

BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT 2008/2009
BUTTE COUNTY JUVENILE HALL

SUMMARY

The Butte County Grand Jury conducted a tour of the Juvenile Hall (JH) facility as required by Penal Code Statute 919a. The Chief of the Probation Department, the Superintendent, and Assistant Superintendent of JH conducted the tour. The JH building was built and opened in November, 2003. There are six pods that can hold twenty wards each. Currently, funding in the budget allows for staffing of three pods. The juveniles attend year-round classes at Table Mountain School (TMS), contained within JH. The Boys and Girls Club has transformed one of the unused pods into a "Club". A Foster Grandparent Program is also in place to offer guidance for the juveniles. There are many afternoon and evening activities and outside organizations that come into Juvenile Hall.

BACKGROUND

The Grand Jury inspected JH as required by Penal Code Statute 919a. The JH operates under the direction of the Butte County Probation Department. The Superintendent is in charge of the daily operation and staff. JH has six pods available; current staffing allows only three of the six pods to be used for housing juveniles.

The youth's day starts at 6:00 a.m. with showers, chores, and breakfast. Classes begin at 8:45 a.m. and end at 2:55 p.m. TMS falls under the supervision of the Butte County Office of Education and are in session year-round.

Three meals are served daily, one hot and two cold. The chef prepares the hot meals from scratch. Knives and dangerous utensils are secured for safety. A plastic spoon is the only utensil used to eat with for safety reasons. Kitchen chores are assigned on a rotating basis.

After school the students can do homework, write letters, or check out books and magazines for reading. Many outside organizations come into the hall for afternoon and evening activities. The organizations include: Northern Valley Catholic Social Services, Catalyst, Live Spot – Behavioral Health, and Spiritual Volunteers. Bedtime is usually 8:30 p.m.

APPROACH

Report findings were gathered during a tour of JH, which included the pods, individual cells, kitchen, medical facility, classrooms, club room, the gym and yard, and control observation and security areas.

DISCUSSION

The tour began in the intake area where a local artist was volunteering his time to paint murals on the block walls.

Intake

Staff spends approximately ninety minutes during the intake process, asking questions and filling out forms. A protective padded cell is available if the juvenile is combative.

Health/Psychological Intake Assessment

Within the first eight hours after intake, the juvenile is given a physical and tested for sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis. Females are given a pregnancy test. A nurse is available to administer medication and first aid.

Transportation and supervision to a hospital is provided when necessary. Butte County Behavioral Health, and a therapist contracted with the Probation Department, conduct a psychological assessment of the individual and provide drug/alcohol counseling. If a psychiatrist's diagnosis is needed, the ward may speak to a psychiatrist via a closed-circuit monitor. This type of technology is also used to talk with the Judge.

Educational Assessment Program

The Grand Jury was taken to one of the pods, where individual cells and classrooms are located. TMS was in session and the Grand Jury was able to communicate with the students and their teacher. TMS assesses the current credits for the student, and then matches the academic courses to fulfill their course requirements. The students said they liked attending TMS because they could return to their public school upon release, without being behind in their studies.

Kitchen/Meals

The kitchen area is equipped to prepare food from scratch. Juveniles are assigned to help with the meals. All preparation knives and dangerous utensils are kept secure. Three meals are served daily, one hot and two cold. A plastic spoon is the only utensil used to eat with, for safety purposes. The kitchen and food preparation areas were clean and had a fresh smell. When the Grand Jury talked to the staff and students, they said their favorite meal was biscuits and gravy.

Activities

The Boys and Girls Club transformed one of the pods not used for detention, into a "Club" with a recreational lounge with exercise equipment, games, and music. They also follow a schedule that provides life-skill building activities. Membership to the "Club" is attained by good behavior, doing chores, participating in school, and maintaining or improving grades.

A Foster Grandparent Program is in place for the benefit of the juveniles. One of the grandparents on duty reported that the juveniles often talk more openly with them than they would with staff. The program allows the youth to bond with someone and discuss their problems.

Many afternoon and evening activities are provided by outside organizations that come into Juvenile Hall.

Future

Several members of the Butte County Board of Supervisors have spoken to the Grand Jury. Due to the economic conditions, cutbacks and layoffs are a reality. If the JH staff is reduced, one of

the pods presently housing juveniles will most likely be shut down. The Chief of Butte County Probation states there are fifty to fifty five juvenile wards housed in the JH at any given time. Three pods are required in order to hold sixty juveniles. He is using the minimum staff required to operate the three pods. The Chief would like to have more staff at JH, but with budget cuts, additional staff will not be an option for quite some time. If staff is cut at JH, the Chief advised he would have to close one of the pods and be forced to release a minimum of fifteen wards. Wards housed in the remaining two pods would be at the maximum capacity of forty. In order to admit one new juvenile ward, another would have to be released.

FINDINGS

- F1. The average number of wards housed in three pods is fifty five.
- F2. Table Mountain School allows students to continue to progress academically, so they can mainstream back into public school upon their release.
- F3. The Boys and Girls Club offers juveniles a place to go where they can participate in building life skills, exercise, music, and games. Entry to the “Club” is earned by good behavior.
- F4. Foster Grandparents provide role models for the youth, offering a non-authoritarian ear to talk to.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. Adequate funding should be made available to maintain the existing three pods.
- R2. TMS classrooms should remain fully functioning in each of the three existing pods.
- R3. The Boys and Girls Club should remain in operation at JH.
- R4. The Foster Grandparent Program and other after-school and evening activities provided by community groups should continue.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

Butte County Juvenile Hall

Butte County Department of Probation

Butte County Board of Supervisors

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person, or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury. The California State Legislature has stated that it intends the provisions of Penal Code Section 929 prohibiting disclosure of witness identities to encourage full candor in testimony in Civil Grand Jury investigations by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate in any Civil Grand Jury investigation.