

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

A report on Mendocino County Juvenile Hall

June 11, 2008

Summary

On April 22, 2008, the Grand Jury conducted its annual visit to Mendocino County Juvenile Hall (MCJH) located on Low Gap Road in Ukiah. The older part of the facility was dedicated in June 1971, and new construction was completed in May 2000.

This facility houses youth under the age of 18 who are wards of the court. The MCJH is managed and dedicated to provide a safe and secure environment for juveniles. The administrators and staff of MCJH have implemented several programs designed to educate and rehabilitate these youth for reentry into society.

Methods

The Grand Jury inspected the cells, the booking area, classrooms, recreation areas, dining room and the kitchen facility. Documents reviewed included the 2007 Annual Report, Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency Inspection Report, Department of Public Health Communicable Diseases Control Report, California Corrections Standards Authority Biannual Inspection Report, California State Fire Marshal Inspection Report, and Food Menu.

Background

California Penal Code §919 (b) states *...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of public prisons within the County.* The Juvenile Hall falls under this directive.

Findings

- 1. The Juvenile Hall staff consists of: one Superintendent, five Supervising Correctional Officers, 21 Correctional Counselors, four kitchen staff, one Mental Health Clinician, and one Licensed Vocational Nurse. There are three unfilled full-time Correctional Counselor positions. Three staff members are bilingual. A contract physician is available six days a week.**

Response: The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

2. The staff work eight-hour shifts, five days per week, with rotating days off. This schedule provides two days off during the week, so employees can attend continuing education classes or perform community service, if they wish.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

3. The County pays overtime because adequate staffing is a state mandate. Employees can choose whether to receive their overtime compensation as paid time off or as direct wages.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

4. The video observation and security systems for doors and common areas throughout the facility are monitored at all times.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

5. Mendocino County General Services Agency provides maintenance.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

6. MCJH has a generator for back-up power in the in-take/release building.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

7. Last year's Grand Jury reported an average occupancy of 27 to 35.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

8. **The maximum capacity of the facility is 43 youth; the average is 37 to 38. At the time of the Grand Jury site visit, the facility was at full capacity.**

Response: The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

9. All youth fill out a health questionnaire and receive a tuberculosis test upon entry.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

10. The newer building contains the in-take and release unit. The in-take/booking area includes a shower, two interview rooms, two holding cells, and a medical exam room.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

11. The facility is divided into 3 units:

- Unit A is for females
- Unit B is for males
- Unit C is for older, more sophisticated, violent, and/or youths charged with serious crimes.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

12. Unit C is fully self-contained; it is a high security unit and has its own classroom, showers, exercise area, and dining area with food brought in from the kitchen.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

13. At night, individual cells are visually checked every 15 minutes by staff. Each cell has an emergency call button.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

14. School attendance is mandatory and is year-round.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

15. Mendocino County Office of Education provides instructional programs.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

16. There are three full-time school teachers and one aide. Classes are held five days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 2:25 p.m.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

17. Youth receive instruction at their assessed grade level.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

18. The classrooms have books and computers. Internet access is tightly controlled. There is also an art room with an instructor two days a week.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

19. The MCJH provides rehabilitation of youth through counseling, life skills classes, parenting classes, and Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Religious services are available for those who wish to attend.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

20. Youth shower and have clean underwear each day. Laundry is done by the staff.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

21. Good behavior is rewarded with activities that include gardening, yard work and “in-house” field trips (within the facility). During free time in the evening, books, magazines, CDs and television viewing are available in the day room. There are also telephone privileges.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

22. There is a “Step” program, whereby all youth can advance from an entrance step level of 0 and earn additional privileges by moving to the next “Step”. It takes two weeks of good behavior to advance from one step to the next. Each youth makes a written plan on how to achieve the next step, such as: *...I will have a better attitude, don't lose my temper, keep my room neat and clean.*

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

23. The dining room and kitchen were observed to be clean, and had a pleasant atmosphere. The food was nicely presented and included fresh fruit and vegetables, along with the main course.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

24. Boys and girls from Units A and B eat together in the dining room but are seated in separate areas.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

25. The menu is prepared by a registered dietician and rotates every six weeks. Snacks are served twice a day. Second helpings at meal time are permitted. Special diets, such as diabetic, religious or vegetarian, conform to State nutritional standards. Milk is provided three times daily.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

26. The average stay is 25 days, although 15 days is more common. The maximum sentence at MCJH is one year; however youth may stay longer while awaiting court adjudication, or for health reasons.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent disagree wholly or partially with the finding, a minor's health is not a justifiable reason to extend his or her stay at Juvenile Hall.

27. Visitation by parents or family is limited to two hours per week.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

28. Parents are billed on a sliding scale up to \$18 per day for the cost of maintaining a youth in MCJH. The maximum is \$800 per stay. Collecting the money from the parents is a difficult task.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

29. Transportation from the MCJH to the court or to medical facilities is provided by the Correctional Counselors.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

30. All juveniles are assigned legal counsel.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

31. A juvenile charged as an adult is eligible for bail.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

32. About 80% of the youth are repeat offenders. Youth with behavioral problems require the bulk of the Correctional Counselors' time.

Response: The Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent agree with the finding.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. the three full-time vacant positions be filled; (Finding 1)

Response: (Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent)

This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be in the future. Ongoing recruitment, background investigations, and hiring are occurring. Positions will be filled when qualified applicants pass all aspects of hiring process.

2. the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors fully fund the staffing portion of the MCJH budget; (Finding 1)

Response: (Mendocino County Board of Supervisors)

This recommendation has been implemented in that the CEO-recommended 2008-09 Proposed Budget included full funding for Juvenile Hall and was adopted by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors in June 2008. The Final Budget will be based on the Proposed Budget and adopted by the Board in September 2008.

Response: (Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent)

This recommendation has been implemented. The County Executive Office is recommending Mendocino County Juvenile Hall be fully funded for fiscal year 2008-2009.

3. the Board of Supervisors address the limited capacity of Juvenile Hall. (Findings 7 and 8)

Response: (Mendocino County Board of Supervisors)

This recommendation will be addressed through the development of expanded juvenile services facilities, as well as other criminal justice facilities, over the next 10 -15 years. Site acquisition is slated to occur by the end of 2009. Preliminary design for the facility needs of all County law enforcement and correctional programs will be completed by the end of 2011. Probation and Juvenile Hall facilities are expected to be in the third tier of construction.

Response: (Mendocino County Chief Probation Officer/Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent)

This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be in the future. The Criminal Justice Master Plan addresses the need for a new and bigger Juvenile Hall. A representative of the Board of Supervisors sits on this committee. The timeline for completion has not been established.

To date, Mendocino County Juvenile Hall has not had to submit an "Overcrowding Report" to Correction Standards Authority. The Juvenile Court, Probation Department and Juvenile Hall work cohesively to monitor and control the Juvenile Hall population.

Comments

If the present escalation of juvenile incarceration continues, as the trends show, the maximum capacity of the facility will soon be exceeded.

The Grand Jury is pleased with the condition and maintenance of the facility. The facility is well managed, efficient, clean and sanitary. Youth benefit from the structured schedule and the expectation of cooperation. The staff was found to be caring, and the youth were well groomed.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Juvenile Hall Superintendent (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (Findings 1, 8; Recommendations 2-3)

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