

SEP 24 2009

Sierra Youth

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September 15, 2009

GRAND JURY

SEP 24 2009

RECEIVED

TO: The Honorable Gary Nadler
Presiding Judge, Sonoma County Superior Court

FROM: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: Response to Final Report of the 2008-09 Grand Jury

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
RESPONSE TO THE 2008-09 GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

SIERRA YOUTH CENTER STUDY, GIVE IT A CHANCE!

F-4 The physical building at SYC is old, outdated and is not conducive to a therapeutic environment. Although it has been grandfathered into the Corrections Standards Authority for inspection, that practice "gives the impression that a facility is adequate, when in reality the opposite may be true." The Corrections Standards Authority inspection found that the physical plant at SYC does not provide a setting similar to the level found at Probation Camp. It encouraged County leaders to place a high priority on replacing the facility for SYC.

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding. The above statements accurately reflect the evaluation of the Corrections Standards Authority (CSA).

Additionally, the Board of Supervisors and Probation Department recognize the age and limitations of the current Sierra Youth Center (SYC) facilities, and that ideally, SYC would exist in a new home.

The CSA report makes other statements that also accurately reflect SYC's situation. The report "found the facility to be clean and in good repair, considering its age". Also, it applauded Sonoma County for offering a separate commitment program for girls. Finally, while the report did encourage county leaders to place a high priority on replacing the facility and enhancing services for girls, it stated this should occur "in the event funding becomes available..."

The lack of a new facility for SYC is less a statement of the County's concern for girls in the justice system as it is the reality of the need to set priorities, and the extraordinary budget climate in which

we exist. Long-term planning for county facilities is underway as part of the Sonoma County Strategic Plan, and evaluation of potential future sites for SYC will be part of this process.

F-6 After extensive review of financial records, the Grand Jury did not receive an adequate explanation as to why there is such a disparity in programs between the two youth facilities, given the apparent parity in funding.

Response: The Board of Supervisors cannot agree or disagree with this finding. As indicated by their response, the Probation Department provided complete information on budgets, accounting, staffing, and programs and was unaware that the Grand Jury was not satisfied with the information. The Board of Supervisors defers to the Chief Probation Officer regarding this matter.

R-1 The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors should take all necessary steps to retain the program at SYC, even if budget cuts are required for the Probation Department. SYC must be allowed and given appropriate time to fully develop into a gender-responsive program, and prove its true benefit to our communities.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented for Fiscal Year 2009/2010.

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors is supportive of SYC and supports the recent actions taken by the department to create a gender responsive program for girls.

The Probation Department's budget for FY 09-10 contains adequate funds to maintain SYC. In future years, the Board of Supervisors will consider budget recommendations for the facility and programming in light of budget constraints and other county wide priority programs and services.

R-2 The Probation Department should enhance existing programs at SYC, and expand them to include certified vocational programs. It should develop and/or make available trainings comparable to those offered to the boys at Probation Camp, including a Culinary Arts Program. This can be done by bringing a chef back to SYC, which will provide vocational training and offer a positive role model.

Response: The recommendation will be partially implemented.

SYC and the Probation Camp are different facilities, serving different youth. The Probation Camp has over 50 years of history, and has acquired property and facilities that allow for the rich vocational programs that now exist. Based on the differing need of girls in the juvenile justice system, the conversion to an "all girls" facility was intentionally structured to meet a different set of needs for these girls.

As indicated in the department's response, there are currently efforts underway to strengthen vocational components of the Sierra Youth Center:

- The Assistance Dog Institute program offers a Certificate of Participation to residents who enroll in the dog-training program for the duration of their stay at Sierra.

- The Garden Project provides an opportunity to encourage career skills development in small business planning, environmental studies, and health and nutrition.
- Sierra, with the assistance of Advisory Committee members, is exploring apprenticeship opportunities in the health care industry through Kaiser.
- SYC reached out to the Regional Occupational Program (ROP) at SCOE to discuss the possibility of implementing vocational services and will soon implement two certification programs for Animal Science, and Landscaping Maintenance certificates. Through this certification process, SYC residents learn key skills, attitudes and values that are essential for success in the workplace. A computer literacy component is also part of this certification.
- The Probation Department is exploring the idea of bringing the Probation Camp chef to Sierra one day per week, to provide culinary education and training to SYC residents. In addition, with the assistance of Advisory Committee members and the Valley of the Moon Rotary Club, a grant proposal was submitted to a local winery, requesting the assistance of a chef to teach culinary skills.
- SYC administration recently met with representatives of a local organization interested in Sierra's vocational needs. These representatives are considering recommending to their Board of Directors that they fund a chef for SYC.

The Board takes this recommendation seriously and is invested in considering partnerships that would enhance the resources available to SYC residents. In fact, through internal discussions between the Board of Supervisors and Probation, Supervisor Zane suggested that the department enlist Lisa Maldonado, Executive Director of the North Bay Labor Council, for the Sierra Advisory Committee. With Ms. Maldonado's assistance, apprenticeships with building trades and labor unions are currently being explored.

R-3 Until a new facility for SYC can be realized, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors should make all necessary upgrades to the existing physical location to enhance the therapeutic environment. The following improvements are needed immediately:

- *Furnish and install an Intercom system*
- *Furnish and install indoor and outdoor cameras*
- *Repair the existing access road to SYC*

Response: This recommendation will be implemented based upon available resources and in light of other priorities.

The Board of Supervisors understands that these capital investments were suggested by the Grand Jury and the Department staff agreed that they are "nice to have" but not essential deficiencies that must be addressed to continue a safe program and facility compliant with state standards. The Board will consider improvement outlined by the Grand Jury based on recommendations presented by staff in light of other competing resource needs.

R-5 The Probation Department should be required to explain the expense anomaly between SYC and Probation Camp, given the difference in staff size and number of juveniles served.

Providing transparency will lead to more equitable allocation of resources and adequate funding for SYC.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

The Department's budget is reviewed by the County Administrator, and approved by the Board of Supervisors each year. For FY 09-10, the budget process began in February, and was adopted by the Board on June 16, 2009. As noted in the Probation Department's response, SYC and the Probation Camp are different facilities, serving different youth. Boys at the Camp are generally 16 to 18 years old, being prepared for emancipation; many of the girls at SYC are younger, and the focus is on family reunification. Indeed, SYC was transformed into a gender-specific program in large part due to the different needs of boys and girls.

ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL

F-7 The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee was created to advise the Board of Supervisors on animal welfare. The members who are appointed by the Board of Supervisors no longer hold regular meetings or play a significant part in the function of AC&C.

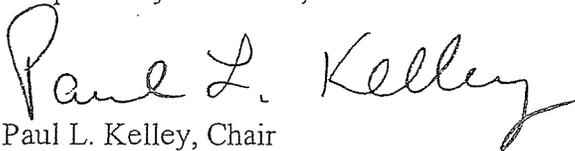
Response: The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

R-5 The Board of Supervisors should consider developing a new Citizens' group for animal welfare to render oversight more effectively, while also acting as advocates for AC&C. Alternatively the current Animal Welfare Advisory Committee should meet regularly with AC&C and report back to the Board of Supervisors.

Response: The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors has not yet implemented this recommendation, but it will be implemented within the next quarter.

The Board of Supervisors is working with the new Animal Care and Control Director to reestablish the Committee.

Respectfully submitted,



Paul L. Kelley, Chair
Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

c: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Chris Thomas, Acting County Administrator
Denise Gordon, Executive Officer of the Superior Court