

SUSAN J. GIONFRIDDO JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTER

The following constitutes an Activity Report issued by the 2012-2013 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) regarding a visit to the Susan J. Gionfriddo Juvenile Justice Center.

The Susan J. Gionfriddo Juvenile Justice Center (Center) is a maximum security facility located in Santa Maria. In October 2012, the Jury made a scheduled visit to the Center as part of its charge under *California Penal Code, Section 919(b)*, to “inquire into the condition and management of public prisons within the county”.

The Probation Department of Santa Barbara County operates the Center for youthful offenders, both male and female, between the ages of 12 and 18. Several expansions to the Center raised its capacity to 140. These youthful offenders are considered wards of the court and detained at the Center for varying periods of time. Youthful offenders are referred to as “wards” in this Activity Report.

OBSERVATIONS

Following an orientation from the staff, jurors were given a tour of the Center, which has six living sections. In the newer section, there are four identical units, each with 20 cells: 10 single person and 10 two-person cells. In the older section, two units are used for programs, but may be used for housing wards when needed. At the time of the Jury’s visit there were 94 wards in custody, with an average age of 16 years.

In each unit in the newer section the cells surround an open space, which contains a dining area, entrances to two classrooms and an indoor recreation area that leads to an outdoor recreation area. In the middle of the open space, the staff uses a raised platform to monitor activities in the unit.

The Center has an extensive video surveillance system capable of retaining all recordings. The system is monitored by a deputy at all times.

The Jury inspected one of the four units and had lunch with the wards. The jurors explained their reason for the visit and asked questions about the wards' experiences at the Center. Their responses ranged from how they felt about the Center to their plans upon release. Some wards talked about how they were trying to make up credits toward their high school graduation while at the Center. Almost all stated that they wanted to return home. Some, however, were concerned about the influence of their home environments and their friends on their future behavior. Many wards seemed to have a lack of awareness of what choices are available to them upon their release. Staff expressed concern about these issues as well.

PROGRAMS

The Jury visited one of several classrooms at the Center. The classroom atmosphere was relaxed and the students were engaged in their lessons. Reading is encouraged and a substantial number of books are available. Computers are available to access educational programs that do not require the internet. The staff encourages the wards to complete their high school credits and to enroll in Allan Hancock College or other college programs while at the Center.

A visitation program called "Baby Elmo" has been developed by the Center's staff for those wards who have children. A nicely decorated area has been set aside for the ward and his or her child or children to interact. The program is designed to encourage bonding between the parent and child during the custody period. The staff talked about this program with great pride and stated they felt it has a positive effect on the participants.

The Center has a medical team under contract with Corizon Correctional Healthcare to provide a physician, registered nurses, a licensed vocational nurse and a medical assistant. Wards needing mental health services are referred to Santa Barbara County's Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services Department. The Center's medical record system tracks inoculations, along with individual medical history, until the ward turns 18. Video presentations covering drugs and other health issues are available for wards that are deemed to need the information.

The staff is concerned that mental health issues are not being addressed adequately before some wards leave the Center. Often, both physical and emotional traumas have contributed to the conduct resulting in a ward's detention. When necessary, wards who may be dangerous to themselves or others, can be isolated from the Center's population. Due to the age of the wards, they can only be isolated for a short period of time. If a longer isolation time is needed and safety issues cannot be resolved, the ward is transferred to a facility better equipped to deal with

those needs.

CONCLUSION

The Susan J. Gionfriddo Juvenile Justice Center, Santa Maria Juvenile Hall, is a modern, well-designed and maintained facility, with professional staff that is trained to be sensitive to the age of their wards. The 2012-2013 Santa Barbara County Jury commends the staff and administration for their outstanding efforts.

Under *California Penal Code Section 933.05* this report does not require a response.