Our objective was to determine whether BCFS HHS met applicable safety standards for the care and release of children in its custody.

How OIG Did This Review

We inspected shelter care and foster care homes and reviewed policies, procedures, and the organizational structure. We also reviewed a nonstatistical sample of personnel records and reviewed a statistical sample of case files for those children who had been released to a sponsor during FY 2015.

BCFS Health and Human Services Did Not Always Comply With Federal and State Requirements Related to the Health and Safety of Unaccompanied Alien Children

What OIG Found

Although BCFS HHS generally met applicable safety standards for the care and release of children in its custody, it did not completely abide by all of these standards. Additionally, BCFS HHS could not provide some documentation required to verify that it met certain safety standards.

Based on our UAC case file sample review results, we estimated that BCFS HHS did not properly document the care and release of 13.7 percent of all children released to sponsors in FY 2015. Without adequate documentation in the UAC case files, ORR could not be assured that for 501 children, BCFS HHS had followed ORR policies regarding sponsor background checks, prompt care, or that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was notified about the child's release to a sponsor. Finally, we determined that BCFS HHS was unable to support the number of reunifications it reported to ORR for FY 2015.

What OIG Recommends

We recommend that BCFS HHS comply with ORR regulations pertaining to (1) video monitoring in common areas, (2) sponsor and other household members background checks, (3) admission/intake assessments and medical exams, and (4) discharge notifications to DHS and other stakeholders. In addition, we recommend that BCFS HHS comply with State regulations pertaining to (1) minimum bedroom space, (2) health and safety standards for shelters and foster care homes, and (3) employee background investigations. We also recommend that BCFS HHS ensure that information reported to ORR is accurate. The report also contains other procedural recommendations for BCFS HHS to operate its UAC program in accordance with Federal and State regulations.

In written comments on our draft report, BCFS HHS concurred with all recommendations and outlined corrective actions to address them. For example, BCFS HHS stated that it has implemented a monitoring system that prompts for the completion of quarterly safety assessments and action plans. Additionally, BCFS HHS stated that it created a quality assurance team to ensure compliance with Federal and State standards, as well as implemented a digital archive system to merge files electronically and store them in one location.