

JOPLIN YOUTH CENTER

A DAY IN THE LIFE

SUMMARY

Sixty-four boys, primarily aged fourteen and fifteen are detained at the Joplin Youth Center (JYC). Although many of the boys are gang members, belonging to as many as thirty-five different gangs, they share the same dormitory without much conflict.

The boys follow a strict discipline at JYC. Privileges are lost for infractions of the rules of conduct and are awarded for positive actions. Many boys come from unstable homes, and this is their first experience in a structured environment. Joplin High School is an accredited intermediate and secondary school and the boys attend classes from 8 a.m. to 2:10 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The Grand Jury, as part of its mandate, toured the facility and had concerns about adequate nursing staff, clerical help and the need for a full-time special education teacher.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to determine if the goals set at the JYC are being accomplished. These goals are to develop academic, emotional and mental competencies within the minor, which allow him to return to the community and his home, and function in a successful and socially acceptable manner. A further purpose is to create public awareness of the daily routines at JYC.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury toured the facility on three occasions. The tours were given by the camp administrators of JYC, who encouraged interaction with the youths, by Grand Jury

members. The Grand Jury joined the boys for lunch and had the opportunity to converse with them. The camp administrators were interviewed on two occasions and the school administrators of Joplin High School were also interviewed.

BACKGROUND

JYC is one of five juvenile institutions run by the Orange County Probation Department. It is located in the hills above the City of Rancho Santa Margarita and was originally opened in 1956. The rustic setting creates a camp-like atmosphere. Boys with potential health problems such as allergies to bee stings and those who are drug or sex offenders are not permitted at JYC and are referred to The Orange County Youth Guidance Center or Juvenile Hall. Sixty-four boys reside at JYC.

The boys wear uniforms at JYC, a polo shirt and slacks or shorts, which gives them a neat appearance. When a boy arrives at JYC he is given a green shirt indicating his thirty-day initiation status. Those recent arrivals or those under discipline are not allowed privileges such as listening to music, watching television or playing video games.

After thirty days, if the youth is doing well in school and following directions from the counselors, he is given a burgundy colored shirt. Good conduct entitles the boy to additional privileges and the possibility of participating in field trips. Continued good behavior allows the boys to experience a more relaxed atmosphere and to wear a light or dark blue shirt. They can then go on furloughs and have access to the recreation room where televisions, stereos and video games are available. A youth not in compliance with the rules is issued a bright yellow shirt. All special activities and privileges for these boys are suspended.

The boys have a set daily routine. They wake at 6:30 a.m., dress, make their bunk and clean their locker area. Breakfast is served, and then the boys attend to hygiene. They are graded on the appearance of their bunk area and personal appearance. School begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 2:10 p.m. with a noon lunch break. From 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 some

youths are assigned to self-improvement programs such as, anger management, parenting, or cultural awareness. Others participate in sports, or a work crew activity. The boys are rotated through the different areas.

The Grand Jury observed the students in the classroom and talked to the teachers and the school administrators. Some of the students seemed to have difficulties with concentration and their restless behavior made it harder for other students to concentrate on their work. The administrators indicated that they have a part time special education teacher who visits the school. The teacher works with the students on a one to one basis. Two full time teacher's aides help the lower achieving students.

It is apparent that contact between the probation and academic staff is continuous and mutually supportive. However, there are no regular formal meetings between the Camp Administration and the School Administration. The Grand Jury was advised that meetings were held only on an as-needed, ad hoc, basis.

The maximum class size is sixteen students. Core curriculum, English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies is taught before lunch. Electives, such as, Current Events, Physical Education, Life Skills, Art and Drivers' Education are taught during the afternoon.

The average length of stay at JYC is one hundred and twenty days. Some boys are detained up to nine months. Credits earned at JYC are applied to the high schools subsequently attended by the boys. After observing the rapid turnover of student in the high school, the Grand Jury felt there was a need to hire someone for a full-time or part-time clerical position to work obtaining and forwarding the students' transcripts. Transcripts have been kept up to date by the current staff through the efforts of the existing secretary. It is difficult for the JYC staff to know what classes the boys require, without the help of an enrollment technician. When the boys return to their former high school, they need their transcripts forwarded in a timely manner.

On one visit to JYC when the Grand Jury ate lunch with and visited with the boys, they expressed an interest in our purpose there. When told that we were there for their benefit and would listen to their complaints, they did not hold back. Their major concerns were lack of radio, video, and game privileges and early bed and wake up hours. They were wholeheartedly in agreement that the food was good and plentiful.

A nurse is on duty Monday through Friday during daytime hours. Recently, late on a Friday afternoon, a boy had a grand mal seizure while playing basketball. Fortunately, the nurse was still on duty and was able to offer immediate medical attention. The boy was subsequently airlifted to a hospital and was successfully treated. Because JYC is located in the foothills there is a delayed 9-1-1 response. Had the incident occurred on a weekend the outcome may have been different.

At 4:30 in the afternoon, the boys participate in a flag lowering ceremony. Dinner follows the ceremony. After dinner the boys are involved with a program, work activity or recreation. Bedtime is at 9:00 and lights out at 9:30.

Saturdays are spent cleaning the facility and playing sports. Sunday mornings are open for family visitation. Church services are held on Sundays and also during the week.

As a special reward, field trips are scheduled, as available for boys who have earned blue or burgundy shirts. One group had the opportunity to participate in an exploratory visit with U.S. Navy SEALs in San Diego. The boys have also visited Sea World. For most, it was their first trip to Sea World. For some, it was the first time they had seen the ocean.

FINDINGS

Under California Penal Code §933 and §933.05, responses are required to all findings.

The Orange County 2001 – 2002 Grand Jury arrived at four findings.

1. JYC does not have a weekend nurse on duty. The boys are actively involved in sports during the weekend and more likely to sustain injuries.
2. Transcripts and school credits earned are not quickly processed.
3. JYC currently has a part time Special Education teacher. Many boys could use extra assistance with their studies. Some boys are disruptive in class due to short attention span.
4. The Director and the Program Specialist do not meet together on a regularly scheduled basis.

Responses to Finding 1-4 are required from the Orange County Board of Supervisors and the Orange County Superintendent of Schools and requested from the Orange County Probation Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with *California Penal Code* §933 and §933.05, each recommendation must be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based on the findings, the 2001 – 2002 Orange County Grand Jury recommend that:

1. A nurse should be hired for weekend duty. Finding 1
2. A part-time or full-time clerical assistant should be hired to assist in processing student transcripts. Finding 2
3. A full-time Special Education teacher would be a valuable asset to Joplin High School. Finding 3

4. The Director and Program Specialist should schedule regular coordination meetings with one another on at least a monthly basis. Finding 4

Responses are required to Recommendations 1-4 from the Orange County Board of Supervisors, the Orange County Superintendent of Schools, the Orange County Health Care Agency and requested from the Department of Probation.