

# Juvenile Justice Commission County of Santa Clara

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### MURIEL WRIGHT RESIDENTIAL CENTER June 2009

#### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

The Muriel Wright Residential Center (MWC or Wright Center) is a rehabilitative program offered for girls ages 12 through 18 and for boys ages 12 through 16 1/2 at the time of the Ranch commitment. The goal of the six-to-eight month program is to have each youth return home with the necessary tools for successful reintegration into family and community. The facility is located in the western foothills of Santa Teresa County Park on a site overlooking a portion of south central Santa Clara Valley.

The Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC or Commission) visited the Muriel Wright Residential Center on April 15 and April 29, 2009, May 1, May 4, May 6, May 12, and May 21, 2009 by prearranged appointments, pursuant to the State of California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 229. Commissioners inspected the facility, reviewed programs, observed academic activities and interviewed staff and youth. This report provides a summary of information gathered regarding youth, staff, physical plant, programs, school and services. Specific commendations and recommendations are also set forth. Documents pertinent to the Wright Center that were reviewed by Commissioners are listed. Six Commissioners inspected varying aspects of the total facility and its programs.

The Juvenile Justice Commission conducts annual inspections of the Muriel Wright Residential Center. The inspection reports for prior years are available on the internet and can be accessed at: <http://www.sccsuperiorcourt.org/juvenile/jjc.htm>.

#### **II. POPULATION:**

The California Corrections Standards Authority (CSA) rated capacity of the Muriel Wright Residential Center is 64 youth. On April 14, 2009 the youth population was 12 girls and 28 boys. The Muriel Wright Center has reduced the number of minors it can serve from the licensed 64 to 48 youth, in order to accommodate the principles of smaller living environments in the Enhanced Ranch Program (ERP). At the time of our visit, 15 youth were ages 12-15, and 25 youth were age 16 and older. There were 8 minors on the waiting list in Juvenile Hall for this facility and capacity was to be achieved within 2 weeks. Residents are assigned to one of four pods or residential units.

The pod system is an essential part of the Enhanced Ranch Program (ERP), which is described later in this report.

There are two units that can house up to twelve minors in individual rooms and two units that house two minors per room with a maximum of 12 youth in each pod. All activities and movements of the youth are designed to minimize contact and conversation between the boys and the girls.

At the time of the visitation, there were no youth at the Center from outside of Santa Clara County. At the April 15, 2009 inspection visit there was one male youth currently a father and one female youth was pregnant.

The ethnic breakdown of residents at the Wright Center reflects the imbalance of youth in the correctional system. No minors are of Asian descent, three minors (7.5%) are African American, thirty-five minors (87.5%) are of Hispanic descent, one minor (2.5%) is classified as “other,” and only one minor was classified as White (2.5%)

The stated mission of the two juvenile rehabilitation facilities, James Ranch and the Muriel Wright Residential Center, is to provide “our diverse population with a safe and secure environment while focusing on accountability and responsibility. We are committed to a balanced and collaborative program of educational, vocational, rehabilitative (including physical health, mental health, and substance abuse) and restorative services leading to a successful transition to Aftercare and reintegration to the community.”

According to the Manager, the population at the Ranches and Muriel Wright Center in particular has been changing in two significant ways. The number of female residents fluctuates. There is one twelve person living unit assigned for girls. There is one living unit, which can be used for girls or boys according to need. When the number of boys on the MWC waiting list at Juvenile Hall is high compared to the girls on the waiting list, the unit is converted to a boy’s unit. If the number of girls on the waiting list becomes too high, the unit may be converted back to a girl’s unit.

Additionally, the population has changed according to the seriousness of the offenses for which the minors are committed. This change is due to a number of factors, but primarily due to the reduction of minors who are committed to State facilities. Since 1998 there has been a steady decrease in population of the (DJJ) Department of Juvenile Justice run institutions with a total decrease of 69.5 percent. This decrease is due in part to the Juvenile Detention Reform Initiative, promoted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation nationally. Santa Clara County joined the initiative to retain youth locally and decrease overall youth in custody. More important, as of September, 2007, no minor can be committed to the Division of Juvenile Justice Facilities unless he or she has committed a serious offense as defined by California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 707(b) or some sex related charges. The Manager points out that the “high end” nature of the residents is shown by the current population of forty minors, only six of whom are being

held for property crimes, while twenty four are committed for “crimes against people” and another ten for violation of probation.<sup>1</sup>

In June 2002, there was an average daily population of 202 minors committed to the Ranches. As of June 2008, the average daily population committed to the ranches had fallen to 180, despite the reduction of DJJ commitments and population growth.<sup>2</sup> This reduction of ranch commitments resulted from the increased use of alternative placements, electronic monitoring, and specialized programs in Juvenile Hall such as “Life Skills. “However, since 2002, the capacity of the Ranches has also been reduced by the closing of the Holden Ranch, and by the implementation of the Enhanced Ranch Program (ERP) which required a reduction in the Ranches’ capacity to implement changes to the physical plant to create a more home-like environment, and the development of policies, procedures, and programming that focus on: (1) fostering supportive one-on-one relationships between youth and staff; (2) providing an appropriate assessment of youth risks and needs; (3) providing cognitive change/pro-social thinking; and (4) supporting youth to transition successfully back into their homes, schools, and communities.”<sup>3</sup>

As a consequence of the reduced capacity of the two Ranches and the retention of more serious offenders for local treatment, the Wright Center’s population is composed of more serious offenders and more minors who have been unsuccessful in other placements. There has also been an increase in gang-related crimes according to the Manager, particularly in the Overfelt and Oak Grove School Districts. Most youth at the Center are 2 to 5 grade levels behind in their schooling. Despite this increase in difficult cases, the success rate, according to the Manager, has improved. The Manager attributes this improvement to the effectiveness of the Enhanced Ranch Program and the outstanding staff at the Center.

### **III. STAFFING:**

The Probation Department staff at the Wright Center includes the full-time Manager, three supervising Probation Counselors, 23 Probation Counselors with one vacant position, and six night-time Probation Assistants, who staff the facility when the youth are asleep. There is an additional Probation Counselor who supervises youth in the Aftercare Program. The position of Program Coordinator is shared with the James Ranch. There are twenty-nine part-time “extra help” personnel who fill in for Probation Counselors absent due to illness, vacation or training. Many of the extra help are retired Deputy Probation Officers who are familiar with the programs and the youth, and are able to participate in the Enhanced Ranch Program. The Manager emphasized that the full-time Probation Counselors must be college graduates, and that they are therefore capable of functioning with less supervision and with greater counseling responsibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Santa Clara County Probation Department *Juvenile Hall and Ranches Daily Statistics* for Tuesday, April 14, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> “June average daily population each year” chart prepared by SCC Probation August 25, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Santa Clara County Probation Department *Ranch Evaluation*, prepared by Community Crime Prevention Associates, October 2007.

They do wear casual type uniforms. Each Probation Counselor is consistently assigned to the same unit. There are two Counselors assigned to each living unit per shift, and each Counselor is assigned primary responsibility for mentoring one to two of the youth assigned to the unit.

The Manager has been at the Wright Center for four years and is planning to retire in a year and a half. Most staff members interviewed during the visitations in April and May 2009, had worked at the Wright Center from five to eight years. All indicated that the new program was working well. The Counselors were meeting with the youth in their pods about three times a day for counseling.

Counselors work 8- hour and 16-hour shifts. The inspection team was informed that the complicated, irregular schedule now being used is acceptable to most staff.

An Aftercare Probation Officer also has an office at the Wright Center, but is not formally considered to be part of the Wright Center staff.

The five full-time kitchen staff members on two shifts are Probation Department employees supervised by Food Services Management.

In addition to Probation Department staff, the following personnel are assigned to the Wright Center:

- Muriel Wright School staff from the Santa Clara County Office of Education (COE).
- A part-time maintenance man shared with the James Ranch.
- Medical Services and Mental Health Services staff from the Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System (SCVHHS).
- Contract staff from Community Based Organizations (CBOs) such as California Youth Outreach, (CYO) Pathway Society and Gardner Health Center, provide a variety of programs.

The Probation Department retained as a consultant the developer of the “Missouri Model,” to refine the ERP and help produce staff training. Most Counselors have completed the required 96 hours of training, and newly hired staff members continue to complete this training. School, Mental Health and Pathway staff members have participated in some of the training so they can better integrate their activities with those of the Probation staff. Several Probation staff members have completed “train the trainer” class and are now qualified to provide ERP training.

The County has hired an evaluator to provide an evaluation of the current successes and challenges of the program. That report was due by the end of May 2009.

#### **IV. FACILITY:**

The construction program designed to upgrade the facilities and accommodate the ERP concept was completed in March 2007. This upgrade included classrooms, school/resource offices, conference/program rooms, two interview/counseling rooms, offices and space for Mental Health, Pathways, a Probation Educational Liaison

Specialist and a Probation Counselor for the Aftercare Program. A and B dorms/pods were constructed in 1963 and are more sterile.

The repainted buildings are attractive, and the grounds now include a planting area for the Master Gardener Program. The central lawn area was planted and maintained by the youth themselves and is used as a play area.

The kitchen and dining room appeared neat and clean, and Commissioners noted that appropriate temperature levels were maintained for the refrigeration and freezer units. The dining area is cleaned by the youth on a rotating pod basis. Menus are planned by the Probation Food Services Managers, who also purchase the food. The previously reported rat infestation of last year has been resolved.

The Commissioners ate a hot lunch with the minors and found the meals to be quite good. The youth expressed general satisfaction regarding both the amount and the quality of the food. The dining area is cheerful and youth sit and eat with their pods in tables of four.

The facility is not air-conditioned and the location is very hot in the summer months. Installing air-conditioning should be explored to make the environment more conducive to learning. The most recent inspection report of the Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital Systems recommends that air conditioning be considered.

Commissioners did comment about the institutionalized flavor of the dorms particularly the girl's dorm. At James, the ERP bought new beds, comforters which gives a rich feel to the youth's personal space. In the girl's dorm the old cells are used as the bedrooms. They have very thin mattresses. There are blankets but no comforters. The doors are heavy metal and the tiny windows covered with screening. Improvement is needed here if it is to be consistent with ERP objective of a more homelike environment. Girls also complained that if the boys were using the outside play areas they were not allowed to go outside. Several girls commented that the use of the outdoors space should be equal.

## **V. PROGRAMS:**

### **Enhanced Ranch Program**

The Enhanced Ranch Program was initiated at the Wright Center in August 2006. Commissioners reviewed a one-year anniversary status report, entitled "Report on Enhanced Ranch Programs at Muriel Wright Center and William F. James Ranch," dated February 14, 2008. The report, which lists the accomplishments of the program and refers to an evaluation of the ERP by Community Crime Prevention Associates (CCPA), is available on the County website. According to the Probation Department's description of the ERP, the core is a cognitive behavioral management program. Cognitive behavioral treatment programs generally consist of a combination of behavioral

modification techniques to change behavior and teaching techniques to change thinking and attitudes.

Part Three of the Wright Center Procedures Manual describes the program as follows:

“The Cognitive Based Behavior Management philosophy places an emphasis on the holistic approach to the development of individual treatment case plans that are created through the Multi-Disciplinary Team. This cognitive model focuses on trying to change the way youthful offenders think, and not how they act. Youthful offenders tend to be under socialized, lack values, attitudes reasoning and thinking skills which are needed for the pro-social adjustment. Through this model youth learn inter-personal problem solving skills and moral reasoning ability. They learn to see the world in different ways. Through this approach, the youth will learn how beliefs, attitudes and thoughts that underlie mood and emotion can affect the choices that are made. Most important is the belief that the individual is responsible for his or her actions. The curriculum goals teach skills of how youth can avoid high risk situations and to gain control over high risk thoughts and feelings.”

A Ranch Orientation Counselor, who works up to twenty hours a week at Juvenile Hall, provides orientation for minors on the Ranch waiting lists. Orientation includes an understanding of ERP, the level system, the special Ranch programs and education options. The Guidebook answers many questions about the Ranches and the orientation counselor urges the youth to read it in detail.

### **Volunteerism**

The Wright Center makes excellent use of volunteers. Volunteers are used for tutoring and other programs such as the Master Gardeners Project. The youth themselves also volunteer in the community and in the park.

### **Master Gardeners Program**

The mission of the Master Gardeners Program is to develop, adapt and extend informal research-based horticultural educational programs to the residents of Santa Clara County. The program has been extended to the Wright Center by a group of volunteers who teach basic gardening skills for approximately one hour on Monday afternoons. The class has a ten-week curriculum, so that each pod gets a turn every 40 weeks. Minors are given school credit for their participation. As part of the classes, the minors built a garden between Units A and B. The Manager talked about trying to sell the produce raised to local restaurants this summer. The garden for the 2009 season looked recently planted. The class was listed for B pod every Monday from 1:30 to 3:30 pm. This class is one of the few opportunities for vocational training with credit currently at the MWC.

### **Computer Program**

A very well outfitted Computer Laboratory seems to be in good use at the Center. C pod is currently using the Lab on Mondays from 1 pm. to 3 pm. Job Readiness is offered on Thursdays as well as online college courses and newsletter production. Computers are offered for the girls on Thursdays from 8 am. to 10 am. School credit is provided for computer training. Perhaps this focus could be expanded to offer a Business Vocational Program with credit.

### **Sports Program**

The Sports Program fields separate teams of boys and girls. In the past the girls have competed in basketball and volleyball with Foothill High School, the Santa Clara County Alternative Schools Department at Calero School and the Alternative Placement Academy. But there hasn't been enough girls for an entire team in recent months. The boys participate in competitive sports with the ranch facilities of nearby counties.

### **Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY)**

Commissioners attended a law day event at the Center just before Cinco de Mayo. FLY provides legal education to incarcerated youth. For three hours on May 1, 2009, two lawyers using skits and hypothetical situations helped the youth to understand what is a crime, the process of charging and consequences for youth who may only be an accessory to a crime. This program is described as worthwhile, educational, and entertaining and should be provided at least once for every incarcerated youth.

### **Other Programs**

Other programs such as Ceramics, Pathway, Victim Awareness, CYO Gang Redirect, Bible Studies, FLY, Zumba, Yoga, Gardner Health Center counseling, Cosmetology, Alcoholics Anonymous and Next Door domestic violence training are all scheduled for different pods on different days. Some such as Yoga and Zumba are provided for the girls in place of Physical Education. Additionally, the girls are involved in an off campus program on Tuesday where they assist in a school for disabled children three hours a week. The schedule is very busy. The youth also keep the trails and areas around Santa Teresa Park clean. They also work with the park's mounted police unit by maintaining the stables. The Art of Yoga Project provides a team of Yoga instructors for the MWC and has taken the participants to off campus activities on several occasions. Other off campus activities are provided by the MWC cadre for deserving residents, including hiking, snow trips and fishing excursions.

One drawback to the current MWC program is a lack of vocational programming including credits such as exists at the James Ranch. James has welding, construction and auto mechanics. The new computer lab is a real asset. Perhaps a business vocational program or the Masters Gardening Program could be further expanded. The ERP goals should be amended to make it clear that the MWR provides very limited vocational training.

### **Teaching Important Pro-Social Skills (TIPS)**

TIPS, formerly known as Aggression Replacement Training (ART), is a comprehensive therapeutic model that has been heavily researched and tested with delinquent youth. The ten-week program is provided to youth in their pods in three 1½-hour sessions each week. Counselors are trained to conduct TIPS sessions. The three TIPS sessions each week focus on:

- Skill streaming (Monday) – Through presented material and interactive role playing, youth learn everyday life skills such as asking for help, dealing with peer pressures, how to say “no” and avoiding fights.
- Morality (Wednesday) – Youth learn about feelings of others and are presented a new dilemma each week. Through group discussions, youth learn how to deal with different life situations and morality issues.
- Anger Management (Friday) – Youth are taught the ABCs of behavior (Action leads to Behavior, which leads to Consequences). Through role-playing, youth learn how to recognize behavior “triggers” and how to calm down.

### **Aftercare Program**

The Aftercare Program is the last phase of the Ranch commitment program. It is a ten -week program for youth who have completed the six to eight months in (ERP). The program is used to provide a transition period for the youth to return to the community. During this period, youth are under the supervision of an Aftercare Counselor and are expected to comply with the Aftercare Contract that each youth is required to sign prior to release from the Ranch. The youth’s behavior is monitored at home, in school, at counseling programs and their overall behavior in the community.

Supervision is provided by the Aftercare Counselor, who is part of the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). The team meets three weeks prior to the youth’s completion of their Ranch portion of the program. An Aftercare Community Transition Plan is created for each youth which outlines the responsibilities of the youth during their Aftercare Program. This plan includes schooling, community counseling, employment, home/family issues and special orders of the court. The youth and parent are required to sign the plan. In addition, an Aftercare Contract is created which outlines twenty- four conditions that the youth must adhere to during the Aftercare Program. The conditions include: 1) school attendance; 2) submitting to drug testing; 3) no use of any controlled substance; 4) reporting into a counselor daily; and 5) no wearing of gang clothing. In addition, the contract also can require specific behavior expectations that are required. Failure to adhere to the conditions could result in return to the Ranch or Juvenile Hall.



The Counselor also has the option of extending pre release for up to four weeks if there are any issues with youth fulfilling the conditions of the contract. The Commissioners noted that the Aftercare Community Transition Plan was not available in Spanish or any other foreign language which could cause some issues with limited English speaking parents/youth. The Aftercare Contract has recently been translated into Spanish but had not been utilized.

The Aftercare Counselor meets with the youth weekly. He also communicates with the youth daily on the phone. The Aftercare Counselor's current workload is 12 youths.

ERP is a holistic program that might be called a "Multi-Systemic" approach in which the child is seen as part of a system of family, peers, school and community, and is treated as such. Consequently, the family is incorporated into the treatment plan. The youth's family is required to participate in pre-release sessions at the MWC, and the youth is allowed to go home on passes during the final stages of treatment. The youth's therapy does not stop upon leaving the MWC.

Aftercare supervision is also provided by a Probation Officer who is housed at the MWC. However, in some cases, a Probation Officer from the Gang Supervision Unit may be assigned if the youth was a gang member at the time of commitment or a different Probation Officer may be assigned who has been working intensely with the youth, the family or siblings where continuity of supervision is desirable.

MWC resident's release to Aftercare is a conditional release. Consequently, the Aftercare Counselor or the assigned Probation Officer has the power to return the youth to either the Wright Center or Juvenile Hall for any violation of conditions to his or her release. Since Mental Health has now lost both of its Spanish speaking Community Workers the Commission believes that if the plan is to be implemented by the whole family it should be in Spanish.

When the commissioners inquired about the overall performance to the program, the Ranch Aftercare Counselor was unable to provide any information. However, a review of the program with the Juvenile Hall Aftercare Manager showed the following data as measured by the percentage of youth arrested six months after completion of the Aftercare Program.

2005-06	40%
2006-07	15%
2007-08	10.3%

## **Multidisciplinary Team Meeting**

The MDT (Multidisciplinary Team) process involves the Probation Officer, the Aftercare Counselor, school faculty (though not routinely so), Medical and Mental Health personnel, Gardner Health Center, counseling staff members, parent(s) and youth, and the Probation Department's Educational Liaison Specialist.

Two commissioners attended a Multidisciplinary Team Meeting (MDT) for a youth leaving the facility in three weeks. The meeting was preceded by a meeting with staff only to discuss the youth's goals and needs. Present at the meeting were: the youth's Probation Officer, a representative from Gardner Family Health Center, a representative from County Mental Health, an Education Counselor, a Counselor from the Residential Center, and a Probation Substance Abuse Counselor. The meeting was run by the youth's Probation Officer.

Overall, the staff were knowledgeable about the youth. Their goal was to see the youth be successful in Aftercare. The Probation Officer reinforced several times that if the youth begins feeling overwhelmed by the number of things he needed to do he should call her. One of the members of the MDT was able to translate for the mother who was Spanish-speaking. The youth and his mother both seemed to agree with the MDT plan, although their responses were primarily "yes" and "no" and they were asked few questions that allowed them to respond in a full manner.

One issue that arose during the MDT was the difficulty in getting the youth back into a school setting. Because he had been expelled from his school, and he would be leaving the MWC in May, staff said it was unlikely that he could get enrolled into school before the end of the school year. It would be necessary to find a continuation or alternative school for him. He probably would not be able to enroll until the fall. The members of the MDT expressed concern about most of the alternative schools he would be eligible to attend. Many had gang members of the gang the youth was not associated with. Others did not have standards for the students that met with Probation's standards (i.e., the students were allowed to wear gang paraphernalia, be disrespectful, etc.)

This is a system issue that the Juvenile Justice Commission should look at in the future. If youth are not able to easily re-engage in school, then the chances s/he will be successful in Aftercare decreases significantly. The Aftercare piece of ERP is just as important as the residential component. In cases such as these perhaps the youth should be placed outside of the home in a program like the San Jose Conservation Corps or another residential program with schooling and vocational training available.

## **VI. BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT:**

### **Level System**

The core of the ERP cognitive behavior program is the "level system." Youth are introduced to the MWC programs during a two to four hour orientation meeting held

at Juvenile Hall for those awaiting placement. Upon arrival, youth are provided another orientation session to the MWC and its expectations.

A youth's progress in the ERP must be demonstrated by growth in approved and desired behaviors and attitudes, as recognized by advancement through the level system. The level system is a performance scale of four graduated steps and is designed to enable youth to acquire specific skills and competencies. Each of the four levels contains objectives and expectations measurable by all staff members and explained to the youth in the MWC Guide Book. Advancement levels are represented by the color of a youth's belt. Youth enter the MWC at Level 1, represented by wearing a white belt, and must actively work toward Level 4, a black belt in order to graduate. The belt level system is a critical part of the MWC. The belts are visible on the waists of the youth throughout the day. The four designated levels and their approximate durations are as follows:

- Level 1 (Orientation, white belt), one month – this level focuses on high direction by staff through setting goals and getting tasks accomplished.
- Level 2 (Program/Treatment, yellow belt), two months – staff examines what motivates the youth, explains decisions. Staff still make final decisions but encourage youth to talk and make suggestions.
- Level 3 (Family Reunification, brown belt) two months – staff's role is more supportive and less directive. Youth are reminded of their increased critical thinking skills and are encouraged to make decisions.
- Level 4 (Continuing Care Plan, black belt) one month. Staff becomes a resource and inspires possibilities in youth. Youth are encouraged to make their own decisions.

There are specific expectations, privileges and restrictions at each program level. For example, youth are first eligible for field trips, sports programs and off-site work crews at Level 2, while youth at Level 3 are eligible for daytime weekend furloughs. Prior to a youth's first furlough, their Counselor has at least three conferences with the family and has made at least one home visit. Youth at Level 4 are eligible for overnight weekend furloughs. Youth are evaluated weekly to assess their progress. A "successful week" would result if the youth is working on current expectations and his/her overall behavior is congruent with expectations and goals. A specific number of successful weeks are required at each level to qualify for advancement. The resident must make written application for level advancement. An Incident Report (IR) might result in an "unsuccessful week," lengthening the youth's stay by one week, although the youth may file an appeal regarding that status. Some youth are returned to Juvenile Hall for a "cooling-off" period when serious transgressions such as drug possession are documented. Individual youth in any one pod may be at different levels. They do not graduate from the MWC as a group, but rather complete the program as individuals.

In the last inspection report of the MWC, the inspection team noted that this rule book was too complex for youth to understand. Unfortunately, there have been no changes to the rule book since the last inspection. There have also been no changes to the "Behavior Scale" on page 10 of the Guidebook, which is deemed to be too complicated. A chart on that page describes the process by which youth lose privileges, have an

unsuccessful week or are reviewed for ranch failure. The chart has a notation beneath it that says, "All of the above are Incident Reports 1, 3, 5, 7, 10 will be considered as an unsuccessful week." The sentence itself is unclear. The chart header row is numbered 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10 so any Incident Report listed on the chart apparently "will be considered an unsuccessful week." Does that mean everything on the chart carries an equal penalty? Is a chart necessary if all the penalties are equal?

Only two incident reports of the nineteen written in March 2009 apply the Behavior Scale: one was a 3/4 for insubordination and another was a 5/1 for direct disrespect. It is unclear what the designations mean or the value of their points. If the month of March is typical, most incidents are not given a point value. Many of the Center's Incident Reports resulted in counseling without any point deduction. That process is consistent with the Cognitive Behavioral approach to changing youth's behavior. Perhaps the complex behavior scale and point system should be deleted from the Guidebook if its use is uneven.

The Guidebook is printed in English. The Ranch Manager told the Commission last year that she would work on a Spanish version. While most of the youth in the Center are Hispanic the Manager says there are rarely non-English speakers in the program. The Manager said she would work with the Commission to review the Guidebook with the Orientation Counselor and see if it can be simplified. Many of the parents who also participate in a Ranch Orientation do not speak English. It may be difficult for them to support the Ranch Counselors in their common interpretation of the rules.

### **Incident Reports**

The Inspection Team reviewed 19 Incident Reports (IRs) written for March 2009, and 20 reports for April 2009. Data from these reports were compared with statistics provided to the Commission via the monthly Salient Features Reports (SFR). There were minor discrepancies between the IRs reviewed and the serious incidents listed in the Salient Features Reports. Differences included: there is no contraband reported on the March SFR, yet there was one IR for contraband but it was labeled "information;" there was one escape shown on the SFR, but there were three minors who escaped; and there was one Ranch failure which was not reported. The inconsistencies were shared with the Manager.

The penalties resulting from an incident range from counseling to ranch failure. All of the penalties appeared justified. Three appeals resulted. One IR for an unsuccessful week appears to be set aside by the Manager upon review without an appeal.

### **Appeals**

During January through April 2009, there were, only 7 appeals filed by residents of the Center. These were for minor issues and were appropriately addressed by Wright Center staff. There were also 2 letters of complaint which were more in the nature of grievances than appeals because there was no IR or penalty to appeal. The appeals seem

to have been handled adequately. According to the Guidebook and Procedures Manual, the appellant has a right to a hearing. There does not seem to be any requests for a hearing. In 2 cases, the youth were interviewed by the unit supervisor in one case and the Ranch Manager in the other. In the later appeal the penalty was reduced. This result supports the conclusion that appeals are being handled fairly.

There is a concern however, that the appeal form needs further refinement. In the event a minor does not agree with the decision of the supervisor who handled the appeal, there is a signature box for the appellant's signature. If the minor does agree the supervisor notes agreement. Without some positive indication on the form by the appellant to agreement there is no real way to review the appeal by others.

### **Grievances**

The procedures for filing a grievance are included in the MWC Guide Book, which directs that grievance forms may be obtained from a counselor or from a box labeled "Grievances" in the dormitory. However grievance and appeals forms and their respective boxes were not visible in the pods at the time of our Inspection. Locked boxes labeled "Grievances" have been added since the initial visit.

As demonstrated by the two letters included in the Appeals file, there is but a fine line between grievances and appeals. Nonetheless, there appears to be sufficient understanding by the residents of the right to complain when they feel wronged, and it appears that due process is not neglected.

At least 11 boys signed onto a grievance done in the form of a petition in February, 2009. They were complaining that the amount of food had greatly decreased leaving them unsatisfied and hungry. The grievance was forwarded to the Department's Food Manager, who responded that the caloric requirements had been changed, so the new menus reflected the lesser calories. The commissioners discussed this issue, which also came up during the James Ranch inspection, with several residents, and conclude that the quantity issue is being favorably addressed.

Two resident boys were interviewed regarding their grievances/appeals. The first was a boy who complained of unfair delay in his promotion from Level 2 to Level 3 and also had a number of complaints about unfair treatment. Notably, the minor had not received any IRs in the past two months and was being promoted to Level 3 on the day of the interview. He felt that there are certain residents that are more closely watched and unfairly punished by the staff. For example, in February he received an IR for tagging in his room and as a result received an unsuccessful week. He felt it was unfair to give him an IR when "all the other boys" are doing the same thing. He initially complained to Commissioners that he was demoted as a result of the IR, but he acknowledged that he was not demoted, he received an unsuccessful week. He filed an appeal of the IR and the Ranch Manager explained to him that an unsuccessful week did not in itself mean he would not promote, and his total behavior would be considered. The February IR has been his only written infraction.

The same minor also complained that his entire pod was forced to wear sandals for a month, and were not being allowed, therefore, to participate in outdoor sports. When interviewed again, he acknowledged that they were allowed to perform outdoor sports, but complained that it hurt his feet to wear sandals during sports. The Ranch Manager acknowledged that the boys were required to wear sandals for two weeks due to a report of one minor smuggling drugs into the Center. In addition, the boys were made aware of an impending urinalysis drug test due to the drug violation, and the likelihood of running away is reduced by requiring sandals rather than tennis shoes. She advised that all first level minors wear sandals during their first week on campus to help discourage escapes. The Manager advised that residents are not prevented from large muscle activities by the wearing of sandals, and directed the Commissioner's attention to the activity field where minors in sandals were playing.

Another boy grieved that his appeal took too long to be heard and demanded to speak with a "Juvenile Justice" person. He was interviewed. The Commissioner noticed that it took five days, from April 22<sup>nd</sup> to April 27<sup>th</sup> for the supervisor to respond to the appeal. The appeal was submitted on a Wednesday and it was returned to him on the following Monday, a total of three working days. The Guide Book provides that "The Supervisor on Duty . . . shall hear the appeal within three (3) *working* days during which time the Supervisor is on duty." (page 22. Emphasis added.) This appeal does seem to have been completed within the time frame required.

Of greater concern in the above case were the facts of the IR and appeal. The minor was infraacted for failing to follow instructions during an exercise period. He asked to be excused due to his allergies which cause his nose to bleed, and when his request was denied, he refused to participate and sat down in the shade. When interviewed, the minor acknowledged that his nose does not bleed profusely due to the allergies, and showed the Commissioner a small drop of blood from that day's activities on his shirt. He was asked if he had seen the nurse, and the minor said that she was no help at all (basically useless). He admitted that she gave him medications, but she wouldn't get him excused from outdoor activities. When told that the Commissioner felt that the minor had received fair treatment and that due process had been provided to him, the minor said the Commissioner was not doing his job and suggested that he too was useless.

## **VII. MEDICAL SERVICES:**

The Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System (SCVHHS) provides medical services at the Wright Center under the supervision of the Nurse Manager at Juvenile Hall. There is one full-time female nurse at the Wright Center. The nurse works a split shift with normal working hours Monday through Thursday from 6:15 am to noon, followed by evening hours, 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. In addition, the nurse reports that she works Saturday and Sunday mornings to provide pill calls for youth. A relief nurse, who also works part time at Juvenile Hall, fills in on the regular nurse's days off. The split shift usually covers both the morning and evening medications and the necessary "sick calls."

Probation Counselors are not allowed to dispense medications; consequently, there has to be a nurse available for the morning and the evening “pill calls.” This devoted nurse has been at the Ranch for over 12 years. When asked she stated that if the budget improved a nurse that worked the 4 to 8p.m. shift would be ideal. However, if a youth’s situation or an injury seems serious, he or she is transported to Valley Medical Center. The Wright Center nurse lives nearby, so she is able to accommodate the split schedule. She is enthusiastic about her job, but especially because of the demands of the female youth at the Wright Center. It was noted that there are many more sick calls at Wright Center (1079) than at the larger James Ranch (793) in 2008. There were a total of 169 Medical Doctor Appointments as well as 2 hospitalizations during 2008.

Every two weeks, a doctor and a psychiatrist visit the Wright Center to see youth on medications and to evaluate new referrals. The doctor sees approximately ten patients and the psychiatrist four patients at each visitation. The Mental Health staff enthusiastically support this addition to services. Follow-up is done through the tele-nursing station which is also working well. Nine youth are currently on psychotropic medications.

A recent incident reported by the nurse was a youth who suffered a “hanging tooth” injury from a sports program. Through tele-nursing, he was eventually sent that evening to a dentist in an East San Jose clinic and the tooth sutured. It is obvious that this nurse must be working overtime. Youth have recently seen a decrease in daily caloric content of their food. Most youth are now on a 2500 calorie a day program and three pre-diabetic girls are on a 2000 calorie diet per day. The nurse always has Fridays off when she conducts her personal business. She does not have time to present group classes but said that Planned Parenthood and the Girl Scouts have presented good sex education classes for the girls. She is concerned by the lack of air-conditioning in that the computers and tele-nursing station are affected by the extreme heat in the summer.

The nurse attends all the MDT meetings about the youth. The nurse says she sees or hears little from the youth’s parents. She said most of the youth are from troubled homes. Because she has access to past medical data on the youth she knows about past abuse the youth have suffered. She cited a recent admit who she eventually discovered had a eating disorder. He was purging food almost daily. He is in the custody of a brother who denied the boy had an eating disorder. In a recent home visit the boy was allowed to play handball for three hours when the nurse had urged the boy’s brother to make sure he did not engage in any physical activity. The Ranch Manager recently received a note from the boy’s mother who is in a Chowchilla prison. The youth is 14 years old.

There was one pregnant girl at the facility at the time of the April inspection. Her condition required regular Monday appointments with a nurse and monthly checkups at Valley Medical Center. The nurse also provides neonatal and mother/baby education. Youth who must be hospitalized for childbirth and or any hospitalization are released into the custody of family. One youth was released to have a gall bladder removed and another for a hernia in the past few weeks.

The nurse's station is compact. According to the nurse a space planner was called in to evaluate the potential for better use of space in the cramped quarters in response to the 2008 JJC inspection, and the 2008 Health and Hospital Systems reports that some progress was achieved. The 2009 Health and Hospital Systems Inspection Report cited the need for air-conditioning in the nurse's station. The team monitored temperatures in the Clinic in April and found them too high for the storage of medicines and the use of the tele-nursing system.

### **VIII. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:**

Mental Health Services are provided by the Mental Health Department of the SCVHHS under the supervision of the Program Manager at Juvenile Hall, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. The on-site staff includes a licensed clinician and a part-time MSW (Masters of Social Work) who is studying for her clinician's license. The two part-time family specialists have been cut from the budget this year. The budget proposal for the FY 2010 suggests that the County Mental Health staff be replaced with outside contractors. The impact of eliminating Mental Health staff from the Ranches cannot be predicted because the replacement services are unknown. The Commission is concerned that the termination of Mental Health services will impact the consistency we now have between Juvenile Hall and Ranch staff. The staff the Commission interviewed were passionate about their work and integrated into the ERP.

In addition to providing Mental Health counseling and monitoring youth who are on psychotropic medications, Mental Health staff members also participate in the entrance and exit processing of youth at the facility. A mental health assessment is made upon placement at the Wright Center, and staff members further participate in the MDT. Clinicians also collaborate with the nurse regarding youth who are experiencing mental health issues. As previously noted, a psychiatrist visits the facility every two weeks, checking medication needs and conferring with youth who may be having more acute mental health issues. Probation Counselors may also make referrals as needed.

The Mental Health staff said that there was open communication between counselors, medical and mental health staff concerning the use of psycho-tropic drugs in the youth's best interests. Mental Health staff attend MDT meetings. The exit MDT needs to be conducted well in advance of a youth's return to the community because there are often mental health, medical and school based issues that take time to resolve. A youth who is released without a solid plan is a youth who will probably return to the Ranch.

### **IX. EDUCATION:**

Commissioners met with the School Principal, at the MWC. The education program at the Muriel Wright Center is managed through the Alternative School Department programs of the County Office of Education (COE), and is designed to allow students to return to their home schools upon return to the community. The school program focuses on Language Arts and Math so that youth can pass the high school exit exam (CAHSEE)



or obtain a high school equivalency certificate by passing the General Educational Development (GED) exam.

The Principal divides his time between the Juvenile Hall, James Ranch and MWC. There are three full-time regular teachers and one Special Day Teacher. In addition, there is one resource specialist and one education assistant available to work with teachers and youths during the week. Staff ratio to youths is currently 1 to 12.

### **Structure**

With four pods of students, and an equal number of teachers, the school program is more favorable to the ERP than the James Ranch program. School is 300 minutes a day, five days a week. School starts at 7:50 am to accommodate a pod meeting in the classroom in which current or emerging issues are discussed.

### **Screening and Admission**

Generally, youth arrive at the Wright Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Orientation to the school program includes curriculum offered, grading system, how credits are earned, school rules, class schedules and individual future plans. The students are then enrolled in school the day after arrival. Attendance at the Muriel Wright School is required

Upon enrollment, the Measurement of Academic Proficiency (MAP), an academic measurement tool, is administered to youths to identify their language arts and math skills, and the California English Language development Test (CELT) is used to determine their English skills. An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is developed for each of the youths. Input from the students, parents, counselors and probation officers is used to develop a plan, which is then used to allow teachers and students to focus on goals aimed at helping youths transition back to the community.

The Commissioners expressed concern over the lack of a measurement system to determine the progress of the youths during classroom time. The Principal pointed out that COE is creating a Prescriptive Lesson Plan (PLP) that will allow the classroom teacher to measure how the student is progressing from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This system along with the installation of an educational data base (Aries) will be installed at both ranches in 2010.

Commissioners attended all four classrooms and had a chance to observe student performance. The youths were very engaged with the instructors. The classrooms were neat and orderly. A Ranch Counselor resides in each of the classrooms during the instruction. Two of the four teachers will be retiring within the next 12 months and concern was expressed over the introduction of new instructors. Commissioners discussed the acceptance of school credits by area high schools. The Principal indicated that many schools are reluctant to accept credits earned by youths because that teachers are not fully accredited to teach the wide variety of subjects required. To correct this

situation, all the ranch teachers are receiving training in Math, English Language Arts, and Social Sciences through the No Child Left Behind Program and by 2010 all teachers will be fully accredited in those subjects.

### **Educational Program Development**

The Wright Center Site Team meets every other month to review, share and discuss current situations while planning for anticipated events. These meetings are to allow Probation, Mental Health, Pathways, Medical and Muriel Wright School staff the opportunity to refine and implement ERP techniques addressing the needs of the students. The Commission reviewed a site meeting agenda and minutes. It is obvious that there is much collaboration occurring at the MWC.

There are activities for professional development of the school staff once a week. Some meetings are focused on core subjects for the site, while other meetings bring together educational staff on an inter-facility basis to address common issues. This sharing of experiences, ideas and cohesive planning helps avoid staff becoming isolated.

### **X. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED:**

#### **County Of Santa Clara**

1. Annual Review of the Security Review Report, Memorandum, October 30, 2007
2. Facilities and Fleet, Annual Building Inspection, January 2008
3. Office of the Fire Marshal, Inspection Report, November 18, 2008
4. SCVHHS, Annual Review, Juvenile Hall/Juvenile Ranches Medical Services, 2008
5. SCVHHS, Public Health Dept., MWC Inspection, June 24, 2008
6. SCVHHS, Public Health Dept., MWC Inspection, May 15, 2009
7. "Report on Enhanced Ranch Programs at Muriel Wright Center and William F. James Ranch," dated February 14, 2008

#### **Santa Clara County Probation Department**

1. Discipline Appeal Form, undated
2. Guidelines for Level Presentations and Expectations not dated
3. James Ranch and Wright Center Enhanced Ranch Program, February 20, 2008
4. Muriel Wright Residential Center Program Guide, undated
5. Muriel Wright Residential Center: Juvenile Services, April 14, 2009
6. Response to JJC Recommendations dated June 11, 2007
7. Muriel Wright Site Team Meeting Report, March 11, 2009
8. Wright Center CBO Training, December 4, 2008
9. Muriel Wright Residential Center- Shift Schedule, March 23-April 19, 2009
10. Juvenile Hall and Ranches Daily Statistics, April 14, 2009
11. Muriel Wright Residential Center Contracto De Cuidado Posterior De Salida ("Aftercare")

## **XI. COMMENDATIONS:**

### **The Juvenile Justice Commission commends:**

1. The highly motivated and well-trained Wright Center staff.
2. The dedicated and goal-directed Wright Center Manager, who promotes staff development for all on-site staff and related Community-Based Organizations.
3. The Wright Center Manager for her efforts to obtain volunteers to supplement programming.
4. The staff and management of the MWC for the variety of activities offered to the residents.
5. The Wright Center Manager and the Muriel Wright School Principal for continuing to advocate for means by which youth may work with the developmentally disabled children of the Santa Teresa Cluster Program.
6. The Aftercare Counselor for extraordinary efforts to provide significant supervision and assistance to youth in transition to life outside the MWC.
7. The Nurse, who deserves special recognition for having to work a split shift and being especially caring for the Center's youth returning on Saturdays and Sundays for pill calls.

## **XII. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **The Juvenile Justice Commission recommends that the Probation Department:**

1. Simplify the much too detailed rules in the Muriel Wright Center Guide Book. Simplify the language used in the Guide Book and have it printed in Spanish as well as English. This recommendation was also made last year, and the Manager has agreed to work directly with the Commission on its implementation.
2. Revise the grievance procedures in conformity with the procedures used at Juvenile Hall to make forms more readily accessible.
3. Ensure that residents are informed of the outcome of a grievance.
4. Share the results of the new contracted evaluation with all key stakeholders.

5. Continue to provide additional Enhanced Ranch Program training to School, Mental Health, Pathway, and other CBO staff.
6. Investigate the installation of an air-conditioning system at the MWC.
7. Explore the possibility of reinstating vocational training.
8. Continue to improve on the accuracy of the monthly Salient Features Reports.
9. Increase the “homelike” attributes to living units at the MWC.
10. Translate the Aftercare Community Transition Plan into Spanish.

**The Juvenile Justice Commission recommends that the Santa Clara County Office of Education:**

1. Take necessary action to facilitate transfer of school records for at-risk youth.
2. Address with the higher levels of school and/or district administration, the problem of refusal by a school or district to accept a youth after release from the Wright Center.

**The Juvenile Justice Commission recommends that the Santa Clara County Health and Hospital System:**

1. Provide recognition to this nurse’s service. The Commission would be honored to work on this recognition.
2. Air-conditioning in the Medical Clinic should be a priority.
3. Consider exit MDT’s to be scheduled as early as necessary to insure appropriate plans are in place for youth with difficult aftercare issues.
4. Reconsider the replacement of Mental Health staff by outside agencies.

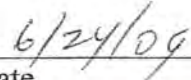
**XIII. SUMMARY:**

Many favorable changes have taken place at the Muriel Wright Residential Center within the past year. The Probation Department met the challenges of continuing to develop and apply the Enhanced Ranch Program. The Probation Department also had the foresight to keep the same Manager in place. It will be very important to begin a transitional Ranch Manager process to ensure the high quality of leadership remains after the current Manager retires.

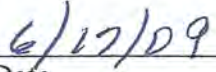
Based on this inspection, The Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission believes that the Muriel Wright Residential Center meets the Commission's standards for a safe and effective juvenile detention facility for the youth of Santa Clara County.

**Approved by the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission on  
June 2, 2009.**

  
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Patricia Khan, JJC Chairperson

  
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Date

  
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Nora Manchester, MWR Inspection Chair

  
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Date