



# NEWS

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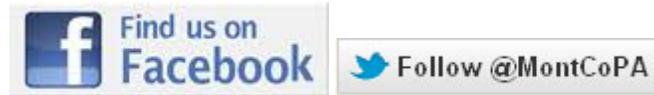
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## **Montco Youth Center Aces Audit**

**Norristown, PA (August 7, 2014)** – Several years ago in an attempt to eliminate sexual abuse and sexual harassment in detention facilities, Congress passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), and in 2012 national standards to prevent, detect, and respond to sexual assault and harassment in juvenile facilities was passed.

In June the Montgomery County Youth Center in West Norriton underwent its first audit under the new standards and met or exceeded each standard becoming the first county in Pennsylvania to receive a perfect score.

“This is a tremendous tribute to the dedicated professionals who work at our youth center,” said Josh Shapiro, chair of the Montgomery County Commissioners. “The auditor was clearly impressed with both the facility and the staff, and in interviews with the youth at the center the auditor received even more glowing reports. We are very proud of everyone at the youth center.”

Joe Viti, executive director of the youth center, was extremely proud of his staff. “The Montgomery County Youth Center has one of the best detention and shelter programs in the state and every employee should be proud of the hard work that is being done, and the accomplishments that we have achieved as a team,” he said. “Our staff is truly committed to helping and making a difference for every youth at our facility.”

The audit took place on June 9 and 10. A third day was planned, according to the auditor, but it was not needed due to “the quality of the documentation provided to the audit and the organized manner that interviews were facilitated by the agency.”

“There were no incidents of sexual abuse or assault during the year prior to this audit,” the report noted. There was one instance of behavior that would fall under the PREA Standards' definition of sexual harassment. The audit went on to point out that “the agency reaction to this event was swift and decisive. The incident was reported to the Pennsylvania Child-Line and the Montgomery County Detective Bureau. The perpetrator was removed from the facility, charged as an adult, and remanded to the county jail.”

The staff of the youth center received some of the most glowing praise from the report. The auditor wrote: “One of the most impressive things about this agency is the quality of the staff they manage to recruit and retain. The least senior direct-care line staff I interviewed had four years on the job. The average time on the job was seven years. All had a bachelor’s degree in an appropriately related field (psychology, criminal justice, sociology). Twelve frontline, direct care staff were interviewed. They ranged in experience from 4 to over 13 years at MCYC.

“All staff were well versed in their obligations as mandated reporters. All felt well-supported by the agency and had no fear regarding retaliation for reporting abuse. All staff has received PREA specific training as first responders and all knew exactly what to do if they were a first responder. All felt empowered to proactively address issues related to sexual violence and were able to describe actions they would take to prevent and/or deter possible acts of sexual violence.”

Eleven youth at the facility were also interviewed, and the auditor remarked in his report that “none of the youth reported having fear for their safety while at (the youth center), and all said they felt very safe at the (center), because the staff is always there and always willing to help.”

The auditor interviewed one youth who identified as LGBT. His reports said, “It was heart breaking to hear this youth describe a life of alienation and rejection prior to arriving at MCYC. It was heart-warming, and again heart breaking, to hear this youth describe a feeling of acceptance and belonging for the first time in her life while at MCYC.”

The Montgomery County Youth Center is a 48-bed coed residential facility where 10- to 18-year-old juveniles reside while they are awaiting juvenile court hearings. The Youth Center operates two separate and independent programs:

- A 12-bed shelter that houses juveniles for minor delinquent offenses and dependency issues such as runaway, truant, or ungovernable behavior.
- A 36-bed secure detention center that houses juveniles alleged to have committed a delinquent act.