

SOLANO COUNTY JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY COMPLEX

2010-2011 Solano County Grand Jury

I. SUMMARY

The Solano County Grand Jury is required by penal code to inquire into the operations of the Juvenile Detention Facilities in the County. The 2010-11 Solano County Grand Jury inspected the facilities in November 2010 and March 2011. The facilities are operated by the Solano County Probation Department.

The need to transport wards from the Juvenile Detention Facility to the Justice Centers in Fairfield and Vallejo continues to be a concern for the safety and security of wards. This situation adds to staffing and other operational costs. One solution would be a facility at the Juvenile Detention Facility Complex or the use of video for detention hearings.

The Juvenile Detention Facility Complex as a whole operates below the maximum capacity, but it should be noted that New Foundations Unit had a waiting list for placement of wards. The Solano County Probation Department should develop a plan that optimizes Challenge Unit, which at the time of this report was not in use.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Juvenile Detention Facility Complex (JDFC) is located at 740 Beck Avenue, Fairfield, California. There are three facilities located on this 4.7 acre site, with 46,390 square feet of building space. The JDFC is an arm of the Solano County Court and houses wards of the Court. The three facilities that make up JDFC are Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF), New Foundations (NF) and Challenge Unit (CU).

A. Juvenile Detention Facility

The average ward population of the Juvenile Detention Facility is 75-80 wards. The ward population can vary by length of stay, age, gender, and seriousness of the offense charged. Until they are released or placed in programs outside JDF, wards participate in regular programming, which includes school.

Within the facility, there are four housing units called "pods" (JDF's term). Each pod has an identified classification to determine assignments. Palo Verde pod houses new intakes and minors with serious health or medical issues. It is termed the orientation pod and houses up to 15 wards awaiting their initial court appearance. There are four rooms equipped for 24/7 video monitoring. Sequoia pod houses females and younger males. Sycamore pod houses older males. Redwood pod is a maximum security unit intended for wards being prosecuted in adult court and for those wards committed 90 days or more.

B. New Foundations

New Foundations is a 30-bed camp/ranch placement program for wards. The Solano County Probation Department is responsible for the operation of NF.

The programs at NF are directed toward family reunification and drug abuse avoidance. The many and varied programs include: education, anger avoidance, self-esteem, self-discipline, and accountability for each ward.

C. Challenge Unit

The Challenge Unit is fully equipped and ready to accept wards in the 28-bed facility, which is intended to operate like NF. This unit functions on an open-as-needed basis. At the time of our inspection, the CU was not used and opening it to house wards would require overtime or additional staffing.

III. METHODOLOGY

California Penal Code § 919, subsection (b) provides that “the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of public prisons within the County.” Pursuant to the statute, the 2010-11 Solano County Grand Jury inspected the Solano County Juvenile Detention Facility Complex on November 10, 2010, and March 3, 2011.

The Grand Jury interviewed the following Juvenile Probation staff:

- Superintendent Juvenile Detention Facility
- Educational Supervisor
- Supervising Counselors
- Supervising Medical Staff
- Counselors

The Grand Jury obtained information provided by the Probation Department and from Solano County’s website.

The Grand Jury inspected the following Juvenile Probation facilities:

- Juvenile Detention Facility
- Medical
- New Foundations
- Challenge Unit

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

A. Ward Processing Procedure

When a juvenile is arrested, he/she is processed and assessed. Subsequently, a ward is placed either in Palo Verde pod (Intake Unit), Sycamore pod, Sequoia pod, or Redwood pod, depending on his/her age, severity of the offense and medical/mental health needs.

The Probation Department prepares a report recommending to the court one of the following:

- return home
- placement with relatives or responsible adults
- out-of-home placement (foster home, group home, etc.), including New Foundations or Fouts Springs Youth Facility,* which is located in Colusa County
- commitment time in the Juvenile Detention Facility
- transfer to the California Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)**

*The possibility of Fouts Springs closing will alter the placement of wards within the County juvenile justice system.

**It is unknown at the time of this report what the overall impact of changes occurring on the DJJ level will have on the operation of the County Probation Department.

JDFC Data
as of March 2011

	Juvenile Detention Facility	New Foundations	Challenge Unit
Ward Population	79	30	0
Capacity	118	30	28
Length of Stay	As long as two years	Between four and six months	N/A

At the time of the Grand Jury visit, the ratio of male to female wards was approximately 70 to 30.

The staffing level, dictated by Title 15, is presently 58. The State-mandated ratios of staff to wards are as follows:

- 1-to-10 – day and evening shifts
- 1-to-15 – day and evening shifts at NF
- 1-to-30 – graveyard shift

New counselors attend a four-week State of California training program and serve a probationary period while working at the facility. Counselors can arrange to rotate to other programs within the facility.

Salaries and benefits are the largest costs involved with facility operations. Mandated staffing ratio levels increase total operating costs. The current cost to house a ward is \$230 per day.

The California Schools Administration and the County Superintendent of Schools review the educational program. Programs operated under the authority of the Solano Board of Education provide for the educational needs of wards. Individual evaluations and assessments are conducted to determine what special needs are present, and the ward is placed in the appropriate program(s). One-third of all wards have special education needs. The education program provides seven to eight classes for each ward. One teacher and one para-educator are assigned to each class. The Girl Scouts of America have a federally-funded grant program for mentoring the female wards.

The JDF and NF offer a variety of programs and courses that target positive results for wards while at the facility. Examples of programs are explained below:

- **Anger Management**
Wards learn various skills that can lead to better self-control. This program offers alternatives to prevent negative situations and provides positive options.
- **Substance Abuse**
An educational program that teaches the dangers of substance abuse and raises awareness of how drugs and alcohol can negatively impact wards' lives.
- **Cognitive Life Skills**
Participants learn how their past mistakes can negatively impact their lives and how to develop positive behaviors to assist them in a successful future.
- **Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART)**
The program teaches techniques on how to control anger and impulsive conduct. It emphasizes moral reasoning and appropriate behavior.

Wards have a structured day and attend school five days a week. School starts at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 2:30 p.m. Recreation is at 3:15 p.m., and evening is used for additional training. Wards are allowed phone service via a pre-paid call phone system. Phones are not monitored and letter writing is unlimited. The in-house telephone system generates funds for the Ward Welfare Fund. This fund is used for the welfare of the wards and is audited by a third party.

JDF has a full kitchen, but due to budgetary reasons, food service is outsourced through a private company (Aramark). The wards' nutritional needs (2,300 calories/day) are mandated by the state.

A private company (California Forensic Medical Group) runs the medical and mental health programs at the facility.

The Juvenile Detention Facility, one component of the JDFC, provides a safe and secure place for youth who are awaiting their court hearing for charged offenses. The court proceedings are held at the Solano County Hall of Justice, 600 Union Street, Fairfield, and the Solano Justice Building, 321 Tuolumne Street, Vallejo. Approximately 2,400 youths require transportation annually. The JDF accomplishes the transportation by using two vans and three designated officers. The requirement that youth detention hearings be held within 72 hours of arrest adds to the transportation demands. Other counties conduct juvenile detention hearings from their juvenile detention facilities via video to reduce transportation needs. Solano County does not. The transportation and holding process is costly and could lead to security and safety concerns. The Sheriff's Office provides transportation *only* for youths being tried as adults.

The Probation Department has indicated that, "NF is highly utilized by the department and provides targeted interventions to minors who need to be placed in a secure environment. Based on a recent analysis, it is more cost effective to operate NF than to place these minors in other residential programs."

At the time of the Grand Jury visits, JDF staff stated there were no gang problems. The facility has a zero-tolerance policy for gang-related problems. There are set procedures for handling ward grievances. Last year there were 43 grievances, and all were resolved. Depending on the types of grievances, other than civil rights charges/accusations, the superintendent makes the final determination.

Wards who meet the criteria may be assigned to an Electronic Monitoring Program that allows the ward to go home with certain restrictions.

There is about a 30% recidivism rate for the wards going through the facility's programs. The wards are tracked in the juvenile probation program until age 18, and, at that point, their criminal files are destroyed. The wards' medical files are kept for seven years, and if a ward was pregnant at the time of going through the program, those files are kept for 21 years from the date of the last medical contact in the facility.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 – Wards must be transported from 740 Beck Avenue, Fairfield, to other locations for court hearings and other court proceedings.

Recommendation 1 – Solano County should discuss with the Court potential solutions to the transportation issues. Possible solutions could be to develop a hearing room at 740 Beck Avenue and/or develop a video monitoring/communication site.

Finding 2 – The complex's population is below allowable levels, but there is a waiting list for placement of wards in New Foundations.

Recommendation 2 – Develop a plan that allows the optimum utilization of space and personnel to avoid delays of placing wards into programs.

COMMENTS

The staff at the Juvenile Complex was extremely helpful and showed great dedication to their jobs. The facilities appear to be clean, well-maintained, and professionally operated.

The uncertainty of funding and the possible impact from changes in State juvenile programs are of great concern. The County needs to utilize all its facilities and other resources available to maximize efficiency in its efforts to help the youth in its custody.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Solano County Board of Supervisors
Solano County Probation

COURTESY COPIES

Superior Court, County of Solano
Solano Sheriff's Office
Solano County Superintendent of Schools