

OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE

Traveled to Arkansas



MILLCREEK BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The OCA was welcomed to the facility by CEO Brady Serafin. He provided a tour of the campus and discussed ways he has worked to improve the facility since entering his role in 2020. We also had an opportunity to meet privately with NH children placed in the program to learn from their experience and bring feedback to leadership.

What we learned:

- Restraints have reduced significantly with the use of a trauma-informed approach and prioritizing de-escalation. Restraints are down 50%
- Workforce is not an issue. Legislation is paying an additional \$2/hour to direct care staff. The pay is comparable to NH with lower cost of living.
- The program utilizes a medical model which ensures clinical and nursing staff are available to meet kids' needs 24/7. With staff available around the clock they voiced no need to contact law enforcement.
- **Although kids noted the structure was better than some placements in NH, NH children want to be placed in state and closer to family.**
- Millcreek offers many outdoor spaces for the kids. They have active sports teams that compete with area schools. They have also invited other local programs to bring kids for field day.
- The program has paid to fly NH parents to AR and fund local hotel stays.



THE VISIT

The Child Advocate, Cassandra Sanchez, and Assistant Child Advocate, Jason Taylor, traveled to Arkansas to visit NH children placed at Millcreek Behavioral Health residential facility. This facility is often utilized by the state of New Hampshire for higher level placements when kids' needs cannot be met at an in state program. The OCA also visited a juvenile detention center, Arkansas Juvenile Assessment and Treatment Center. We learned about the positive engagement of children in treatment at Millcreek and hope to inform in state facilities of different techniques to improve programming.



ARKANSAS JUVENILE ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT CENTER

What we learned:

- Arkansas has 4 major treatment facilities for youth committed for serious offenses or when committed for over a year. They also utilize county jails for youth awaiting adjudication or for shorter commitments.
- AJATC utilizes a mentorship approach where kids who have made progress in treatment act as mentors to new kids or those struggling within the facility. Mentors reside in less restrictive dorms and are tasked with intervening and encouraging peers to follow rules.

The Juvenile Justice Ombudsman for the state of Arkansas, Brooke Digby, was kind enough to provide a tour of the facility. She has worked to build supportive and trusting relationships with kids committed to facilities across Arkansas.