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Troubled group home where two runaways died in traffic to close

Realation Group Home in Tulsa had 2 runaways fatally struck by vehicles in 4 years

By Curtis Killman and Harrison Grimwood Tulsa World May 1, 2017



Realations Group Home, located on Skelly Drive, is set to close at the end of June. MIKE SIMONS/Tulsa World file

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A troubled Tulsa group home for abused and neglected children will close June 30, its owner said Friday.

Realation Group Home, 2026 W. Skelly Drive, notified the Oklahoma Department of Human Services on Friday afternoon that it would be terminating its contract, owner Mark Jackson told the Tulsa World.

“Given the current situation, it’s with a heavy heart that we just feel it is in our best interest to terminate our contract at this time,” Jackson said, paraphrasing from a letter he sent to DHS.

Jackson declined to elaborate on the reason for terminating the contract.

DHS had stopped placing children at the facility while it investigates the death of a boy who died after running away from the facility. It was the second such death in four years involving a child who was fatally struck by a vehicle while fleeing the facility.

The facility currently has 21 children, with seven scheduled to step down in their treatment plan, a move toward placing them back with their families, DHS spokeswoman Sheree Powell said.

While the spokeswoman said the dwindling numbers were not indicative of the future of the group home, she did acknowledge that an ongoing investigation into the latest death had reached the review stage.

DHS contracts with two companies owned by Jackson, Realation Community Services of Oklahoma, licensed for up 16 boys, and Realation Health Care, licensed for up to 16 girls.

The facility is a D+ licensed group home that contracts with DHS to take children 8 to 18 years old, although most of the children are aged 10 to 14.

Realation employs 33 full- and part-time workers, Jackson said.

The company has been in business for 17 years, with the past 16 years at its current location on Skelly Drive.

Asked if he thought DHS was preparing to terminate the contract, Jackson said he had been having "positive conversations" with the agency and didn't believe the contract was going to be canceled.

Earlier Friday, Powell confirmed the agency's Child Welfare Services division had been in discussions with Realation.

"They've been in discussion with Mark Jackson about the future of his facility and the kids there. And there's been no official decision yet," Powell said.

Chase Dakota Bridges, 11, a resident of Realation, was hit and killed about 6 p.m. Dec. 28, while attempting to cross Interstate 244 in west Tulsa near 31st Street.

Chase had walked away from the facility earlier in the day, according to a previous story. Another resident from the group home, Christopher Seaton, 11, was killed in April 2013 while attempting to cross Interstate 44.

Part of Realation's protocol for runaways is to notify police. Many of the runaway reports are residents who repeatedly leave the facility, according to a previous story.

Police responded to 158 calls for service to the facility in 2016, 115 calls in 2015 and 119 calls in 2014, according to Tulsa Police Department records.

In an effort to address the issue, Jackson said previously that he intended to move the facility into a rural, Osage County area.

The Department of Human Services' primary goal in placing youth in a Level D-plus group home, such as Realation, "is to help youth cope with and control" emotional, behavioral disorders or problems the youth might have through counseling and treatment, Powell said in a previous interview.

Level D-plus facilities are paid a fixed rate of $134 per day per bed.

Jackson said some of the children would be transitioning out of his facility anyway with the end of the school year.

The remaining children would most likely find "positive placements."

“I think the majority of the kids will be able to transitions in a really positive way,” Jackson said.

Jackson said he would most likely sell the property once the contract ends.

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