

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY JUVENILE HALL ADOPTS POSITIVE BEHAVIOR METHODS

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

This report describes and addresses the methods by which the San Luis Obispo Juvenile Hall manages the behavior of youth assigned to its detention and Coastal Valley Academy (CVA) facilities. The methods of behavior management used and their effectiveness are important issues in any environment where groups of people must coexist.

ORIGIN

This report is a result of the San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury's investigation of the Juvenile Hall via a guided tour of the facilities. During this tour staff explained the program and methods by which youth behavior is managed. Since these methods appeared to the Grand Jury to be unique and effective, further investigation was warranted. Following the visit, Juvenile Hall personnel were interviewed for the purpose of clarifying and expanding upon information learned during the tour.

METHOD/PROCEDURE

This investigation included a site visit and tour by Grand Jury personnel, an interview of Juvenile Hall personnel, and follow-up emails to Juvenile Hall personnel for clarification of Grand Jury observations and staff interview responses. This investigation was conducted under the authority of CA Penal Code 919, Subsections (a), (b), and (c).

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

The San Luis Obispo County Juvenile Hall and Coastal Valley Academy are detention facilities in the same building which serve male and female youth up to 18 years of age. In exceptional cases, there are youth up to 21 years old. There are 50 beds available at the facility. These

offenders are incarcerated for minor criminal acts, incorrigible behavior, or violations of probation. Youths committing felonies are not housed at this facility. Staffing consists of Juvenile Service Officers, teachers, medical staff, mental health therapists and social services. There is a Juvenile Justice Courtroom with a presiding judge, stenographer and court assistant. This courtroom deals with initial cases and sentencing for incarcerated youth. Attendance is required in a year-round educational program. This program has three co-educational classrooms. The curriculum offered can lead to a high school diploma or GED.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS:

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a universal, school-wide prevention strategy that has been implemented in over 21,000 schools across the nation to reduce disruptive behavior problems through the application of behavioral, social learning, and organizational behavioral principles.¹ PBIS attempts to alter educational environments by creating improved systems and procedures that promote positive change in student behavior by targeting staff and student behaviors. This model is a derivative of a broader research-based behavior management approach commonly referred to as “Applied Behavior Analysis.”² PBIS has been shown to be effective in traditional³ and in alternative education settings such as corrections.⁴

In Spring, 2016, the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education (SLOCOE) contacted the Juvenile Hall about implementing PBIS at its facility, at SLOCOE expense. This was offered by SLOCOE because Juvenile Hall has an educational arm, Coastal Valley Academy (CVA), for which SLOCOE has shared responsibility. During the summer of 2016, Juvenile Hall sent a team of its leaders to observe an operational PBIS program in Placer County. The SLOCOE subsequently paid for the training of Juvenile Hall staff by faculty from the University of Oregon. The staff positions trained was administrative and line staff, as well as staff from the SLOCOE, and Behavioral Health staff. The general public perceives correctional facilities to be inherently punitive environments, not environments where good behavior is systematically

¹ Horner & Sugai, 2015

² Cooper, Heron & Heward, 2019; Horner & Sugai, 2015

³ Cook, Frye, Tal, Lyon, Renshaw, & Zhang, 2015

⁴ Simonson, Britton & Young, 2010; Simonson & Sugai, 2013

targeted for improvement. The Juvenile Hall implementation of PBIS is a distinct departure from traditional practices in correctional settings.

NARRATIVE

The components of an effective behavior management program include (1) setting clear, unambiguous expectations for observable behavior, (2) frequent monitoring of behavior, and (3) providing immediate feedback via positive and negative consequences of behavior. In the PBIS system, the emphasis is to encourage positive behaviors that fall under the three major categories of being Safe, Responsible, and Considerate. These three broad classifications are the focus of the PBIS system. Posters to that effect are visibly posted throughout the facility. Staff is trained to use a ratio of 4:1, i.e., four positive feedback statements to each reprimand. Behavior is monitored daily by staff. Examples of positive outcomes for compliance to rules include becoming Peer Leader, additional phone privileges, longer showers, and the opportunity to wear their own shoes. A “token economy” is also in effect, in which coupons are given for meeting behavioral expectations. Coupons can be redeemed from the commissary twice per week. The Wednesday commissary is directly tied to school performance. Although the focus is on the positive reinforcement of desired behavior, there are also consequences for behavior violations. Failure to demonstrate behaviors related to being Safe, Responsible or Considerate may result in separation from a group (called “Time Out”), mandatory Reflection Time. Reflection Time is when a youth is given an assignment to complete while seated alone, the completion of which reinstates the youth’s privileges. Other privileges (e.g., having radio on in their room, free time) may also be suspended for failing to complete schoolwork.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

Exact and timely measurement of relevant behavior is crucial to ongoing program feedback and development. The staff is currently working with Amazon and Cal Poly to develop a computer application capable of electronically tracking a youth’s behavior. Such a capability would allow enhanced accuracy of behavior measurement and allow more immediate feedback to Juvenile Hall staff and youth.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the PBIS system is a distinct departure from the methods commonly employed in correctional facilities, as the focus is on increasing desirable behavior. Specifying what behavior is expected, what behavior is undesirable, and allowing or withholding privileges contingent upon behavior is essential for rehabilitation. Behavior is monitored daily, and desirable behavior is reinforced frequently (i.e., with coupons). Data reflecting behavior trends are compiled weekly and monthly by staff.

FINDINGS

F1. The use of PBIS with our incarcerated youth teaches them the criteria of demonstrating safe, responsible and considerate behavior as adults.

COMMENDATIONS

The SLOCJH and the SLOCOE are to be commended for their cooperative effort in implementing a research-based method of behavioral improvement into JH. This method has the long-term potential to positively impact the prosocial behavior and general culture of youth while in JH.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

“This is an information report. No responses are required.”

Presiding Judge	Grand Jury
Presiding Judge Jacqueline H. Duffy Superior Court of California 1035 Palm Street Room 355 San Luis Obispo, CA 93408	San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury P.O. Box 4910 San Luis Obispo, CA 93403

APPENDICES, ATTACHMENTS, BIBLIOGRAPHY, GLOSSARY AND SUGGESTED READING

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