

SOLANO COUNTY JUVENILE HALL
2009-2010 Grand Jury Report

REASON FOR INSPECTION

California Penal Code Section §919, Subsection (b) provides: “the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public jails within the County.” Pursuant to the statute, the 2009 -2010 Grand Jury inspected the Solano County Juvenile Hall on October 27, 2009.

GRAND JURY ACTIONS

- Inspected and toured Juvenile Hall
- Interviewed staff
- Interviewed educational personnel
- Interviewed Chief Probation Officer
- Juveniles observed

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

The current Juvenile Hall facility located at 740 Beck Avenue, Fairfield, California, was completed in 2004. It appears well maintained and secure. All areas are monitored from an upgraded and modernized central control located in the middle of the facility. The upgrade was completed in October, 2009. The central control is staffed 24/7. The main entrance and administrative offices are located in front of the main receiving area. This area is where all parents and visitors must check in for visits or request information concerning a juvenile.

Movement is controlled by Central Control and the use of door keys in possession of the Superintendent and selected staff. Juveniles are housed in separate facilities called Pods (self-contained areas).

The Pods and programs are named and categorized as follows:

Pods:

- Sycamore: 15-17 year old boys
- Sequoia: coed facility, boys 12-14 and girls up to the age of 18
- Redwood: males with serious crimes, most awaiting trial as adults
- Palo Verde: intake – new arrivals
- Challenge: juveniles that have been sentenced to a maximum of one year or those who are awaiting transfer to other confinement facilities.

Program:

- New Foundations: a coed, four-month treatment and family reunification program.

At the time of the inspection, the population was 85. The total capacity is 148. The juveniles are required to keep their room clean and orderly. Each Pod has shower facilities, and the juveniles are provided the necessary hygiene products. Within each Pod, there is a drop box for internal mail so that the juveniles can request medical care or log a grievance. Each room has an intercom for communication with the staff person in control of each Pod in case of emergency or sickness.

Each pod has one or two classrooms depending on the size of the pod. A recreation area is located directly adjacent to the pod. The juveniles have core muscle exercise for one hour per day, and four hours of recreation per day. School is held year-round: six hours during the regular school year, and three and a half hours during the summer. All teachers are California State Board certified. Credits earned in the facility are transferable to their home school when they leave the facility. The curriculum meets State standards. At the time of the Grand Jury visit, several of the juveniles were taking the high school exit examination.

Although they provide all the study material for the G.E.D., currently there is no procedure to allow the juveniles to take the G.E.D. exam. The Fairfield-Suisun Adult School is willing to administer the test only if the juveniles can be transported to their location to take the exam. This is not practical due to the logistics involved.

At the time of the Grand Jury's inspection, Juvenile Hall was operating at approximately 65% capacity. The population at the time of the visit was 85 juveniles. The average daily population for 2008-2009 was 76 juveniles. The average intake per month was 178-180. Depending on the circumstance of the arrest and/or adjudication, juveniles remain for a few hours, days or months. Juveniles' ages range from 10 to 19 years old. The recidivism rate varies from year to year and can be as high as 60%.

According to California Code of Regulations Title 15, the proper staffing level is one counselor for each 10 juveniles during the day and one counselor for each 30 juveniles at night. Staffing is based on the actual number of juveniles in the facility. Extra staff is called in when the population rises above the required staffing levels. The procedures for calling additional staff have improved over last year as staffing was set at the capacity of the facility as opposed to the actual number of juveniles.

New fences and cameras have been installed since last year to enhance the security of the facility. All staff has mandatory training in Management of Assaultive Behavior (M.A.B.) every six months. Currently, there are three in-house instructors, with the possibility of more being added.

Juvenile Hall has a zero tolerance policy for gang activity and prohibits displaying gang colors. The policy includes all visitors. The administration is making an effort to ascertain the gang affiliation of all juveniles in their care so that they can be categorized appropriately.

The staff is trained in gang intervention, gang therapy, and crossroads cognitive behavioral groups. These groups work on recognizing appropriate behavioral responses, replacing aggression with reason, logic and appropriate social behavior. A grant of \$44,000 was received to cover the cost of Aggression Replacement Training for 17 Probation Department Staff.

Juvenile Hall medical personnel include a Registered Nurse (RN), a Medical Assistant, with hours from 7 am to 3 pm, and a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN), with hours from 3 pm to 11 pm. After 11 pm, juveniles with medical emergencies are transported by ambulance to a local hospital and are accompanied by a Juvenile Hall staff member.

Complete dental office/equipment was donated by the Solano County Sheriff's Office to Juvenile Hall. All that is needed is funding to install the equipment.

Juvenile Hall is also equipped with a negative air pressure room in the medical wing to treat airborne conditions such as H1N1.

Juvenile Hall has been able to reduce their overtime by two-thirds, and mandated overtime has been eliminated.

PROCEDURES

Upon arrival at Juvenile Hall, each juvenile is given a medical and psychological evaluation. They are placed in the Palo Verde Pod where they are individually housed and monitored every half hour for the first 72 hours. Upon review and classification, they are subsequently transferred to the appropriate Pod.

Juvenile Hall has a library where the juveniles have access to books and other library materials. All juveniles are able to check out books and read them at their leisure. Juvenile Hall is governed according to the California Code of Regulations Title 15. Juvenile Hall has an evidence-based behavior modification program, which is based on recent research into successful outcomes of various approaches to juvenile rehabilitation. Juveniles are held accountable for their behavior, earn all the privileges they receive and learn that they must be able to deal with people, even those they dislike.

According to the Superintendent, there has been no evidence of contraband in Juvenile Hall. A notable challenge has been confiscating writing instruments from the juveniles, who tend to write on the walls or in the vans. The juveniles are subject to pat-down searches whenever they are moved from one place to another, including from Pod to Pod. Staff use of cell phones in front of the juveniles is prohibited.

Staff monitors all visits. All visits are “contact” visits (with limited physical contact) conducted in the communal visiting room. If there is a situation that may be harmful to the juvenile or visitors, “non-contact” visitation rooms are utilized.

A contract is in place with Aramark to supply all meals. Juveniles from separate Pods do not mingle at any time during meals. The staff does not eat with the juveniles.

A disaster plan is in place. There are informal agreements for cooperation with Napa and Contra Costa Counties. This plan allows for the transportation of juveniles to other facilities when necessary.

TRANSPORTATION

The radio communication problem cited last year between the Juvenile Hall staff and the Sheriff's department has been resolved.

Counselors transport the juveniles to the courts in vans. Serious offenders, accompanied by counselors, are transported by the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff has provided radios for the counselors to use when entering and leaving Court areas. Use of these radios ensures that everyone is aware of all movement in the courts and holding areas, thus providing better safety and security for all participants.

There are disadvantages associated with having to transport juveniles to the Court building, i.e., insurance, liability, costs, possible escapes, etc. The law requires that juveniles must be transported and housed separately from adult offenders. Juveniles are escorted into the Court building through a separate entrance. Juveniles are placed in separate holding cells connected to the designated Juvenile Courtroom. They are constantly supervised by the counselors.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 – There are no courtroom facilities in Juvenile Hall. Juveniles must be transported to the Superior Court for their required court appearances. Providing transportation involves additional expense, safety and security issues to juveniles, counselors, transporting staff and the general public.

Recommendation 1 - The Grand Jury suggests that the County work with the Superior Court to provide a facility at Juvenile Hall that could be used for juvenile hearings.

Finding 2 – There is no procedure in place that allows juveniles to take their G.E.D. exam.

Recommendation 2 – A procedure should be established with the County Office of Education and the Fairfield/Suisun Unified School District for the G.E.D. test to be administered as needed.

Finding 3 – Due to pending budget cuts, Juvenile Hall may lose all mental health staff, leaving no trained mental health specialists to monitor juveniles in crisis.

Recommendation 3- It is imperative to ensure that Mental Health program services are provided. A possible solution to this issue would be the combining of Mental Health program of Juvenile Hall with existing County Mental Health programs within the Department of Health and Social Services.

Finding 4 – A large number of juveniles require Special Education. There are only two special education teachers to comply with all Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Recommendation 4 – Due to the number of juveniles with Special Education needs, i.e., academic and emotional needs, it would be beneficial to have additional Special Education teachers as many juveniles come into Juvenile Hall with learning disabilities. Additional funding should be provided to acquire additional Special Education teachers.

Finding 5 – Currently, the wards have to be removed from the facility for dental care. A local dentist has volunteered to come to the facility and provide the appropriate dental care. Complete dental office/equipment was donated to Juvenile Hall by the Solano County Sheriff's Department. The appropriate space is available and the equipment just needs to be installed.

Recommendation 5 - The Board of Supervisors should instruct the appropriate county department to install the donated equipment.

COMMENTS

The facility is well maintained inside and out. All personnel appear to be well trained and concerned about the care and rehabilitation of the juveniles. The staff seems to be very professional and motivated to change the behavior of the juveniles and decrease recidivism.

The Grand Jury commends the Probation Department and Juvenile Hall staff and personnel for their dedication and efforts to change the behavior of the young people.

RESPONDING AND AFFECTED PARTIES

Solano County Juvenile Hall Superintendent
Solano County Chief Probation Officer
Solano County Sheriff/Coroner
Solano County Board of Supervisors
Solano County Administrator

COURTESY COPIES

Solano County Office of Education Superintendent
Fairfield/Suisun Unified School District Superintendent



Entrance



Reception area



Intake



Common Room



Typical Cell



Laundry Facility



Food Service



Inside Sports Quad



Classroom



Classroom



Medical Reception



Examination Room



Donated Dental Equipment



Library