

# 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.
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.
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.

4. The video observation and security systems for doors and common areas throughout the facility are monitored at all times.
5. Mendocino County General Services Agency provides maintenance.
6. MCJH has a generator for back-up power in the in-take/release building.
7. Last year's Grand Jury reported an average occupancy of 27 to 35.
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.
9. All youth fill out a health questionnaire and receive a tuberculosis test upon entry.
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.
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.
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.
13. At night, individual cells are visually checked every 15 minutes by staff. Each cell has an emergency call button.
14. School attendance is mandatory and is year-round.
15. Mendocino County Office of Education provides instructional programs.
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.
17. Youth receive instruction at their assessed grade level.
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.
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.
20. Youth shower and have clean underwear each day. Laundry is done by the staff.
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.
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.*

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.
24. Boys and girls from Units A and B eat together in the dining room but are seated in separate areas.
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.
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.
27. Visitation by parents or family is limited to two hours per week.
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.
29. Transportation from the MCJH to the court or to medical facilities is provided by the Correctional Counselors.
30. All juveniles are assigned legal counsel.
31. A juvenile charged as an adult is eligible for bail.
32. About 80% of the youth are repeat offenders. Youth with behavioral problems require the bulk of the Correctional Counselors' time.

### ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. the three full-time vacant positions be filled; (Finding 1)
2. the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors fully fund the staffing portion of the MCJH budget; (Finding 1)
3. the Board of Supervisors address the limited capacity of Juvenile Hall. (Finding 7 and 8)

### ***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)

## The Grand Jury Report Process

The role of the Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury is to oversee and shed light on local and County government. Jurors conduct oversight inquiries and investigate matters of public interest. Any individual can file a complaint with the Grand Jury using forms available online at [www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury).

A Grand Jury inquiry begins when a topic is approved by a minimum of 12 of the 19 seated Jurors. A committee then undertakes extensive research and drafts the report.

Findings are verified against documents and interview notes and are reviewed for accuracy with key individuals in the agency of interest. The draft is then reviewed by an internal Edit committee and must receive approval by the Full Panel. It is then sent to County Counsel and to the Presiding Judge for final review before public release.

## Members of the 2007/2008 Grand Jury

Bob Coppock  
Brad Hunter  
Kathy Johnson  
Nancy Kleiber  
Lois Lockart  
Chas Moser  
George Pacheco  
Lillian Pacini  
Carolyn Pavlovic  
Barbara Reed  
Wendy Roberts  
James Schweig  
Dennis Scoles  
Bill Stambaugh  
Sherry Stambaugh  
Finley Williams

### Partial Year

Thomas Clay, Al Pierce, Brent Rusert, Pamela Shilling, Thelma Thompson



*The cover photo for this report was taken at Point Cabrillo Light Station Historic Park by Donald F. Roberts. This report was produced with the generous assistance of Tony and Maureen Eppstein. Information on Point Cabrillo State Historic Park and the Lighthouse Inn is available at [www.pointcabrillo.org](http://www.pointcabrillo.org)*