

BETTER THAN SOME HOMES

A Report on Mendocino County Juvenile Hall

May 5, 2011

Summary

The 2010-11, Mendocino County Grand Jury (GJ) conducted its mandated annual visit to the Mendocino County Juvenile Hall (MCJH) on Low Gap Road in Ukiah. This facility works closely with the Mendocino County Probation Department and houses youth ages 18 or under who are wards of the court. The facility is managed and dedicated to provide a safe and secure environment. Administration and staff have implemented several programs designed to educate and rehabilitate youth for re-entry into society.

Mendocino County Probation Department (MCPD) works closely with MCJH, developing a plan, which includes parents, to reduce the recidivism rate among incarcerated youth.

Methods

The GJ visited the MCJH on November 18, 2010. The GJ inspected the cells, the booking area, classrooms, recreation areas, the dining room and the kitchen facilities. Documents reviewed included the Budget, Organizational chart, and inspection reports from: Mendocino County Health and Human Service Agency, 2010 Bi-Annual California Correction Standard Authority, California Fire Marshall, Annual Security Review, 2009 In-House Annual Report, California Department of Public Health Communicable Disease Control Report, the Ukiah Fire Department Safety Plan for Juvenile Hall, Program and Activities Evaluation, and food menus.

Background

California Penal Code §919(b) states, "...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the County". The MCJH falls within this mandate. MCJH provides for the physical and emotional care of incarcerated youth in Mendocino County pursuant to Title 15 of the California Operational Code guidelines, and Title 24 of the Health and Safety Code Regulations.

MCJH is an integral part of the Criminal Justice System and operates under the Mendocino County Probation Department.

Findings

1. The total correctional staff consists of 27 allocated positions, seven of which were vacant at the time of the GJ visit. Staff is multi-racial, and four are bilingual.
2. The seven vacant full time Correctional Counselor positions are being covered by nine extra-help, part-time employees.

3. The maximum capacity of the facility is 43, but is considered full with 40 youth. On November 18, 2010, there were 23 youth incarcerated; 18 males and five females. Between January and October 2010, the average daily population was 29 youth.
4. Adequate staffing is mandated by the State at a ratio of one Correctional Counselor for 10 juveniles for the day and swing shift. Graveyard shift is one Supervisor Correctional Counselor for 30 juveniles. One male and one female Correctional Counselor must be on the premises at all times.
5. Title 15 mandates all youth respond to a medical and mental screening health questionnaire and receive a physical examination, including a tuberculosis test, within 96 hours of admission.
6. All youth are given an orientation on acceptable behavior and the parameters of the Step Program. The Step Program rewards good behavior with extra privileges.
7. The facility is divided into three units: Unit A for females, Unit B for males, and Unit C for older or violent wards and those charged with serious crimes.
8. Unit C is fully self-contained; it is a high security area with its own classroom, showers, exercise room, and dining area.
9. Males and females in Units A and B attend school and eat at the same time, seated at separate tables in the dining room.
10. Video observation and security are maintained for doors and common areas at all times; at night, individual cells are visually checked every 15 minutes or more often if needed.
11. The average length of stay is 15 days; the reimbursable cost at \$20 per day with a maximum of \$800 per stay is billed to the parents on a sliding scale, and collected through the courts.
12. The maximum sentence at MCJH is one year; the stay can be longer for an un-sentenced youth.
13. When a youth is charged as an adult, he/she is entitled to bail and will be housed at the Juvenile Hall until court proceedings are finalized or until the age of 18.
14. The majority of youth has substance abuse issues. Frequently, they are repeat offenders.
15. Approximately 30% of the youth have behavioral problems and require 75% of staff time. There is zero tolerance for anything gang related.
16. The recidivism rate for new crimes, not probation violations, ranges from 10% to 15%.
17. Mendocino County Probation Department (MCPD) works closely with MCJH, developing a plan, which includes parents, to reduce the recidivism rate among incarcerated youth.
18. The Mendocino County Office of Education provides full time teachers and a Special Education Resource Aide for MCJH, as per Title 15. Year round school is mandatory and youth can obtain a G.E.D., a high school diploma, and earn college credits.
19. Title 15 requires a minimal recreation allowance of three hours on school days and five hours on non-school days. Recreation can be either indoors or outdoors and is offered equally to both genders.
20. A Physician or Physician's Assistant is available on call 24/7. Medical costs may be reimbursed by Medi-Cal or private insurance. Mental Health Services are provided by Mendocino County Youth Project.

21. The kitchen was found to be clean and sanitary. A Dietician prepares a rotating six week menu, and special diets are available. New diet guidelines have reduced the amount of table salt, sugar, and calories. Homemade bread is provided by Mendocino County Jail; all meals are prepared on site.
22. Food costs are supplemented by Federal and State Free and Reduced Meal Programs, seven days a week.
23. MCJH has a garden area in the spring and summer; vegetables are harvested to be used for their meals.
24. Visitation is on Saturdays, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., meeting Title 15 requirements.
25. Media reports that California may close Juvenile State facilities.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury Recommends that:

1. State mandated staffing ratios be maintained at all times, (Findings 1-2, 4)
2. Mental Health Services and substance abuse counseling resources be provided on a full time basis to incarcerated youth to reduce recidivism. (Findings 14-17)

Discussion

The opportunities provided for the youth in the facility are structure, education, diet, personal hygiene, nutrition and social skills. These opportunities provide for an increased chance to succeed in society after incarceration.

The Juvenile facilities were found to be neat, clean and well maintained. The management and administration of Juvenile Hall is commendable. Juveniles are not statistics; they are individual boys and girls, treated with respect and consideration by all staff members.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Probation Department, Chief Probation Officer (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Juvenile Hall, Division Manager (All Findings; All Recommendations)