

FOUTS SPRINGS YOUTH FACILITY 2009–2010 Solano County Grand Jury

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

California Penal Code Section §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 2009 – 2010 Grand Jury inspected the Fouts Springs Youth Facility on September 15, 2009. This property, while not in Solano County, is under the jurisdiction of Solano County.

GRAND JURY ACTIONS

- Inspected the facilities at Fouts Springs
- Interviewed management and educational staff
- Observed wards
- Interviewed Solano County Chief Probation Officer
- Reviewed Fouts Springs' Budget
- Reviewed Joint Powers Agreement, ward process and program curriculum

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

Fouts Springs Youth Facility (Fouts) located in Mendocino National Forest near Stonyford in Colusa County, was established in 1959. This facility was built to house 162 wards. Fouts currently operates under a Joint Powers Agreement between Solano County and Colusa County. The Solano County Probation Department has administrative authority over the facility.

All counties in California may contract to send male wards between the ages of 14 and 18 to Fouts after being adjudicated of a serious crime other than murder, robbery and sex offenses. Prior to placement, a Juvenile Court Judge reviews the disposition reports from the Probation Department. Previous adjudication and high community risk are considered when determining placement. Fouts is the last County placement facility available before a Solano County ward is placed in the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), a State of California facility.

Prior to September 1, 2007, California Counties sent juveniles adjudicated of a felony to the DJJ facility. Effective September 1, 2007, a new State law, Senate Bill 81, took effect. This law allows only those youths adjudicated of the most serious crimes to be incarcerated at a State facility.

Fouts' annual working budget is \$4.1 million. Supporting revenues include contracted fees from other counties using the facility. The operation expenditures at Fouts are currently less than the allocated budget amount. Unspent funds are carried over to the next fiscal year. The facility is set up to be self-supporting. Revenues from County placement of wards are expected to cover operating expenses.

The Solano County Board of Supervisors and the Fouts Board of Directors approve the budget. They also establish and control ward charge-back rates, programs and staffing.

Fouts is currently staffed to house 60 wards. Presently, 43 wards are in residence. However, Fouts' budget revenue levels are based on 54 wards. Under the Joint Powers Agreement, Solano County and Colusa County are required to pay \$6,100 per month per ward. This reserves space for 18 wards from Solano County and two wards from Colusa County.

Solano County pays \$4,200 per ward that exceeds the initial guarantee covering 20 wards from both counties. All other counties pay a rate of \$4,200 per ward per month. The Fouts Board of Directors established this two tier rate system to maximize marketability.

Solano County owns the buildings and leases the land in the Mendocino National Forest from the Federal Government for \$6,250 annually. Solano County and the U.S. Forest Service have been in discussions concerning a possible land swap that would result in the County owning the 74 acres of land on which Fouts is located, in exchange for 180 acres of land known as Defy Glade in Colusa County. The County would prefer to own the Fouts land or hold a long-term lease before making any more capital improvements to the property. The present lease was extended to 2030. Some capital improvement projects have been proposed, but not yet approved by the Solano County Board of Supervisors. Improvements include the replacement of the water systems, i.e., holding tank, main water feed lines and replacing some electrical transformers.

The facility consists of three main dormitories, a new administrative area, remodeled kitchen /dining area, recreation hall, basketball courts and classrooms (including industrial arts building). Also included are various barns, storage areas, an outdoor swimming pool, plus several acres for other recreational activities. The administrative complex contains office space, intake area, medical offices, one holding room and a visiting area.

The staffing budget for Fouts includes a Facility Manager, 14 group counselors, four senior group counselors, two supervising group counselors, one registered nurse, four culinary staff, one maintenance person and two support staff. Wards assist in the food preparation.

The staff duty cycle includes three shifts per week, (one 12 hour and two 14 hour shifts). Due to the length of workdays and the remoteness of the facility there are housing accommodations for the on-duty staff.

All wards are presently housed in one dormitory. The dormitory includes four special rooms which are used to contain wards with short-term behavior problems. If the special rooms are not available these wards might require immediate transfer to the more secure facilities at Juvenile Hall.

If a ward needs medical attention that cannot be provided by the registered nurse, the ward is transported by van to Glen Medical Center in Willows or evacuated by air to Enlo Hospital in Chico. Fouts contracts with local physicians' group in a nearby community for routine medical care.

The cost of feeding a ward is \$5.82 per meal. The Grand Jury sampled the food and found it to be well prepared and tasty.

EDUCATION

Upon arrival, the wards are tested in reading and math to determine their grade level. Many of the wards are either at or below their expected grade level. Each ward is required to attend school and has the opportunity to earn his high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate. The on-site high school, Clinton B. Nelson High School, operates under the jurisdiction of the Colusa County Office of Education. This office reports that 6 wards received high school diplomas this past semester, and another 6 wards received their GED certificates.

The educational program is designed to afford each ward the opportunity to achieve substantial advancement in both academic and grade level performance. A six-hour school day, five days a week, an extended school year, lower class size, and consistent attendance enable wards to re-enter the main stream school system with a better chance of success, both academically and socially. This educational program seems to be working very well at Fouts. Students close to graduation can schedule classes to meet their graduation requirements.

To learn responsible behavior and social skills, the wards clean Mendocino National Forest campgrounds after holidays, clean Stonyford Rodeo grounds and Stonyford Ranch grounds. All wards have daily recreation. Special activities can be earned for good conduct. The activities consist of day trips in the surrounding national parks, basketball, football, and swimming. Religious study is available on a weekly basis for those wards that choose to participate.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1- While there is sufficient land and adequate housing for 162 wards, staffing levels only provide for a maximum of 60 wards. At the time of the Grand Jury's visit, there were 43 wards participating in the Fouts program. Several California counties send wards to the facility.

Recommendation 1 -The Probation Department should actively solicit court placements from other counties.

Finding 2- Solano County has proposed capital improvements to the Fouts Springs land and buildings. There is no incentive to initiate these improvements until Solano County takes ownership of the land.

Recommendation 2 - The Solano County Board of Supervisors and the Fouts Springs Board of Directors should continue their efforts to complete the potential trade of land between Solano County and the United States Forest Service. This would allow the facility to make much needed upgrades to the water system as well as the grounds.

COMMENTS

The Solano County Grand Jury commends the staff of Fouts Springs for continuing to operate a clean, well-run facility. Fouts is in the process of updating self-enrichment programs for the wards. These programs include:

- Individual counseling
- Peer group meetings
- Self-enrichment groups and/or interventions that are regularly scheduled throughout the week include:
 - Substance abuse/relapse prevention
 - Anger Management
 - Handling difficult emotions
 - Gang awareness
 - Life skills
 - Restorative justice efforts - victim awareness
 - Cognitive learning skills
 - Parenting skills

The fixed costs at Fouts tend to remain the same regardless of population levels. If the facility pays for itself now with user fees, an increase in ward population would not result in any additional cost to the County and, in fact, may result in savings to the taxpayer. The fixed costs of operating the facility will remain basically the same and the income from the additional ward fees will pay for the additional staff required.

RESPONDING AND AFFECTED AGENCIES

Solano County Probation Department
Solano County Board of Supervisors
Fouts Springs Superintendent
Fouts Springs Board of Directors
Colusa County Board of Supervisors
Colusa County Superintendent of Schools

COURTESY COPIES

U.S. Senators representing California
U.S. Congress Members 3rd, 7th and 10th Districts
Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
California State Senate President Pro-Tem
California State Senate 4th and 5th Districts
Speaker of the California Assembly
State Assembly 7th and 8th Districts
Solano County Administrator
City Councils of Solano County
U.S. Department of Forest Service
Colusa County Department of Probation
Solano County Juvenile Court
Colusa County Juvenile Court
All California County Civil Grand Juries