March 20, 2013

Dear Colleagues,

Ensuring the safety of our staff and the youth we serve is OYA’s top priority. This includes both physical and emotional safety, and freedom from any type of harm. Federal laws, state laws, and agency policies all seek to protect everyone associated with OYA from being the victim of any type of abusive behavior or unsafe practices.

Within OYA, the Professional Standards Office (PSO) is the group charged with investigating any allegations of misconduct that rise to the level of illegal, unethical, or abusive behaviors. PSO investigates all charges of misconduct it receives, regardless of who is involved. As needed, PSO works with OYA’s Human Resources Office or law enforcement. Although PSO often is considered to be primarily concerned with investigating alleged misconduct by staff, PSO also investigates reports of youth misconduct directed at staff or other youth. PSO’s actions play a key role in promoting a safe environment.

As agency employees, we also have a role to play, and that is to responsibly report inappropriate behaviors. It can be difficult to come forward and make a charge against a co-worker, but it is the right thing to do for the safety and well-being of other co-workers and of the youth we serve. Maintaining OYA’s zero tolerance for abusive behavior relies on everyone being willing to stand up against that type of behavior when we see it.

We also understand that it is frustrating to be falsely accused of wrongdoing by anyone, whether it is a co-worker or youth in our care. We all know that innocent behaviors can be subject to misinterpretation. Many of our youth, in particular, often don’t know how to appropriately manage turbulent emotions and, as a result, staff may undeniably face the consequences of a youth’s anger or misinterpretation of something they saw or heard.

PSO is aware of this, and fairly and thoroughly investigates all allegations of misconduct. When an employee or youth reports suspected misconduct in good faith, that person is not penalized in any way. If, however, youth or staff are found to have deliberately falsely accused someone, the person who made the false report will be held accountable.

Because of the confidential nature of investigations and personnel actions, it also is not always possible to let the person who reported the problem know the outcome of the case, or whether any disciplinary actions were taken. However, PSO does provide monthly and annual reports that give a general indication of the results of its investigations. For example, only two of 26
allegations of staff-on-youth sexual misconduct/harassment were substantiated in 2012. At the same time, 13 of 34 youth-on-youth sexual misconduct allegations were substantiated.

If you have any concerns about youth or staff behaviors that you believe may merit an investigation, please step forward and contact PSO. Doing so may help make a positive difference in the lives of the youth we serve and of your co-workers.

We appreciate your continued professionalism, respect, and compassion in what we know can be challenging working conditions. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Fariborz Pakseresht
Director

Joe O’Leary
Deputy Director