

Office of the
Independent Ombudsman
for State Supported
Living Centers



2019

Biannual Report

July through December

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) provides specialized assessment, treatment, support, and medical services at state supported living centers (SSLC) for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Office of the Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Centers was established for the purpose of investigating, evaluating, and securing the rights of residents of state supported living centers. The duties and powers of the Independent Ombudsman are mandated by Texas Health and Safety Code, Title 7, §555.

The mission of the Office of the Independent Ombudsman is to serve as an independent, impartial and confidential resource.



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apps.hhs.texas.gov/sslcombudsman

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Executive Summary

Since the creation of the Office of the Independent Ombudsman by the 81st Legislature ten years ago, the Office has been dedicated to advocating for and protecting the rights and welfare of residents and families of the State Supported Living Centers. It is essential that the Ombudsman's role and mission be understood and that the value of the Office be recognized and celebrated.

The collaborative approach of the Office and the partnership established with the administration of the centers has fostered a positive climate of cooperation without abandoning the independence that is vital to successful outcomes for the residents we serve. The Ombudsman at each center is called upon to significantly impact the quality of the lives of the residents and improve the outcomes of services and protections. One of the most essential duties of the Office is to provide recommendations to the administration of each center to indicate the possible systemic issues to be identified and addressed. Residents, families, guardians and staff turn to the Office to provide assistance and answer complex questions concerning their needs.

This reporting period's statistics have been impacted by the concentrated effort to prepare our Annual Report which will be issued within several weeks. The trust and confidence of our stakeholders is essential to our office's continued success. The Ombudsman's office is a resource for positive change at the centers and for the entire HHS system.

My thanks to the Governor and his staff, the Legislature as well as the leadership of HHS for their continued support. I extend my gratitude to the AIOs and the staff of the Office for their continual dedication, as well as their assistance in preparing this report.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dr. George P. Bithos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

George P. Bithos D.D.S., Ph.D.
Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Center

George P. Bithos D.D.S., Ph.D.

Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Center

Raised in Dallas, Dr. Bithos attended The University of Texas and graduated from Southern Methodist University with a Bachelor of Science in Biology and Anthropology. After practicing reconstructive dentistry for 28 years, Dr. Bithos retired to change the direction of his life. He read for a PhD in Theology and History at the University of Durham in Great Britain. After earning his degrees, he returned to the States to work in academia in Boston. In 2004, he returned to Texas to become the Executive Director of the Texas Conference of Churches. Dr. Bithos was appointed the Independent Ombudsman for SSLCs in February 2010 by Governor Perry. Dr. Bithos is certified as a Person Centered Thinking trainer and coach by The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices. He is also certified to facilitate Trauma-Informed Care training. George and Ria have been married for over forty years, have two grown and married children and five fabulous grandchildren. They enjoy traveling, cooking entertaining and the arts.



Central Office



Candace Jennings
Deputy Independent Ombudsman

Ms. Jennings was raised in Galveston County, Texas. She received her undergraduate education in Social Work at Southwest Texas State University and earned a Master of Public Administration degree at University of Texas at San Antonio. She began serving people with developmental disabilities as a direct care specialist while attending college. She first gained professional experience in San Antonio as an Investigator for Child Protective Services. For several years, she served as a Service Coordinator and Manager at the Local Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Authority. She then held the positions of Rights Protection Officer and Ombudsman at the San Antonio SSLC before joining the Central Office staff as Deputy Independent Ombudsman in July 2010. She is certified by The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices as a Person Centered Thinking trainer. As Deputy Independent Ombudsman, she seeks to support the Independent Ombudsman by leading with compassion and integrity, and supporting people to have positive control over their lives.



Carrie Martin
Lead Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Ms. Martin has 10+ years' experience pursuing social justice issues and over five years' experience providing advocacy, direct care and services for adults, the aging, and children with disabilities. She has a consistent record of advocating for underserved populations including: providing vocational training and employment services at a residential training facility; working with special education students in the public school system; ensuring due process for indigent defendants; and performing administrative operations and internal auditing for a foster care/adoption agency. Ms. Martin has specialized education and experience in data management, training and development, organizational development, and program management. Ms. Martin completed graduate coursework in Organization Development at St. Edward's University, earned her B.S. in Criminal Justice from Texas State University and is trained and certified in Mediation and SAMA (Satori Alternatives to Managing Aggression). She accepted the position of Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the central office in November 2014.

Kenn Purcell
Administrative Assistant



Kenn Purcell joined the United States Navy and worked first as an Operations Specialist (Radar Operator) within the Combat Information Centers of four ships; USS Clark, USS Estocin, USS Patriot, and USS Scout. Kenn later transitioned to the Naval Intelligence branch as an Intelligence Analyst. During the time he served onboard the USS D. D. Eisenhower, US Central Command HQ, US Pacific Command HQ Joint Intelligence Center, and the U.S. Embassy, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. After serving in the US Navy for 20 years, Kenn was honorably discharged and retired to a life on the shore. He joined Northrup Grumman, as an Analyst, team lead and trainer for five years. From both military and civilian sectors, Kenn Purcell brings over 10 years of administrative experience to the team. Kenn came aboard the Office of Independent Ombudsman team in February 2018, where he serves as the Administrative Assistant to Dr. Bithos and his team.

Jessica Rosa
Administrative Assistant

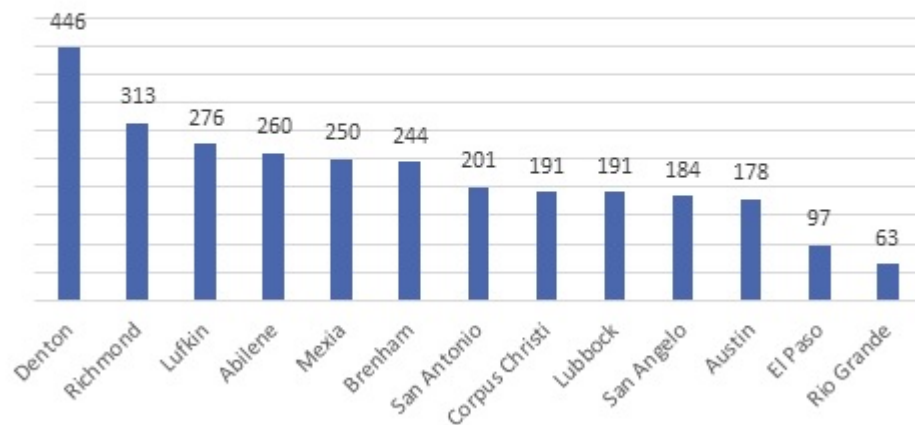


Jessica Rosa was born and raised in Austin, TX. She attended Austin Community College and Concordia University where she studied Finance. She began her professional career working for several financial institutions providing banking services for the community. She eventually moved on to work for D&S Community Services, a leading provider of residential services and supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Jessica worked to provide billing and money management assistance and it was there that she experienced how rewarding it was to help others in need. She then transitioned into to an Administrative Assistant role at Excel Finance Company where her results driven personality led her to effectively streamline processes and provide administrative and accounting support for over 30 offices across Texas, New Mexico, and Louisiana. Ms. Rosa has experience in report development, data management, and administrative operations. After years of tenure and much experience gained, she joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman central office team in December 2019. In her free time Jessica enjoys spending time with her friends and family, cooking, and conquering her fitness journey.

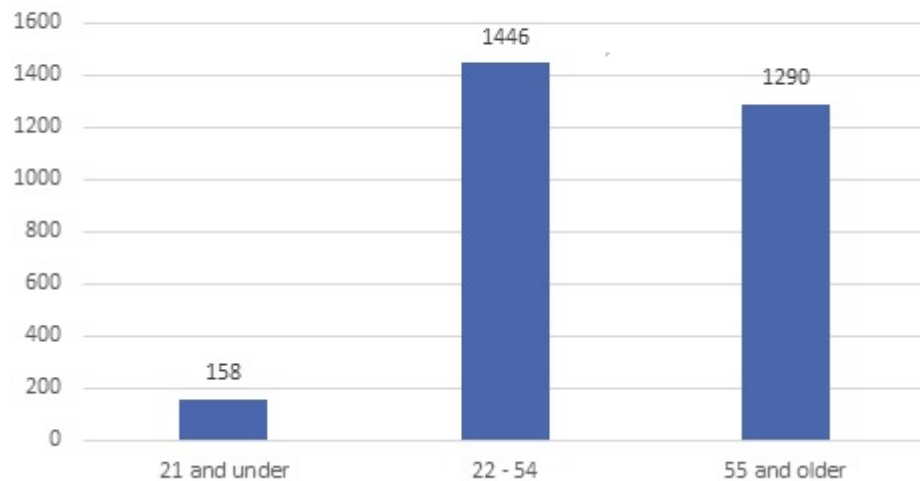
Resident Population

There are 13 state supported living centers across the state where 2,984 people reside. Each of the SSLCs provides 24-hour residential services, comprehensive behavioral treatment services and healthcare services, including physician, nursing and dental services. Other services include skills training, occupational, physical and speech therapies. The majority of residents have lived at the SSLC for more than 10 years, making up 65% of total enrollment. From July to December of 2019, there were 51 residents who transitioned from an SSLC to a community-based home. During this same period, there were 75 admissions.

Resident Population:
2,894



Resident Population by Age



Half of the total population of residents are between the ages of 22 to 54 years. There are 1,290 residents over the age of 55 (45% of the total population) and 89% of them have lived at the SSLC for more than 10 years. There are 158 residents who are under the age of 22 (5%). Children, adolescents, and adults up to age 22 receive public education through the local school district. Adults receive employment, vocational, or day habilitation services at each center. There are also many residents who have paid employment in their local communities.

Currently, there are 194 residents who are alleged criminal offenders. Although many SSLCs serve a small number of residents who were alleged to have committed a criminal offense, 76% of alleged offenders reside at Mexia SSLC which has been designated by the legislature to provide forensic services. There are 2 alleged offenders that have been determined to be a high risk of danger to themselves or others and require a highly restrictive environment.



Duties and Activity of the Office

Being visible and engaged in the operations of the SSLC is the hallmark of the Ombudsman's role. The Ombudsman at each center provides meaningful input, collaboration, and expertise on a routine basis. This includes making recommendations to the SSLC administration. Contacts made directly to the Ombudsman or concerns of the Ombudsman are documented and tracked in an online database. There were a total of 374 contacts in the biannual period of July 1 to December 31, 2019. There is a decrease in volume compared to the previous biannual period. This is primarily due to the Ombudsmen traveling across the state frequently between August and November to participate in the Program Review.

Aggregate Contacts per Biannual Period 2010 - 2019



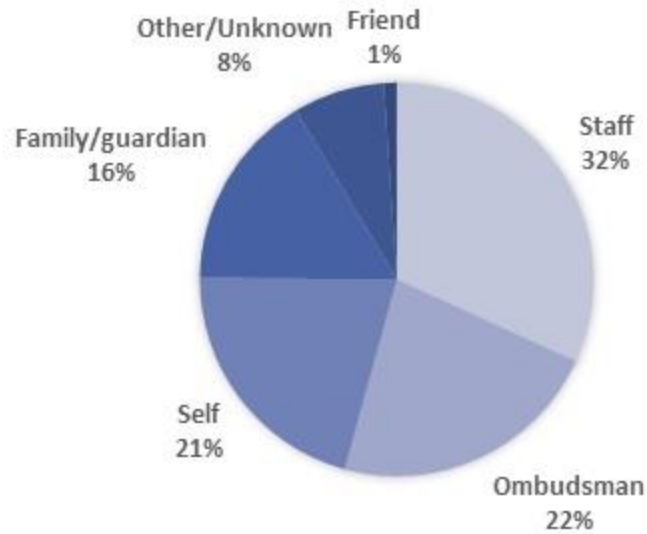
Through legislation the Office conducts annual audits of the SSLCs, referred to as Program Review. The legislative mandate requires an on-site review of the adequacy of staff training, rights and due process, including the right to file a complaint, and evaluating staff to client ratios. In addition to the on-site reviews, Ombudsmen conduct ongoing monitoring at each SSLC throughout the year. Ombudsmen collect data from newly hired Direct Support Professionals (DSP) about the on-the-job training they receive, monitor staffing ratios, observe and evaluate due process in Human Rights Committee meetings, interview staff and residents, as well as review thousands of documents related to residents’ rights and restrictions. Details and findings from the 2019 Program Review can be found in the 2019 Annual Report that will be published in early 2020.



Sometimes the Ombudsman is contacted about issues that are outside of the office’s scope. During this reporting period, there were 46 contacts referred to another entity, such as the Long-term Care Ombudsman program. Excluding these referrals, the office handled 328 cases. Complaints that were investigated, opposed to consults, inquiries, or referrals, made up 88% of all contacts for this biannual period.



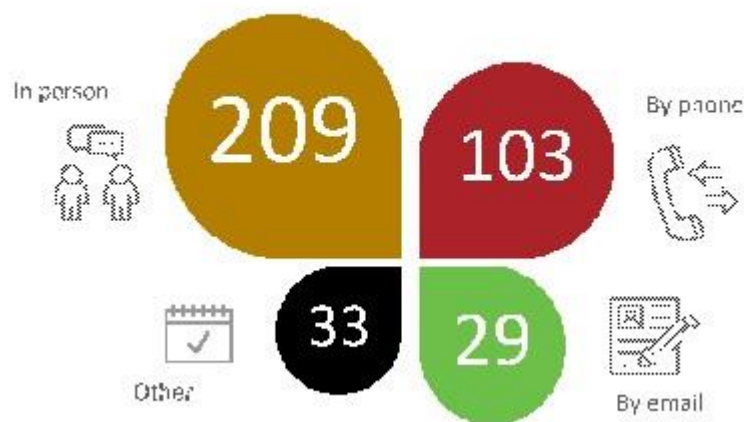
Who Contacted the Ombudsmen?



The majority of contacts made to the Ombudsmen come from staff members of the SSLCs. In this biannual period, a total of 119 staff members directly contacted the Ombudsman to report a concern or for a consultation. There were 78 cases where the resident made the initial contact and 84 cases in which the Ombudsman initiated an investigation.

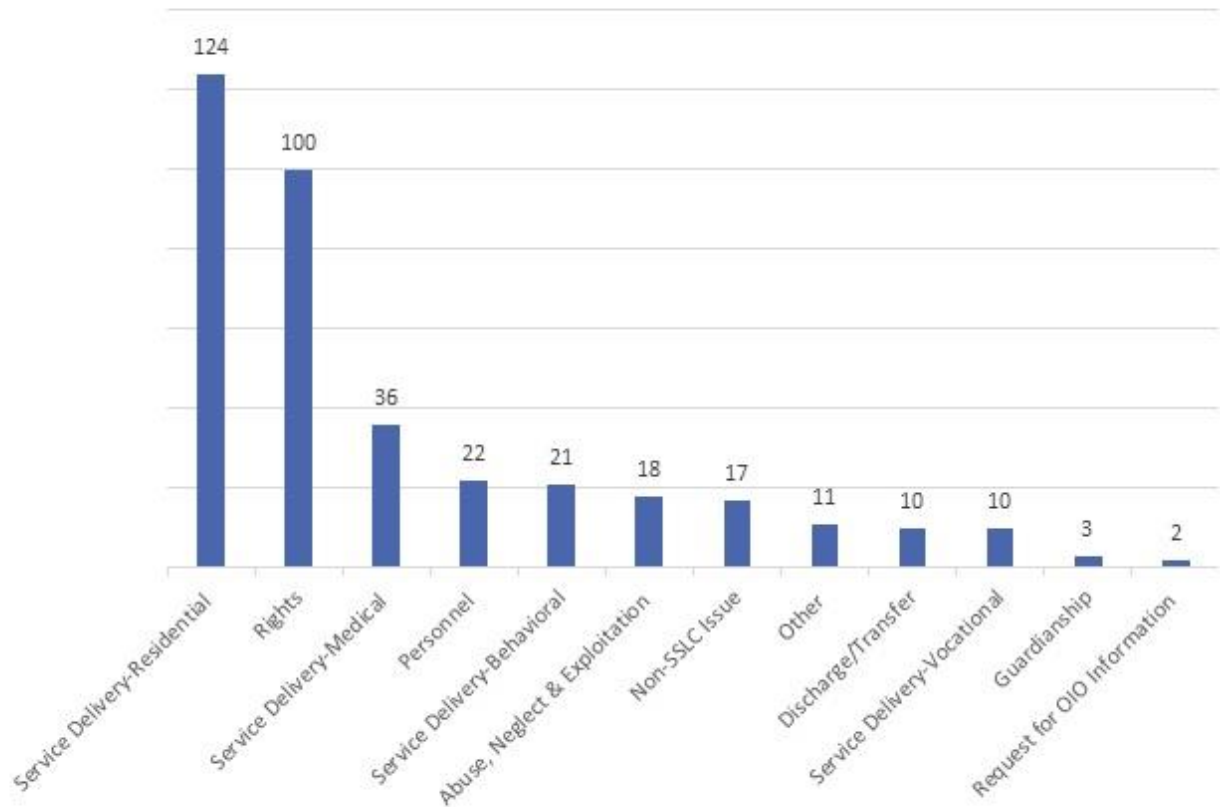
Each Ombudsman has an office at the SSLC which makes them easily accessible to residents and staff. As a result, the majority of contacts are made in person. The Office of the Independent Ombudsman maintains a toll-free number which directly connects to the Ombudsman’s office phone. This number is displayed prominently in common areas at each SSLC and is promoted on the website.

How Were Ombudsmen Contacted?



Staff, residents, family members, and others contact the Ombudsman for concerns that impact residents’ lives. For this biannual period, most concerns were about residential service delivery. These documented concerns were about staffing, clothing, meals, daily routine, hygiene, and other services that residential staff provide. The second highest volume of contacts were about residents’ rights. All concerns are resolved or monitored by the Ombudsman while the SSLC administration addresses the issue.

Number of Contacts by Type



In addition to monitoring service delivery and investigating concerns, the Ombudsman at each SSLC evaluates the way the SSLC investigates serious incidents. Each Ombudsman attends incident meetings, reads all investigative reports, and monitors actions taken by the SSLC after each incident. In total, the Ombudsmen reviewed 2,104 incident investigations this biannual period.

The most common reported and reviewed incidents were abuse allegations, which made up 87% of incidents in this biannual period. The Ombudsmen do not investigate abuse and neglect. Allegations of abuse and neglect are reported to and investigated by the HHSC Provider Investigations unit. When a report is made, the SSLC is responsible for protecting the alleged victim and taking precautions to prevent further allegations from occurring. The Ombudsman at each SSLC monitors recommendations that the HHS Investigators make to the SSLC administration when an allegation has been confirmed.

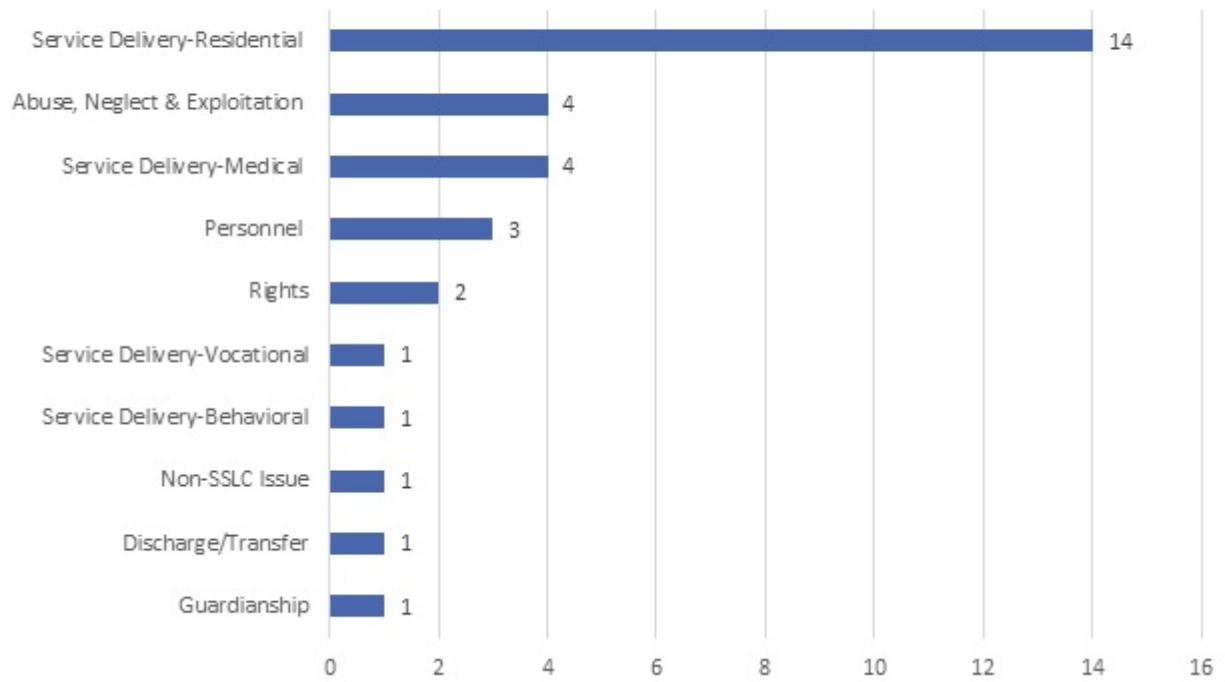
Susan Aguilar, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Brenham State Supported Living Center

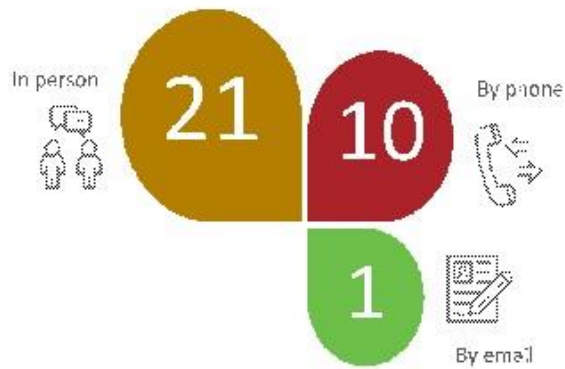


Susan Aguilar earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Texas Lutheran University. She worked in the field of early childhood intervention prior to obtaining the position of Qualified Developmentally Disabled Professional at the Brenham State Supported Living Center. While at the Center, Ms. Aguilar also served as program facilitator, person-directed planning coordinator, level of need coordinator and interim rights protection officer. She has held the position of Assistant Independent Ombudsman since 2010. Ms. Aguilar is a certified Person Centered Thinking Trainer with The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices.

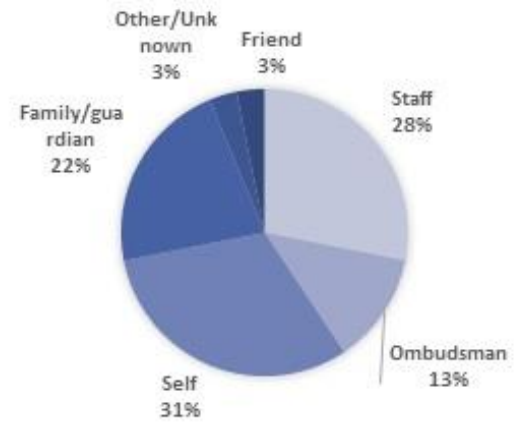
Number of Contacts by Type Brenham



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



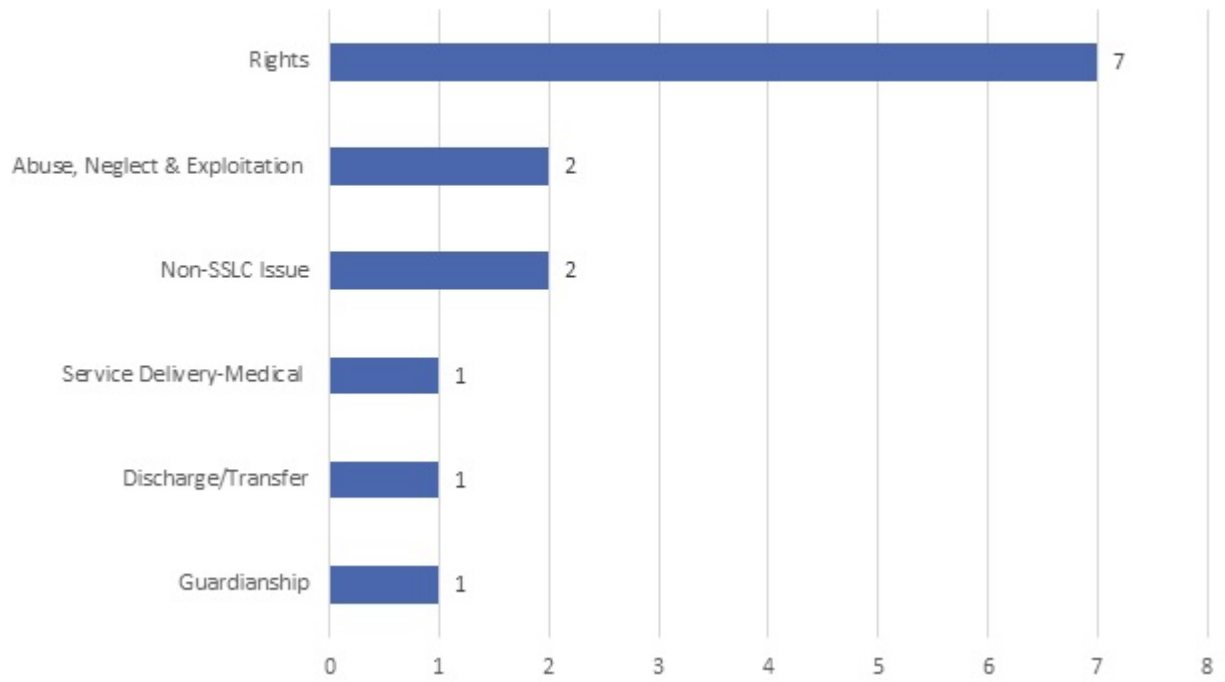
Jill Antilley, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Abilene State Supported Living Center

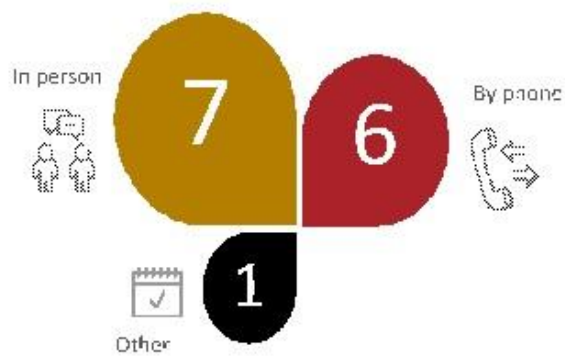


Jill Antilley has served residents at the Abilene State Supported Living Center for 18 years. Her career began in the Recreation Department as a direct-care staff in 2000 while attending college at Hardin Simmons University (HSU). Ms. Antilley graduated from HSU in 2000 with a Bachelor's degree in Police Administration and went to work for a juvenile correctional facility as a case manager and as a juvenile probation officer. Antilley returned to the Abilene SSLC in 2002 to serve as a Qualified Developmental Disability Professional and as the Human Rights Officer, before accepting the position as the Assistant Independent Ombudsman in 2010.

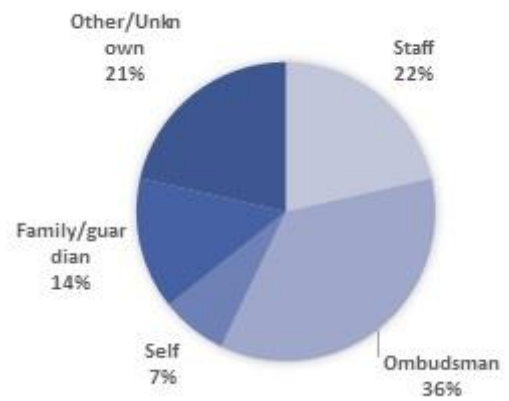
Number of Contacts by Type Abilene



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



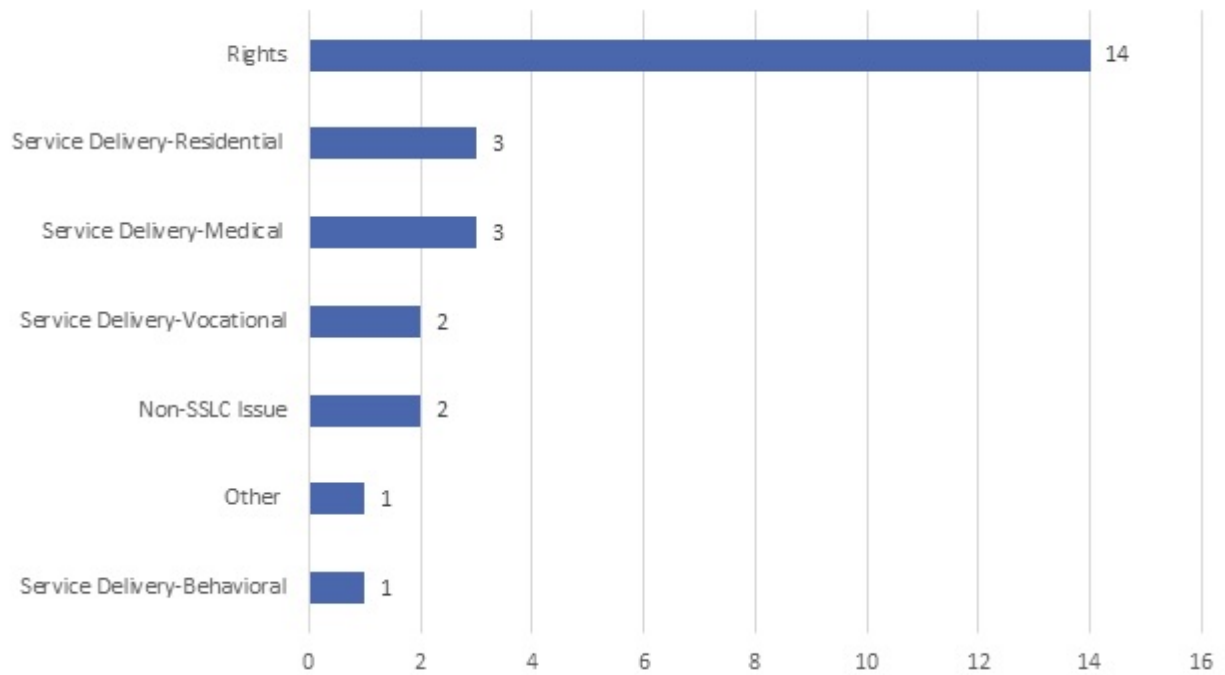
Kellen Davis, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Corpus Christi State Supported Living Center

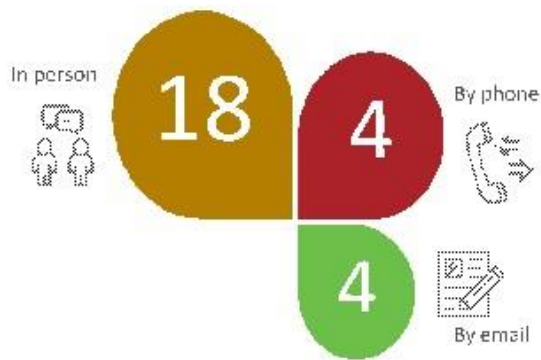


Ms. Davis's career began in 1988 while going to school at Howard Payne University. She worked for the Texas Youth Commission as the Recreation Supervisor. She graduated from HPU with a degree in Physical Education and a minor in English. She went on to work for the TYC for 15 years in various roles. Ms. Davis also worked as an LVN for the University of Texas Medical Branch at a TYC facility and in nursing facilities. She was a respite supervisor for local MHMR and owned her own business, a doughnut coffee shop. Ms. Davis worked at the Mexia SSLC for 4 and a half years as the Transition Specialist. She joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman at the Corpus Christi SSLC in 2017.

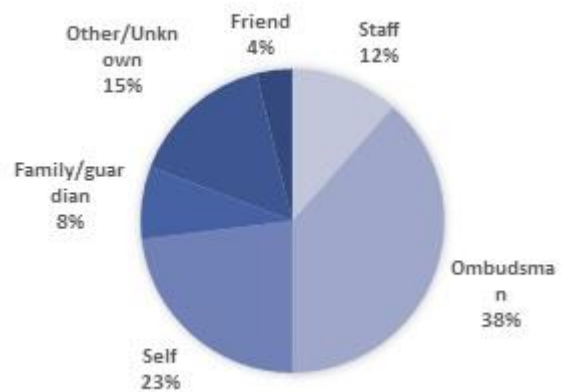
Number of Contacts by Type Corpus Christi



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



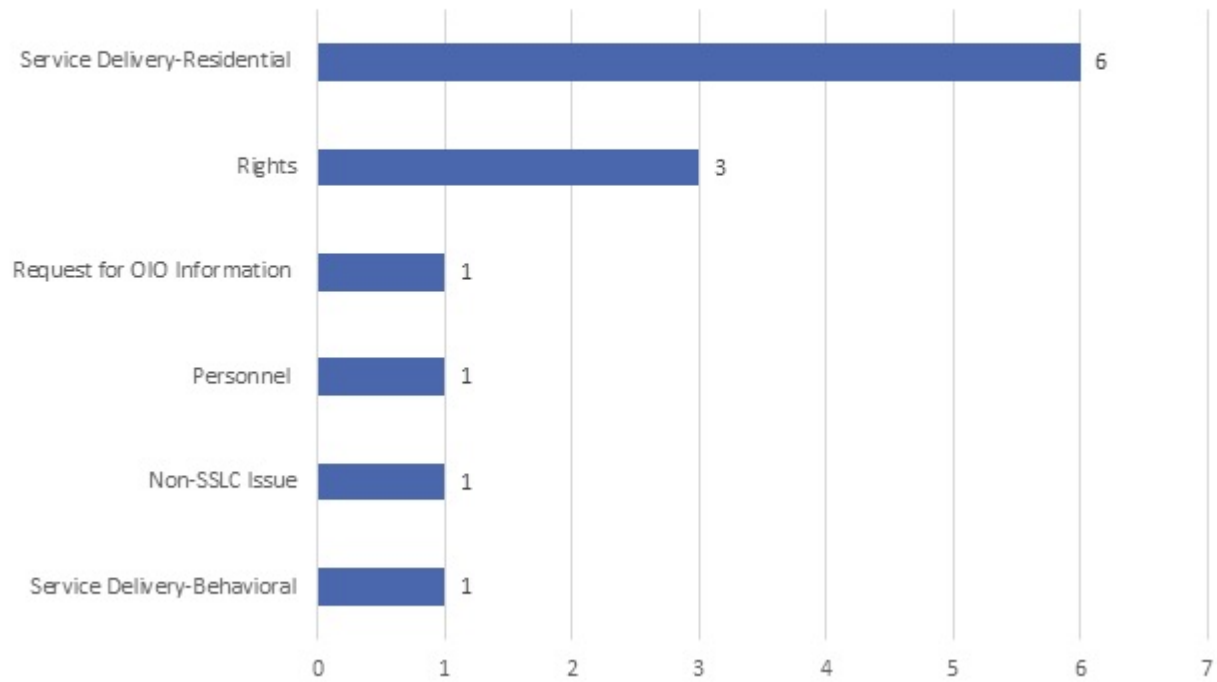
Horacio Flores, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Rio Grande State Center

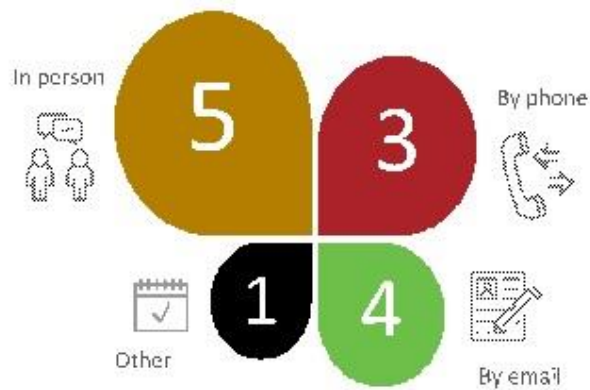


Horacio Flores hails from the Rio Grande Valley and attended Texas A&M Kingsville where he earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology. He began his career with the State of Texas working for the Department of Family and Protective Services as an Investigator for Child Protective Services in Nueces, Kleberg, Duval and Jim Hogg counties. Mr. Flores then accepted the position of Qualified Intellectual Disabilities Professional (QIDP) at Corpus Christi State Supported Living Center. Shortly thereafter he was appointed to a Lead QIDP. Mr. Flores then relocated to the Rio Grande Valley and accepted the position of QIDP at the Rio Grande State Center in Harlingen. Mr. Flores accepted the position of Assistant Independent Ombudsmen of the Rio Grande Center in April 2017.

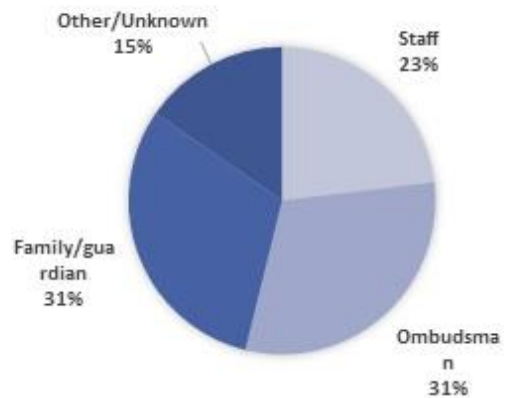
Number of Contacts by Type Rio Grande



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



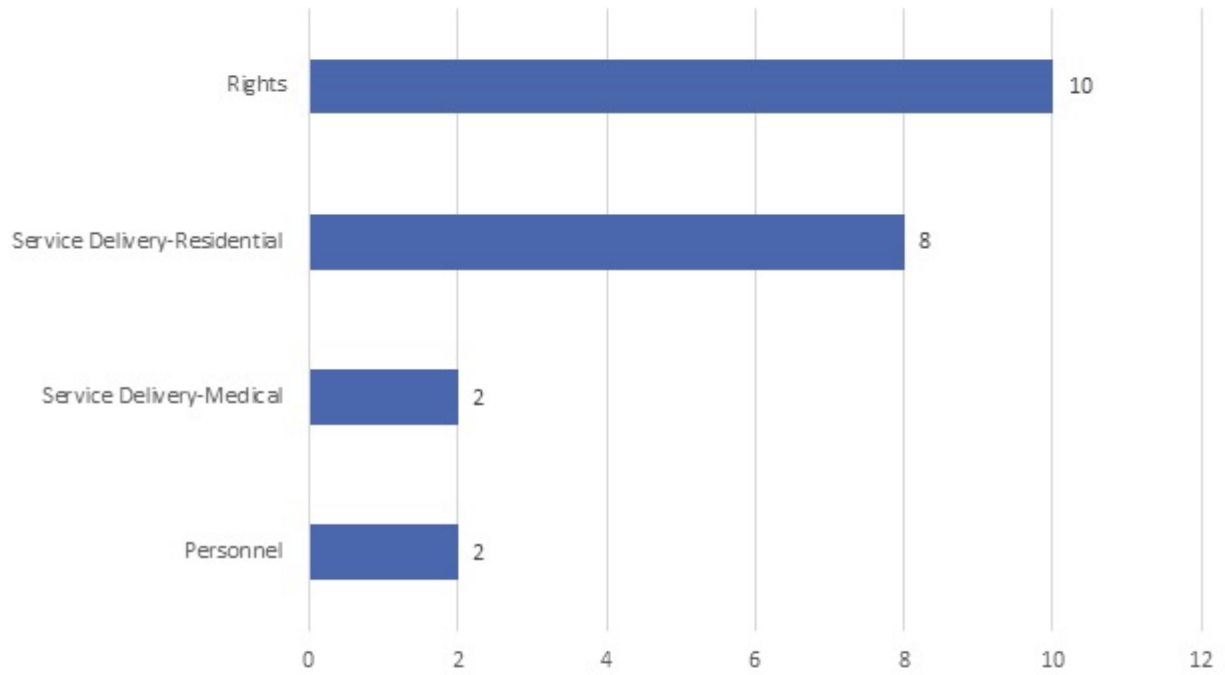
Brenda Frausto, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

San Angelo State Supported Living Center

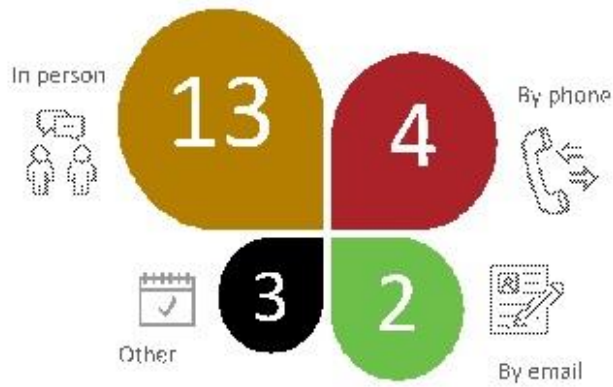


Ms. Frausto obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Sociology from Angelo State University. She began her career at the San Angelo SSLC in 1991 as an active treatment provider then later assumed the role of Admission and Placement Coordinator. Ms. Frausto was also the Admission Coordinator for MHMR Service of the Concho Valley. For 13 years, Ms. Frausto worked for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services as an Adult Protective Services Specialist where she earned the reputation of going above and beyond to protect and serve Texas' most vulnerable adults. Ms. Frausto has served as a Guardian Advocate with Guardianship Alliance of the Concho Valley and was a member of the Tom Green County Coalition Against Violence She joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman in 2016. Ms. Frausto is a candidate for certification as a Person Centered Thinking Trainer with The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices.

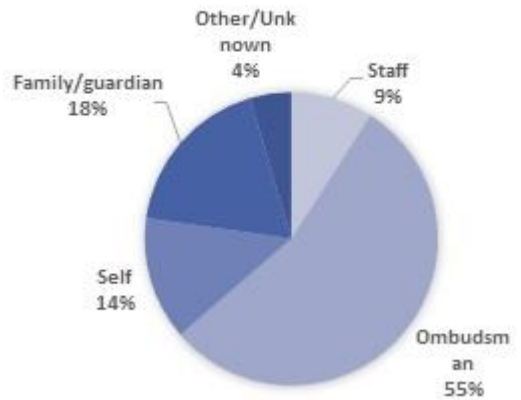
Number of Contacts by Type San Angelo



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



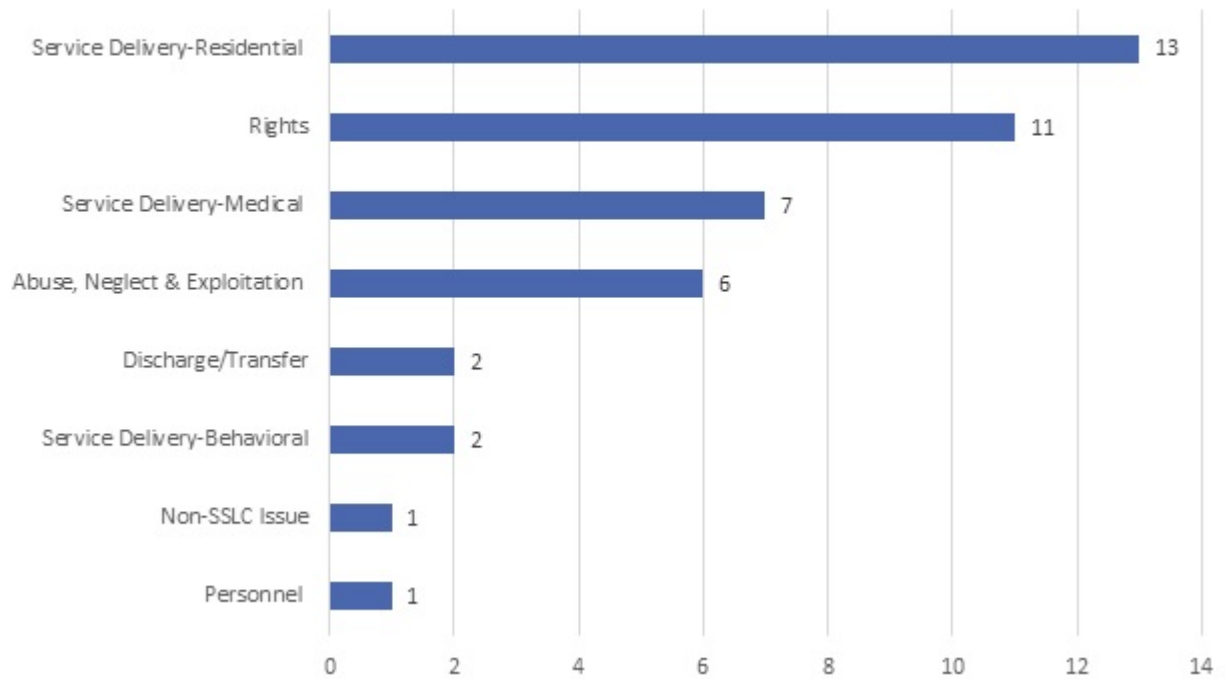
Gevona Hicks, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

San Antonio State Supported Living Center

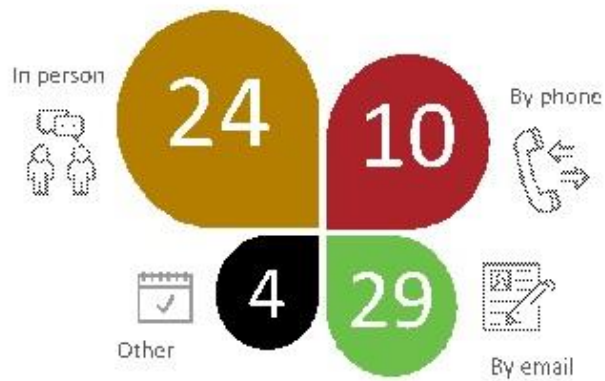


A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Ms. Hicks received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a certificate in Gerontology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She relocated to San Antonio, Texas in 2001 and worked with infants and toddlers at a local children's shelter. She began her career supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities providing direct care and then as a case manager, supervising multiple group homes in San Antonio for an Intermediate Care Facility and Home and Community Service provider. Ms. Hicks began her employment with the state of Texas in 2006 at Austin SSLC prior to transferring to San Antonio SSLC where she worked as a QIDP and Human Rights Officer prior to joining the Office of the Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Centers in April 2014. Ms. Hicks is a certified Person Centered Thinking Trainer with The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices.

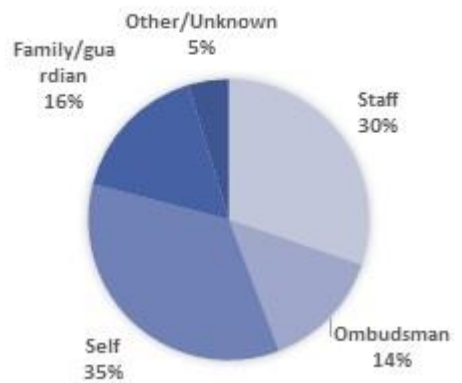
Number of Contacts by Type San Antonio



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



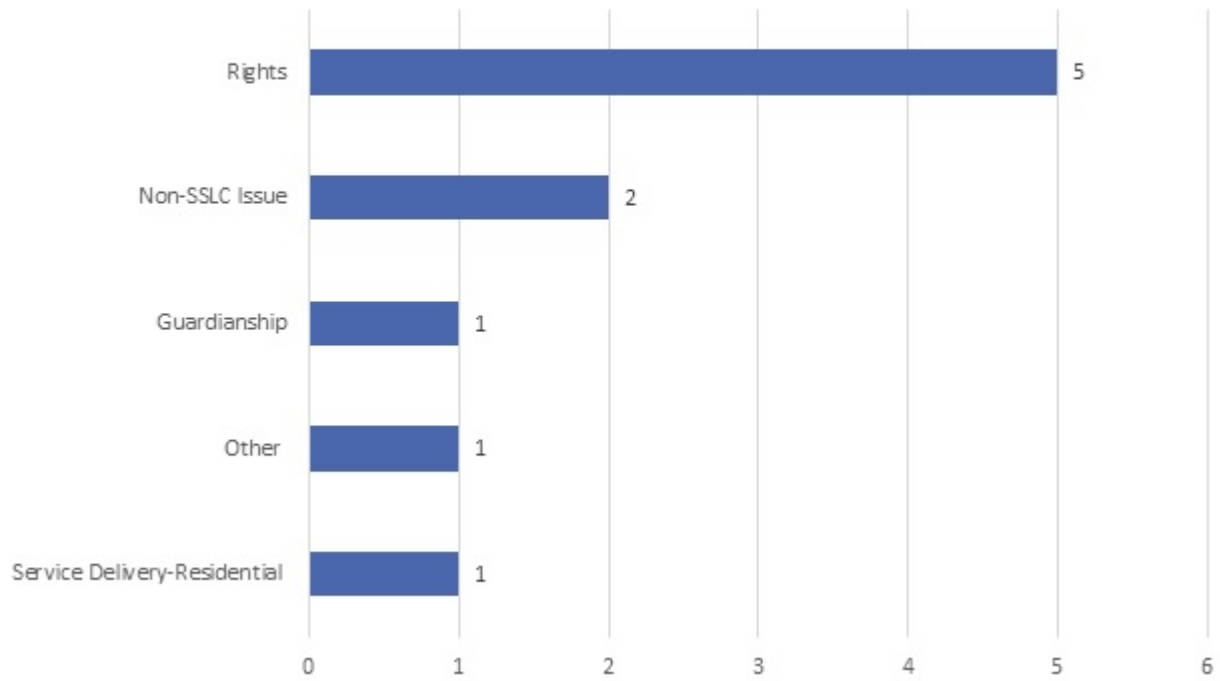
Talya Hines, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Austin State Supported Living Center

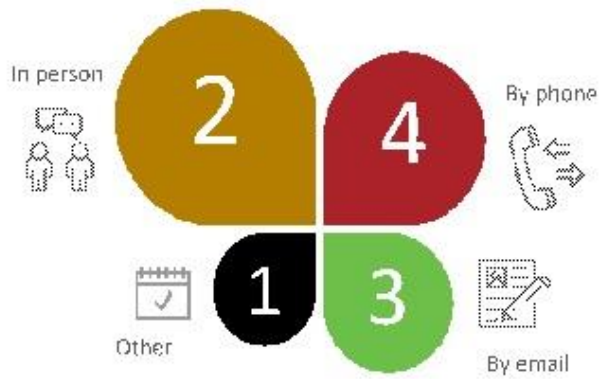


Ms. Hines was born and raised in Grayson County, Texas, and resides in Pflugerville with her family. Ms. Hines earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology and a Master of Science Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of North Texas. She began her professional career at the Department of Family and Protective Services as a Child Care Licensing Specialist in Dallas. Ms. Hines then moved to Austin where she assisted individuals with disabilities with maintaining independence through their environment and employment as a case manager for the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. Following her passion to help others, Ms. Hines obtained the position of Post-Move Monitor at the Austin SSLC, where she supported individuals who transitioned into a community setting. Before she began serving as the Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Austin SSLC in 2018, she developed online and instructor led curricula for Local Authorities as a Curriculum Developer for HHS. Ms. Hines is a candidate for certification as a Person Centered Thinking Trainer with The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices.

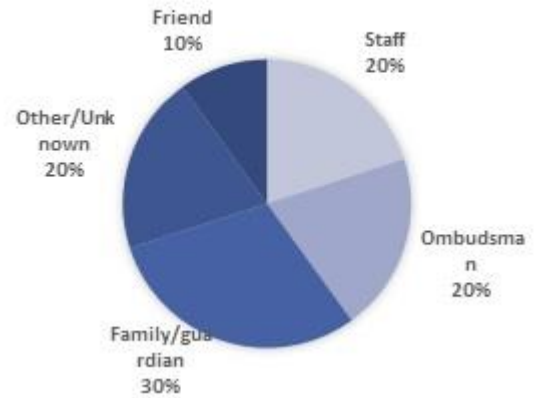
Number of Contacts by Type Austin



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



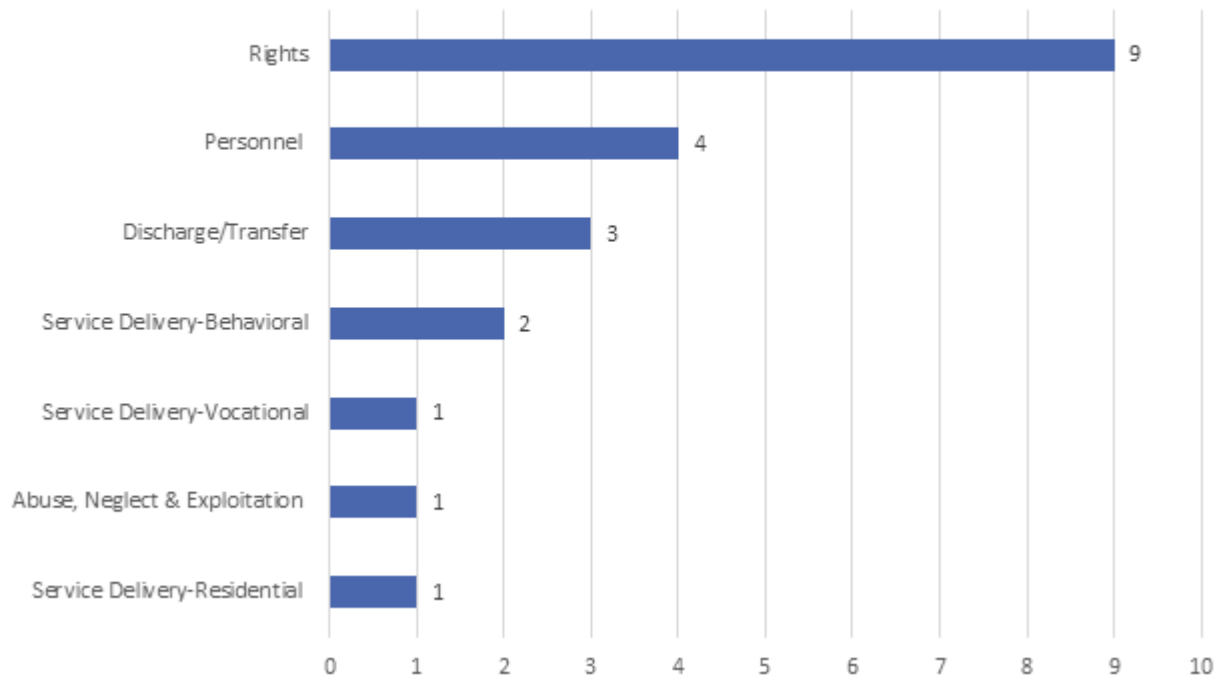
Adam Parks, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Mexia State Supported Living Center

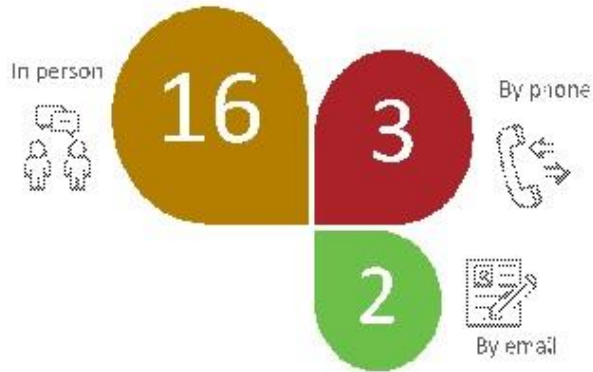


Adam Parks was raised in Mexia, Texas. He attended Stephen F. Austin State University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. After graduation, he began his professional career as a conservatorship caseworker for the Department of Family and Protective Services in Angelina and Shelby County Texas. Mr. Parks then accepted the position of Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional (QIDP) at Lufkin State Supported Living Center. He was later appointed Lead QIDP for the Oak Hill Unit. He also served as a standing member of the Human Rights Committee during his time working at Lufkin State Supported Living Center. Parks accepted the position of Assistant Independent Ombudsman of the Mexia State Supported Living Center in February 2014. Mr. Parks is a certified Person Centered Thinking Trainer with The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices.

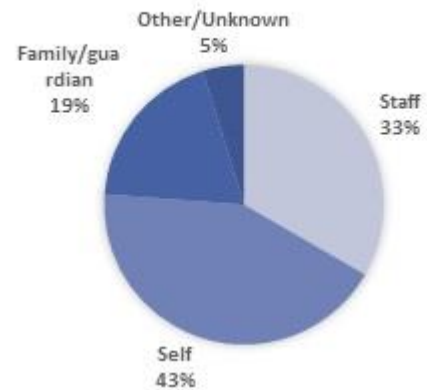
Number of Contacts by Type Mexia



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



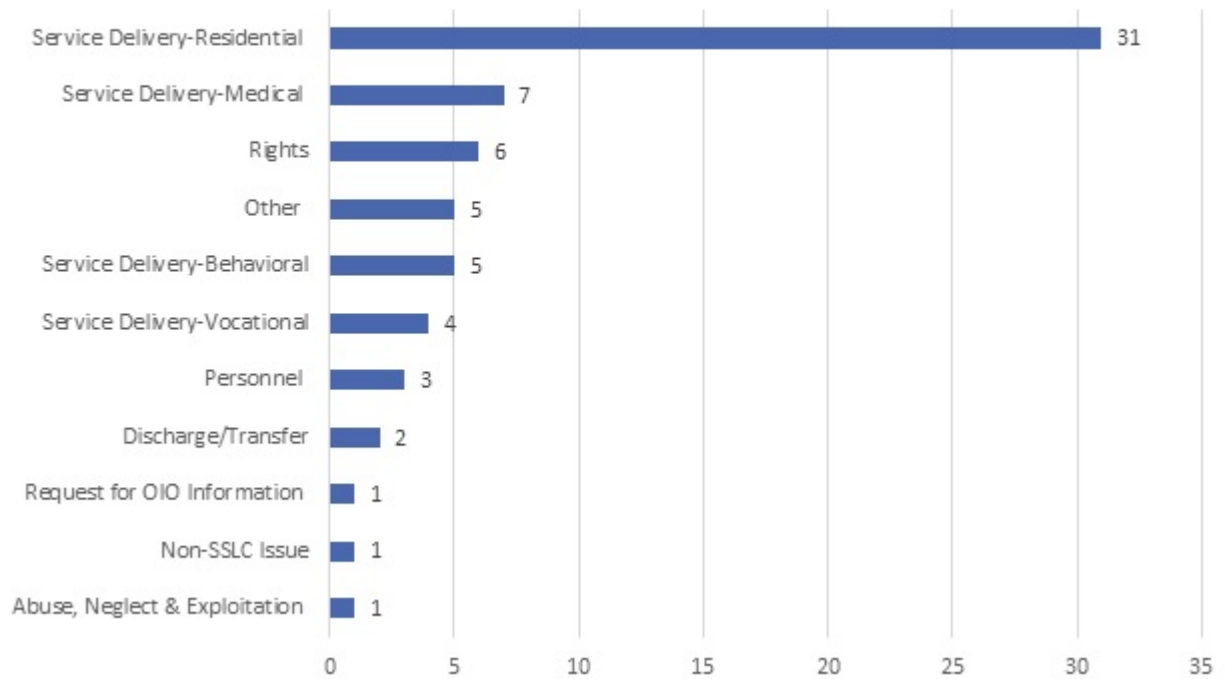
Isabel Ponce, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

El Paso State Supported Living Center

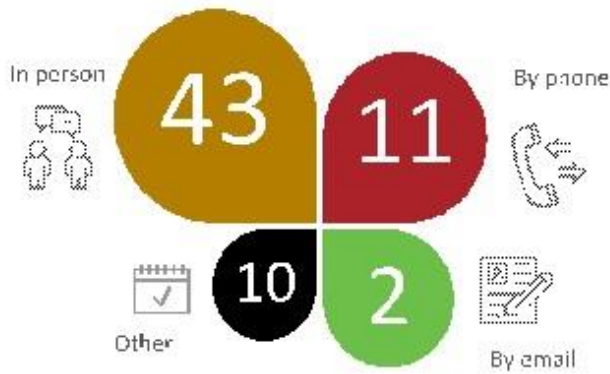


Born and raised in the Sun City, Ms. Ponce went from serving the elderly population to working with children. She was employed by the El Paso Headstart Program where she provided social services to children and their families through Community Outreach. Later she came to serve adults with developmental disabilities as a Residential Director in the private sector. Once she became a Certified Internal Investigator, she began working as a Case Manager for a Home and Community-based Services Provider. After seven years, Ms. Ponce joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman in December 2010 as the AIO for the El Paso State Supported Living Center.

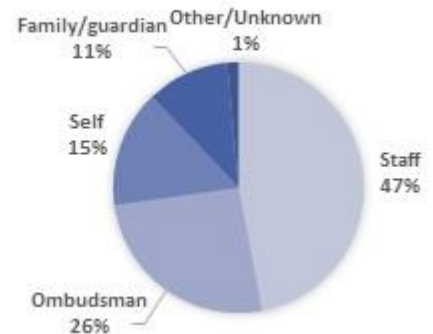
Number of Contacts by Type El Paso



How were contacts received?

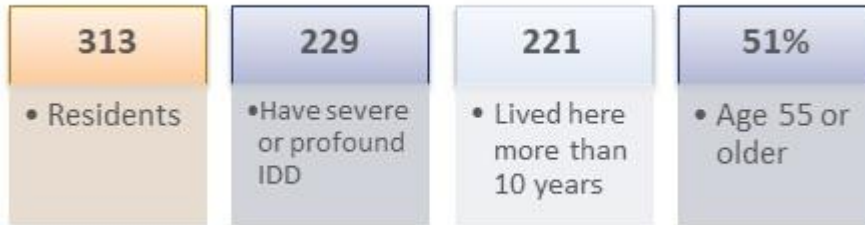


Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



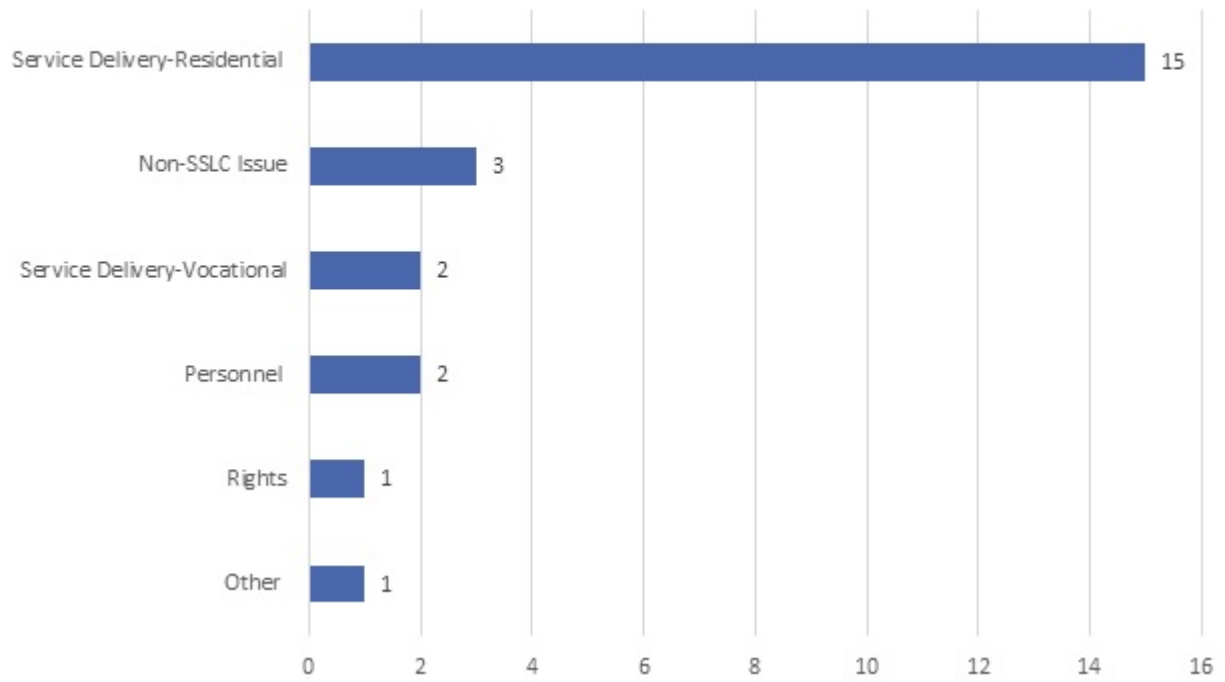
Deatrice Potlow, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Richmond State Supported Living Center

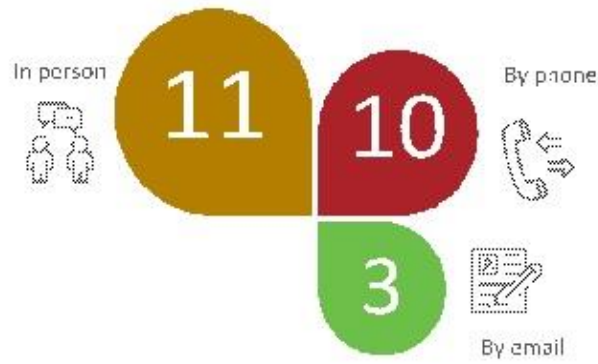


Born and raised in Greenwood, Mississippi, Ms. Potlow earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Office Administration in 1997. Shortly after graduating she began working at a local hospital as a Medical Transcriptionist. She relocated to Houston, Texas for career advancement, and began a career with the State of Texas. During her tenure of employment, she served as an Investigator for children, adults and persons with disabilities. Prior to being hired as an Assistant Independent Ombudsman, she worked as a Facility Investigator who was responsible for investigating allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation at the Richmond SSLC.

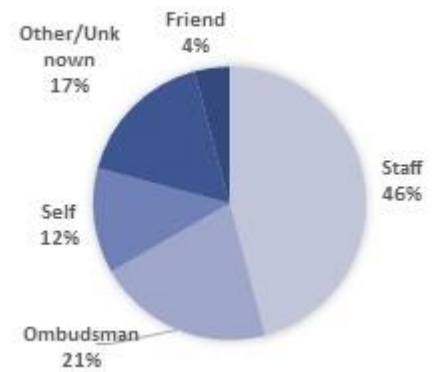
Number of Contacts by Type Richmond



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



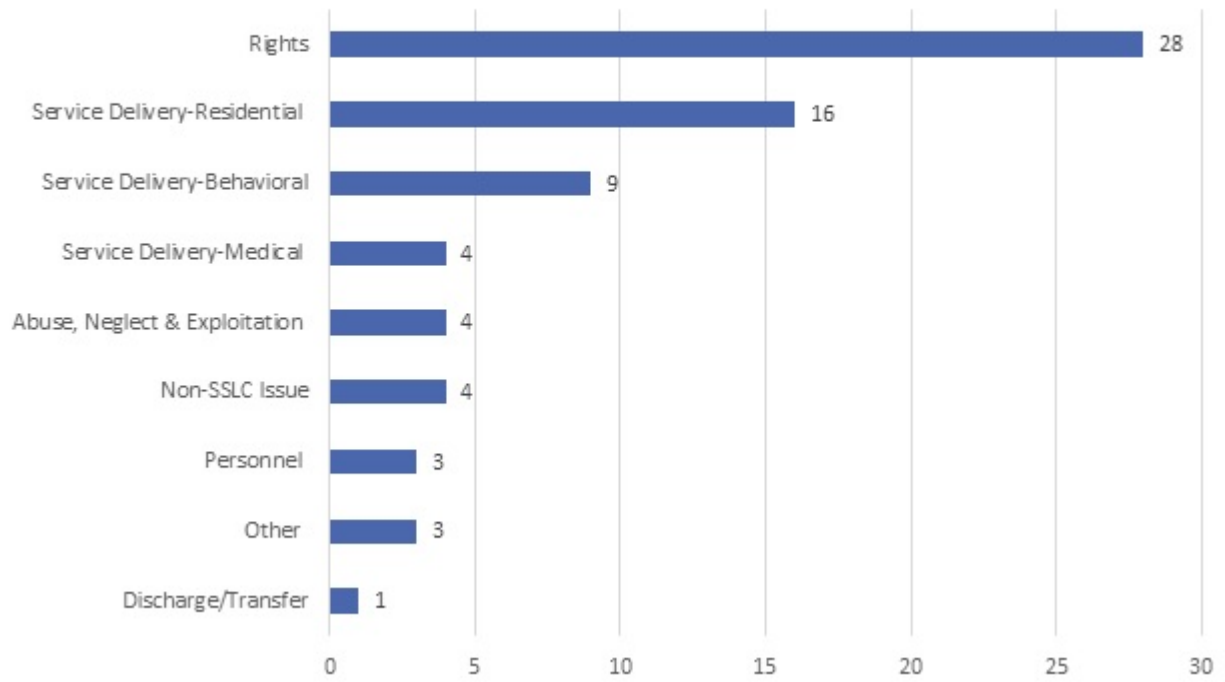
Robin Seale-Gutierrez, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Lubbock State Supported Living Center

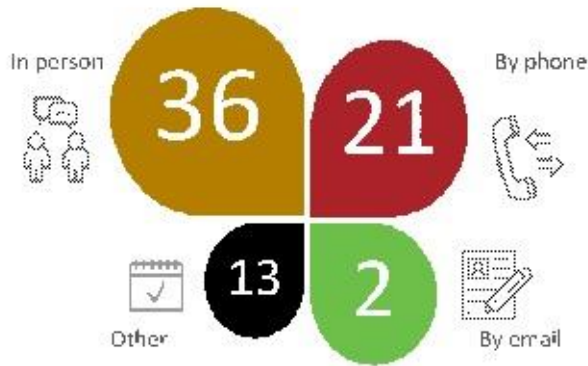


A Lubbock native, Ms. Seale-Gutierrez received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Texas Tech University and continues to work toward her Master's degree. Ms. Seale-Gutierrez worked at Lubbock State Supported Living Center for 10 years in varying roles including a Psychological Assistant, Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional (QIDP), QIDP Coordinator, and most recently the Assistant Director of Programs prior to joining the Office of the Independent Ombudsman. Ms. Seale-Gutierrez is a graduate of the 2009 Building the Bench program where she obtained her Certified Management Professional certificate. Prior to working at Lubbock SSLC, Ms. Seale-Gutierrez served as a parent advocate for those receiving Special Education Services by serving on multiple committees and advisory boards for two school districts. She also assisted families of children receiving special education services in understanding their rights and the services available to them allowing the families to become strong advocates for their child. Ms. Seale-Gutierrez joined the Office of the Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Centers in June 2014.

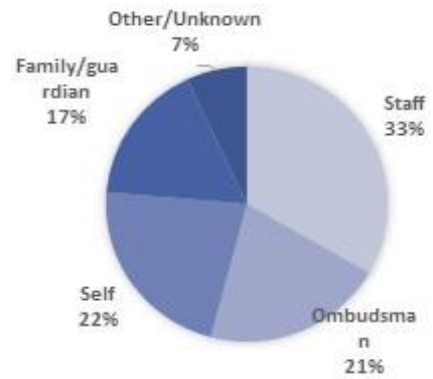
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How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



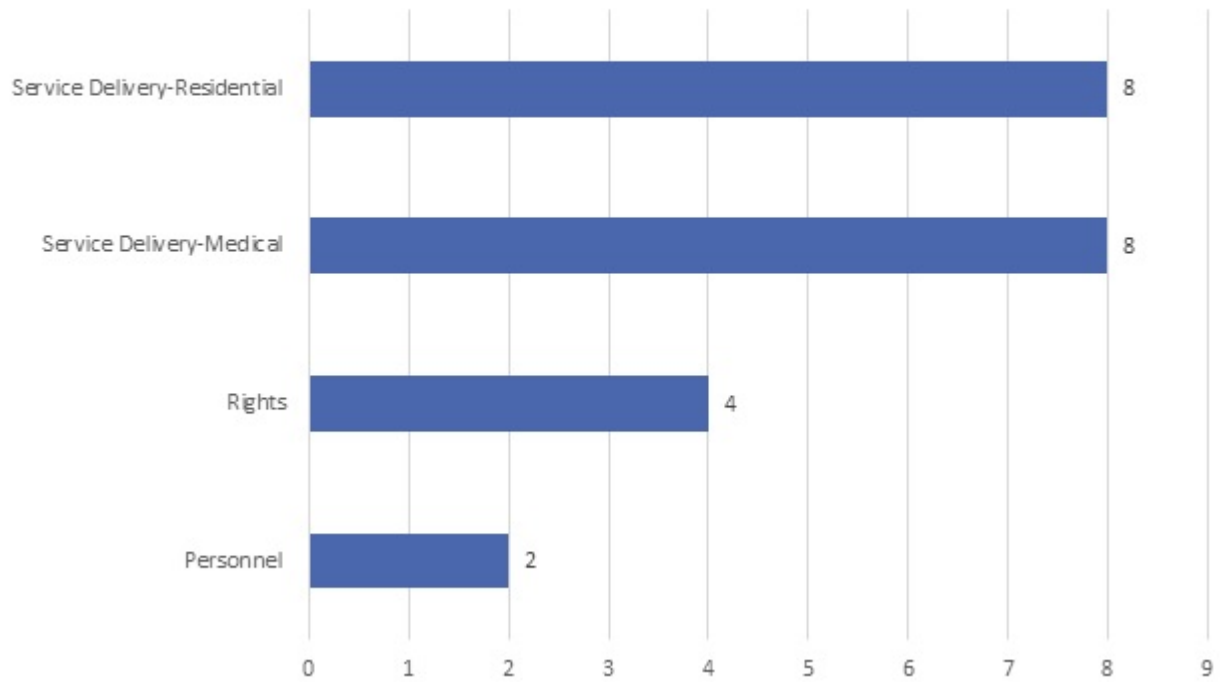
Marvin Stewart, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Lufkin State Supported Living Center

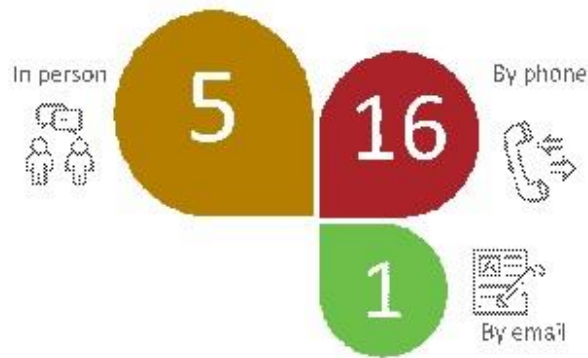


Marvin Stewart received his Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology/Sociology and his Master of Arts degree in Community Counseling from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Mr. Stewart has worked at the Lufkin State Supported Living Center for 27 years and has lived in the Lufkin, Texas area all of his life. He spent his first sixteen years of employment at the Lufkin State Supported Living Center as a Behavior Health Specialist followed by two years as a Supervising Behavior Health Specialist. Mr. Stewart then transferred to the Quality Assurance Department and worked 18 months as a Program Compliance Monitor prior to accepting his current role as Assistant Independent Ombudsman in August 2011. Prior to his this role, he served as a standing member of the Behavioral Intervention/Human Rights Committee and while working as a Program Compliance Monitor, served as the deputy Human Rights Officer. Mr. Stewart retired with 27 years of state service in December 2019.

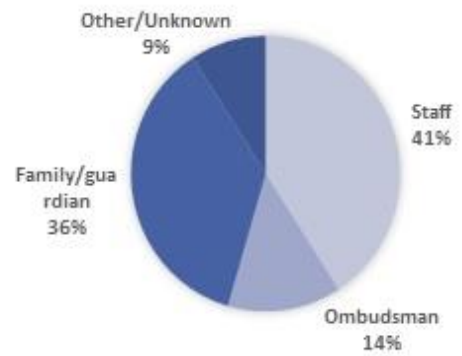
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How were contacts received?

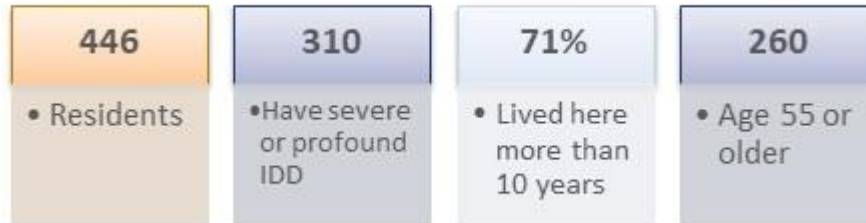


Who Contacted the Ombudsman?



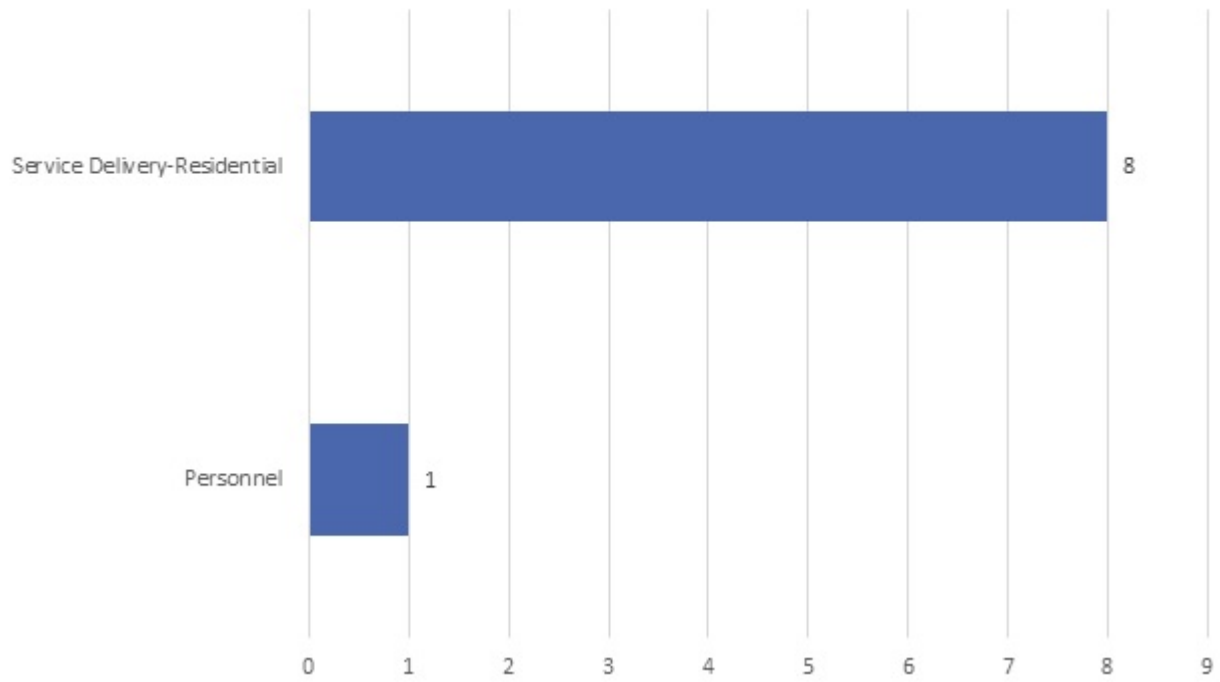
Jerome Young, Assistant Independent Ombudsman

Denton State Supported Living Center



Born and raised in Clovis, New Mexico, Mr. Young obtained a Bachelor's degree in Accounting from Texas Tech University. He began his career at Lubbock State School in 1993 as an Active Treatment Provider. After several years in Lubbock, he moved to the Dallas/Ft. Worth area and served at the Denton SSLC, holding the positions of Direct Support Professional, Building Coordinator, Residential Supervisor and Job Requisition Coordinator. His reputation for client advocacy, fairness and compassion attested that he would be a valuable member of the Office of the Independent Ombudsman for State Supported Living Centers. He joined the OIO as the Assistant Independent Ombudsman for the Denton SSLC in February 2013. Mr. Young retired with 27 years of state service in December 2019.

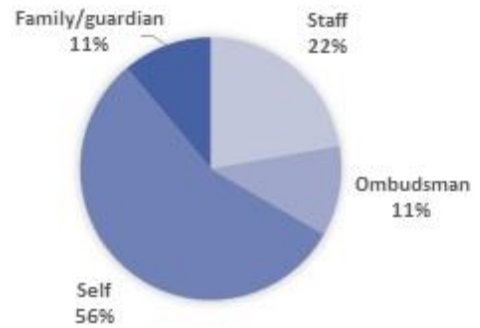
Number of Contacts by Type Denton



How were contacts received?



Who Contacted the Ombudsman?





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