



January 2017

AURORA HOUSE 2016

Report of the Citizens Advisory Committee
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Aurora House is a community-based residential counseling center for girls ages 13-17. Certified by the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, Aurora House offers short-term and long-term community-based treatment to girls referred by the Juvenile Courts of Arlington County, and the Cities of Falls Church and Alexandria, as well as from the Department of Human Services for the above jurisdictions and Fairfax County. The success of the Aurora House program stems from its unique combination of nurturing, structure, and support that has proven effective in assisting female adolescents address a variety of court-related difficulties, as well as behavioral and substance abuse issues. For almost three decades, Aurora House has provided teen girls and their families a safe environment in which to make positive changes toward a brighter future.

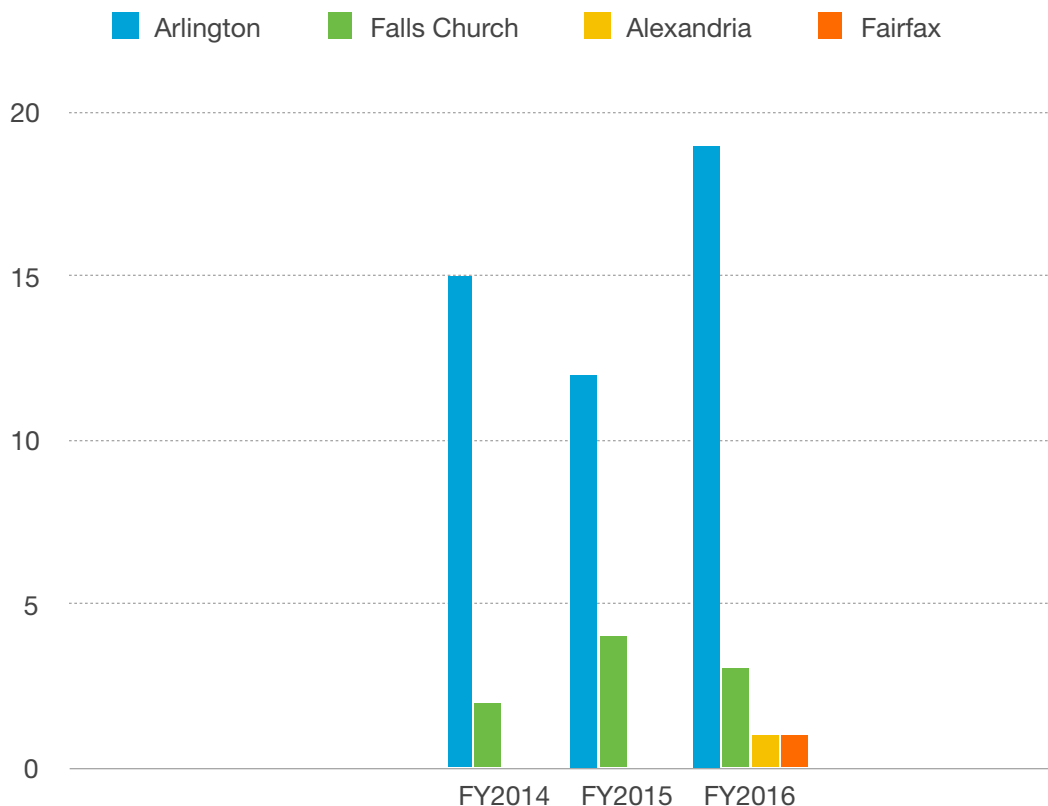
In FY2016, Aurora House served 24 girls from Falls Church, Arlington, Alexandria, and Fairfax with a total of 3,370 child care days. Utilization for the fiscal year was 78%. This is consistent with state-wide utilization targets of 75%. It represents an increase from FY15 of 33%.

Highlights from 2016 include fifteen successful discharges, six college tours, 200-plus hours of community service, cooking classes, book club, and summer bicycle and sailing camps. In addition, two former residents successfully completed summer employment with FC Parks and Rec.

In fall 2016, 75% of AH residents achieved a B grade or higher for the first progress period.



Aurora House opened in 1991 and is part of the City of Falls Church Department of Human Services. It operates under the direction of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court for Arlington County and the City of Falls Church. The breakdown of placements by jurisdiction over the past three fiscal years is shown in the table below.



AURORA HOUSE 2016 *“Aurora House Changes Lives”*

INTRODUCTION

FY16 brought a number of significant changes to Aurora House. In late January, long-time Executive Director Donna Ahart retired after more than thirty years of service. Guided by Residential Supervisor Rachel Kindell as Acting Director, Aurora House finished the year strong. Teresa Vaughn, a mental health professional experienced in working with adolescents, was hired for the Director position in June 2016 and took the helm at Aurora House in August. CAC and staff are excited to have Teresa as part of the team.

As recognized by the Council in mid-November, one of CAC’s original members and former chair, Leah Porzel, passed away in 2016. The AH scholarship has been renamed the Olom-Porzel Scholarship in recognition of Mrs. Porzel’s lengthy service and immeasurable contributions to Aurora House. The CAC approved one (1) scholarship application in FY16 totaling \$1,500.00.

Long-time Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court Judge Esther Wiggins-Lyles, a staunch supporter, role model, and mentor for numerous AH residents, retired in June 2016. Judge Wiggins-Lyles’ afternoon teas and her message of tough love over almost two decades, will be greatly missed. Her successor, Judge Robin Robb was on-site for the annual holiday open house and we look forward to her involvement with AH in the years to come.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

In FY16, Aurora House:

- Accepted and cared for 24 adolescent girls from four jurisdictions;
- Successfully discharged 15 residents;
- Achieved 87% attendance at family counseling sessions.

AH residents also continued the program’s strong tradition of improvement in school. As of September 2016, all but one resident was passing all assigned classes with a grade of C or higher and 75% of residents received grades of B or higher in the first progress period of the current school year. In addition, two former residents successfully completed summer employment with the Falls Church Department of Parks & Recreation.

Recently, Aurora House hired its first former resident as a relief counselor. She is eager to return to Aurora House to share what she has learned with a new generation of AH residents.

Aurora House does, in fact, change lives.

UTILIZATION

In FY 16, Aurora House served 24 girls, compared to 16 residents served in FY15. This represents a thirty-three percent (33%) increase in utilization over FY15, due in large part to the outreach efforts of AH staff. In FY16, AH had an average daily population of 9.2 residents. Agreements through the Comprehensive Services Act (CSA) for at-risk youth and families with Arlington County Department of Human Services and Fairfax County Department of Family Services were finalized in FY16, allowing AH to accept placement referrals for residents not otherwise affiliated with the Juvenile Court. Aurora House received its first Fairfax County CSA referral in early 2016. The remaining FY16 placements were all Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA) referrals processed through the Juvenile Court. Staff continue to believe, however, that the CSA placement vehicle will become a significant referral base for Aurora House given that most of the VJCCCA referrals in FY16 were for girls found by the court to be in need of services (CHINS) rather than girls who had been adjudicated delinquent. In addition, in the first half of FY17, AH received three referrals through the Fairfax CSA.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

While the types of issues bringing girls into the Aurora House orbit in FY16 were similar to years past, staff continues to see an increase in the number of referrals presenting with substance abuse, trauma, and self-harming behaviors. The rates of delinquency among potential referrals, on the other hand, is on a clear downward trend. In meetings with neighboring jurisdictions, staff report that there is a clear, unmet need for services to address behavioral issues associated with substance use/abuse and/or mental health issues, along with a growing need for services associated with human trafficking, particularly as it impacts undocumented at risk minors living in the community. For all these reasons, trauma-informed care and substance abuse counseling continue to be priorities for staff training and development initiatives at Aurora House.

STAFFING PRIORITIES

In addition to hiring a new Executive Director, staff recruitment in FY16 focused on hiring an additional counselor to ensure that AH is compliant with the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) staffing ratios which must be implemented by October 2017. PREA standards, which are applicable to residential facilities such as Aurora House, also require additional staff training in the prevention and detection of sexual abuse. Currently,

- Three out of six AH direct care staff members are fully licensed or pending licensure as mental health clinicians;
- One staff member is fully certified in trauma-informed care and another is pending certification;

- One staff member possesses substance abuse training; and
- One staff member is bilingual English/Spanish.

To better serve the need for substance abuse services, Aurora House is currently recruiting a certified substance use professional. It is anticipated that the increased focus on both mental health and substance abuse services, coupled with the PREA training initiatives, will further enhance the reputation of Aurora House as a safe environment for adolescent residents in the Northern Virginia community, a core element of any successful trauma-informed treatment approach.

SUMMER PROGRAM

Aurora House continued its robust summer program, which included visits to six different college campuses. In addition, summer residents performed forty (40) hours of community service each, working within the Arlington and Falls Church communities to assist children with disabilities and perform other beneficial community activities. With a grant from the Arlington Bar Foundation, residents attended a summer sailing camp, and with a grant from the Falls Church Branch of the American Association of University Women, summer residents took etiquette classes. Along with year-round tutoring provided by various volunteer tutors, AH girls participated in a week long writing camp, met a local author during Book Club, received cooking lessons from a Falls Church Public Works employee, and participated in a substance abuse education workshop.

CONCLUSION

Aurora House made significant strides in FY16 to improve utilization and meet state utilization targets (75%). Maintaining consistent utilization requires an ongoing investment of staff resources and time. While demand for the program continues to fluctuate, the experience over the last year demonstrates that sustained outreach is necessary to ensure that service providers are aware of both the high quality, personalized services available to residents through Aurora House, and the contract vehicles/funding streams available to place residents in the program. To this end, AH staff have developed a CSA Promotional Packet to be distributed monthly to the various Department of Human Services equivalents in Arlington, Fairfax and the City of Alexandria. In addition, meetings were held with relevant Department heads in all served jurisdictions to establish and maintain open channels of communication regarding both existing and potential future service needs. Enhanced staff training in mental health and substance use further solidify Aurora House's standing as a unique, community-based program able to effectively address the needs of at-risk adolescent girls in the Northern Virginia community in a safe, structured residential environment.