

## **SOLANO COUNTY JUVENILE HALL 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report**

### **REASON FOR INSPECTION**

California Penal Code §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 2008-2009 Grand Jury inspected the Solano County Juvenile Hall on October 8, 2008.

### **GRAND JURY ACTIONS**

- Inspected and toured Juvenile Hall
- Interviewed staff
- Interviewed juveniles
- Interviewed Presiding Judge
- Interviewed Chief Probation Officer

### **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 a central control, which is located in the middle of the facility and is staffed at all times. The main hall and administration 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 any juvenile.

Movement is controlled by the use of door keys in possession of the Superintendent and selected staff. Juveniles are housed in separate facilities called Pods (self-contained areas). According to staff, the Pods and programs are named and categorized as follows:

- 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 awaiting trial as adults
- Palo Verde: intake – new arrivals
- Challenge: juveniles that have been sentenced to a maximum of a year or who are awaiting transfer to other confinement facilities (Fouts Springs or a State Facility)
- New Foundations: a coed, four-month rehabilitation program.

The population figures include New Foundations, which is not a Pod. Juvenile Hall has a capacity of 148 beds, including five Pods with 28 rooms to a Pod. Each room has one or two beds. Rooms with two beds are located on the end of each aisle. The rooms are equipped with a bunk and a mattress, which the juveniles are required to keep 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.

At the time of the inspection, Juvenile Hall was operating at about fifty percent capacity. The current population figures were not available, but as of two days before the Grand Jury tour, 78 juveniles were housed. The average daily population for 2007-2008 was 76 juveniles. The average intake per month was 178-180. Depending on the circumstance of the arrest and/or adjudication, juveniles may remain for a few hours, days or months.

According to California Code of Regulations Title 15, the proper staffing level is one counselor for each 10 juveniles during waking hours. The staffing level at Juvenile Hall appears to be based on the capacity of the facility, rather than its actual population.

All Pods have two classrooms. Juveniles attend school for six hours per school day while housed in Juvenile Hall. All teachers are California State Board certified, and credits earned in the facility are transferable to any school outside of the facility. The curriculum meets the State standards. At the time of the Grand Jury visit, several of the juveniles were taking the high school exit examination. Each Pod also has a recreation area located directly adjacent to the Pod. The juveniles are afforded two hours of recreation per day.

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

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

## **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, also from Pod to Pod. Staff use of cell phones in front of the juveniles is prohibited.

All visits are "contact" visits (with limited physical contact), unless there is a situation that may be harmful to the juvenile or visitors, in which case "non-contact" visitation rooms are utilized. Contact visits are conducted in the communal visiting room. All visits are monitored by staff.

All meals are prepared on-site and delivered to each Pod. There is no mingling of the juveniles from separate Pods at any time. The administration approximates the cost of each meal at \$2.06 per juvenile per day.

The administration has applied for a grant from a private corporation to establish a culinary training program. Juveniles from the New Foundations program would participate in the program.

There is a disaster plan in place for cooperation with other juvenile confinement facilities in the area. This plan allows for the transportation of juveniles to other facilities when necessary.

## **Transportation**

According to the Sheriff, there has been a communication problem between the Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center and Juvenile Hall counselors during transportation of juveniles to the court facility and within it. This was due to the incompatibility of the respective radio systems. This had been a procedural problem in the past, but the Sheriff and the Chief Probation Officer have met and resolved the situation. The Sheriff provides the counselors with radios and keys for access to the Court and holding area designated for the juveniles. In addition to the communication difficulties, Sheriff's Deputies are not specifically trained to handle juvenile detainees.

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

There are disadvantages associated with having to transport juveniles to the Court building. To avoid contact with adult offenders, juveniles must be escorted into the Court building through a separate entrance. Juveniles are placed in separate holding cells, connected to the designated Juvenile Courtroom and supervised by counselors.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Finding 1** – There are no courtroom facilities in Juvenile Hall. Juveniles must be transported to the Superior Court for appearances. Any transportation involves safety issues to juveniles, transporting staff, as well as additional expense.

**Recommendation 1** - As soon as possible funds should be reallocated to construct two courtrooms at the Juvenile Hall site. This should resolve the transportation expense and safety issues resulting in a cost savings to the County.

**Finding 2** - Staffing levels are based on facility capacity, rather than on actual population. There appears to be a wide margin between capacity and population.

**Recommendation 2** - Staffing levels should be reviewed and adjusted as appropriate by the Chief Probation Officer.

**Finding 3** - At the time of this report there were remaining issues relating to the communication problems between the Sheriff's Dispatch Center and Juvenile Hall Counselors. When Juveniles are in the courthouse, Sheriff's Dispatch Center is unaware of movement of juveniles, which is under the control of Juvenile Hall Counselors.

**Recommendation 3** – All movement of juveniles within the courthouse should be communicated to and monitored by the Solano County Sheriff's Dispatch Center for the safety of the juveniles and Juvenile Hall Counselors.

### **COMMENTS**

The facility is well maintained inside and out. All personnel appear well-trained in their positions 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 Probation Department and personnel at Juvenile Hall should be commended for their efforts.

### **RESPONDING AND AFFECTED PARTIES**

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

### **COURTESY COPIES**

Superintendent, Solano County Office of Education