

BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT BUTTE COUNTY JUVENILE HALL

SUMMARY

The 2007-2008 Butte County Grand Jury fulfilled its duty to inquire into the condition and management of the Butte County Juvenile Hall. The Hall, as it is sometimes referred to, is a modern looking, well organized facility that is both well lit and spacious. Table Mountain School (TMS), contained within the Hall facilities for the continuing education of its minors, is under the supervision and direction of the Butte County Office of Education. Staffs at both the school and the juvenile facility were sincere about their efforts to run a model facility providing these wards of the court with the best supervision and opportunities that can be offered. The Grand Jury was interested in how information concerning rights and responsibilities while confined is conveyed to the minors detained at the Hall. We were able to offer suggestions to improve the access of critical information to the wards.

Juvenile Hall's involvement with local Boys and Girls Club organizations offering an innovative way to transition wards back to their communities promises positive results when fully implemented.

BACKGROUND

The Grand Jury is required by law to inquire annually into the condition and management of the public prisons within our county. The subject for this report is Butte County Juvenile Hall, which falls under the supervision and direction of the Butte County Probation Department. Their stated goal (www.buttecounty.net/probation) is "to establish and support a local juvenile detention system which utilizes the assessment of risk, eliminates unnecessary detention, provides a safe and humane institutional environment, incorporates policies and practices respecting the dignity of residents, and demonstrates a level of care and public safety awareness which serves as a model to other jurisdictions."

This facility opened in November, 2003, with six wings, or "pods", each capable of housing up to 20 juveniles. Three pods are currently in use while a fourth has been converted into a recreation center for a Boys and Girls Club program. Remaining pods, available for future growth, are currently in use for such purposes as storage, office space, et cetera.

Minors are awakened by staff right after 6:00 A.M. They have morning showers followed by morning chores and breakfast at 7:30 A.M. Time is allowed after breakfast for personal hygiene, dish crew cleanup, and then year-round school begins, ending at 2:55 P.M., with a break for lunch.

After school there are various letter-writing, homework, recreation, counseling, and group activities before and after dinner which is served at 5:00 P.M. Such organizations as Butte County Public Health, Rape Crisis Intervention, Catalyst Domestic Violence Services, Northern Valley Catholic Services, Community Collaborative for Youth, and Parent Education Network provide services for the minors. Evening activities also include counseling, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), religious activities, and general free time. The Foster Grandparent Program is active year-round in Juvenile Hall, too.

Bedtimes normally range from 7:00 P.M. to 8:30 P.M.

DISCUSSION

The 2007-2008 Butte County Grand Jury made multiple announced and unannounced visits to Juvenile Hall during the year to become acquainted with everyday programs and activities. Table Mountain School is the educational program housed within the facility. The Grand Jury observed classes both indoors and outside. Interviews were conducted with the Superintendent for Juvenile Hall and the Principal of TMS. The Assistant Superintendent was also very helpful and assisted us throughout our inquiry. Staff and students at TMS were made available for interviews and a review of the Hall's policies and procedures manual was conducted during one visit. Various inspection reports and other documents were requested and promptly delivered by the administrative staff. The Grand Jury was pleased with the overall cooperation and assistance provided to us by the staff at Juvenile Hall.

While reviewing policies and procedures the Grand Jury became interested in the means used to convey the rules, schedules, et cetera to the juveniles in the facility. In each pod on the wall, posted above a counter, are approximately 30 plastic-covered, 8.5 X 11 inch, printed sheets that encompass the information all minors must know to succeed at the facility (Attachment A). While disappointed that the Grievance Procedure we were searching for was not included in the postings, the Grand Jury did find mostly relevant information. This posted information included several pages of daily schedule routines in great detail. The schedules were printed in very small type and seemed intended for staff as well as minors. Standing at the counter while looking at the wall, many pages were difficult to see and read much less comprehend or commit to memory. A few of these informative pages did use appropriately sized type fonts with simple, relevant graphics to display basic concepts at a comprehensible level and seemed intended for this audience. But overall, the Grand Jury found this method of displaying critical information for the minors to be a highly questionable means of doing so. A properly prepared rights and policies manual for individual distribution should be considered. This manual would pertain only to the wards and could be written at a grade level more comprehensible to them. The Grievance Procedure should be included in such a manual rather than posted or offered elsewhere, for example.

This year's Grand Jury was excited at hearing of the efforts and publicity surrounding the onset of the Boys and Girls Clubs' involvement at Juvenile Hall with transitioning juvenile offenders back into the community. Programs of this type could play a crucial role in returning minors back to a positive experience in the community. The next Grand Jury should find this program in full swing with some success stories that need to be publicized. Membership in the Club and its recreational activities must be earned by exhibiting desired traits and behaviors while detained.

FINDINGS

- F1.** The Grand Jury found the method used to convey rules and policy information to wards inadequate. This info is critical to a successful detention experience in Juvenile Hall. A properly prepared rights and policies manual for individual distribution should be considered. This manual would pertain only to the wards and could be written at a grade level more comprehensible to them. The Grievance Procedure should be included in such a manual rather than posted or offered elsewhere.
- F2.** The Grand Jury finds great potential in the development of transitioning programs such as the Boys and Girls Clubs' project at Juvenile Hall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** A thoughtfully organized manual providing useful, pertinent as well as mandated information at a readable level should be constructed and used, in lieu of the current method of posting, to ensure that all wards have access to critical information during their detention. A Spanish edition should also be written at a proper comprehension level.
- R2.** Innovative, promising, and practical ideas such as the Boys and Girls Club transitioning project should be given every opportunity to succeed. The Grand Jury would like to see continued publicity especially for the success stories this program will produce.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

From the following individual:

- Chief Probation Officer

