

Juvenile Justice Commission County of Santa Clara

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Inspection Report Muriel Wright Residential Center March 2011

Introduction

The Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC), a state-mandated, court-appointed authority, visited the Muriel Wright Center (MWC) pursuant to the State of California Welfare and Institutions Code section 229. All visits to the MWC were pre-arranged with the Probation Manager. Five Commissioners inspected the facility and met with the staff, service providers, the youth and their families. This report summarizes the information gathered during visits which took place on January 10th, 14th, 16th and 26th, 2011. The JJC conducts annual inspections of the MWC. The inspection reports for prior years are available on the internet at (<http://www.sccsuperiorcourt.org/juvenile/jjc.htm>).

The Muriel Wright Center, which is operated by the Santa Clara County Probation Department ("Probation") is a rehabilitative program for girls ages 12 through 18 at the time of their commitment to the Center and for boys ages 12 through 16 at the time of their commitment to the Center. The facility is located on five acres in the foothills of the Santa Teresa County Park on a site overlooking the Santa Clara Valley.

The MWC Handbooks states the mission of the Santa Clara Juvenile Rehabilitation Facilities:
To reduce crime and to protect the community by providing a structured, safe and secure facility, which supports residential, and aftercare programs and services to minors and their parents and to enhance personal accountability, positive behavioral choices and the successful reintegration of the minor into the home and the community.

Population

On January 19, 2011 the MWC had a total population of 28 youth; 17 boys and 11 girls. There was no one on the waiting list at that time. One of the girls was from out of the county. At the time of the inspection none of the female youth were pregnant and none of the male youth were fathers. The ethnic breakdown of residents at the MWC was as follows:

Asian descent (2 youth, 7.1% of total population), African American (3 youth, 10.7% of total population), Hispanic (20 youth, 71.4% of total population), Caucasian (2 youth, 7.1% of total population) and Other (1 youth, 3.5% of total population). Nineteen of the youth were ages 14

or 15, and nine were 16 or older. There were no minors at the MWC under 14 years of age on January 19, 2011.

The California Corrections Standards Authority (CSA) has rated the capacity of the MWC at 64 youth. In order to accommodate the principle of smaller living environments, a key component of the Enhanced Ranch Program (discussed below), the MWC capacity has been reduced from 64 to 48 youth.

The Probation Manager told the Commissioners that there have been a large number of releases in the last two months, which has resulted in the relatively low population.

Staffing

On the first visit to the MWC the Commissioners received an overview of the program from the Probation Manager, accompanied by one of the Probation Supervisors and the Program Coordinator. The Probation Manager came to the MWC in April of 2010, with 26 years of experience in the Probation Department. The Probation Manager told the Commissioners that she had attended the 3-day training course for the “Teaching Pro Social Skills” (TPS) program, but had not yet had the opportunity to attend the Enhanced Ranch Program course.

The MWC has one Probation Manager, 3 Probation Supervisors, a Program Coordinator who is shared with the James Ranch, 1 Aftercare Counselor, 24 Probation Counselors (with two vacant Counselor positions that are expected to be filled within the next month), and 6 Night Probation Assistants. In addition there is a roster of extra help available to fill in as needed. Six Counselors are Spanish speaking and two speak Vietnamese.

MWC “site team meetings” give staff from Probation, Community Solutions, Pathways, the Medical Office, CYO, Girl Scouts, Victim Awareness, Chaplaincy and the Blue Ridge High School a chance share program issues and work toward collaborative solutions. A site team meeting was held on March 9, 2011. The Probation Manager plans on holding sessions three times a year.

Enhanced Ranch Program (ERP)

The Enhanced Ranch Program (ERP) began at the MWC in August 2006. The ERP is based on an evidenced-based practice referred to as the “Missouri Model.” Below are the components of the Enhanced Ranch Program as described in “Aftercare Study, Enhanced Ranch Program,” a report written by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and published on April 30, 2010.

- a. Staff Development and Coaching – 96 hours of instruction in a Cognitive Based Treatment model of group counseling. This is supported by ongoing mentoring and coaching.
- b. Treatment – all youth are assessed within three weeks of entering the MWC. A Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) comes together, including probation counselors, parents, probation school counselors, mental health and substance abuse counselors to consider all

relevant information and develop a treatment plan. It is required to follow the treatment plan.

c. Family Atmosphere - The smaller treatment groups of 10 to 12 youth and the personalized living space create a more home-like atmosphere. Each pod has a central meeting area that is furnished like a large family room.

d. Group Process – Counseling and group processing supports the personal development of each youth. Youth are encouraged to talk out personal problems with the group.

e. Small Staff-to-Youth Ratios – These low ratios allow for the staff to interact and work closely with the youth rather than just monitor them.

f. Family Participation - Before the youth enters the ERP, s/he is screened to ensure a significant adult figure (parent, relative or legal guardian) is willing and able to participate in the program with the youth.

g. Personal Enhancement Opportunities – A variety of activities are offered to the youth (see Programs section below).

h. Extended Length of Stay – The in-custody program has increased from a six month stay to an eight month stay with a six month Aftercare program.

i. Relationship Building – One-on-one relationships between line staff and youth in order to build trust and encourage the youth to participate in the group work.

j. Education – The Santa Clara County Office of Education provides a school day of 300 minutes (see Education section later).

k. Aftercare Programs – These programs and supports are offered to the youth for 6 months after they leave the MWC to support the youth's success when s/he returns home. This is described in more detail later in the report.

While in custody (usually the first 8 months of the program), youth at the MWC progress through 4 levels. Youth reach each level by displaying good performance and achieving his/her goals. Each youth is evaluated each week to determine if s/he is ready to progress to the next level. Below is a schematic of the in-custody levels:

Level 1 – Orientation - Lasts about 1 month

Level 2 – Core Program Activities – Lasts 2 – 3 months

Level 3 – Family Reunification Planning – 2 months (Youth begin to spend time at home on weekends.

Level 4 – Re-entry and Aftercare Preparation – 1 month

In another study conducted by NCCD (released on July 24, 2009), researchers found that there had been a significant decline in behavior incidents at the MWC (fights, gang activity, disruptive conduct or contraband) after the ERP was introduced. The report found that in the year prior to the introduction of ERP, there were a total of 4647 behavior incidents over a 24-month period. After the introduction of the ERP, these incidents declined to 1294 over 18 months. Pre-ERP there were 475 youth in the program for an average number of incidents of 9.8/youth. After ERP was instituted there were 262 youth in the program with an average of 4.9 incidents per youth. Incident Reports will be discussed later in this report.

Education

The Santa Clara County Office of Education (COE), Alternative Education Department oversees and administers the educational program at MWC. Youth are at the MWC for 6 – 8 months, which provides a unique opportunity for youth to focus on academics, develop and practice effective study habits, earn (or catch up on) credits and position themselves for success when they leave the MWC and re-enter regular high school.

Commissioners met with the school principal, who has been in the position for one year. The principal divides his time between James Ranch, the MWC, and two other sites. His assignment differs from the past principal's role in that it includes one additional school site. There are three full time regular teachers and one special education teacher and one educational assistant. In addition, there is an extra educational assistant and access to a Resource Specialist when needed. There are many opportunities for professional development for the teachers.

Youth are oriented to the school program with a review of the curriculum offered, the grading systems, how credits are earned, the school rules, class schedules and individual future plans. Students are enrolled the day after their arrival. School attendance is mandatory. Two student assessment tests are administered: Measurement of Academic Proficiency (MAP) and the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is developed for each youth using these tests plus the youth's individual student records from his or her home school district.

The school day is 300 minutes in length, 4 days a week with early release on Wednesdays (240 minutes) for staff professional development in the content areas (English language arts, Math, History and Science) and in teaching strategies for English language learners. The educational program is designed to assist students in returning to their home schools. The program is focused on language arts and math and on assisting students in passing the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). There are also provisions that allow students to obtain a high school equivalency certificate by passing the General Education Development (GED) exam. Commissioners attended all four classrooms to observe student performance. Youth were engaged in learning both with the instructor and independently. At least one Ranch Counselor was in each of the classrooms during the instructional day. Commissioners observed a classroom where a Ranch counselor was assisting in the delivery of the lesson, which struck Commissioners as a sound educational practice

Career Technical Education (Vocational Education) provides job skills to high school age youth so they will be job-ready upon graduation from school. The MWC offers a Computer Business Applications course and focuses on career preparation. "Cyber High" is a computer-based credit recovery program that allows youth to earn additional credits. This may allow them to return to their high school at grade level. Cyber High can be used only during the regular school day and is in limited use at MWC.

In past inspection reports, Commissioners expressed concern over the lack of a measurement system to determine the progress of youth during classroom time. Last year, COE was to create a prospective lesson plan (PLP) and install an educational data base (ARIES) that would measure student progress from grades 8 through 12, but as of the date of this report, this has not been implemented. Therefore, it is still difficult to determine youths' progress. However, the new English language development core program, offered to students below grade level, was

implemented in December 2010 with placement assessments followed by a 45 day gains assessment to measure student growth. In addition students are assessed using Renaissance STAR for math placement and growth every 90 days.

Last year there was concern expressed by staff regarding the reluctance of some school districts to accept the school credits given at the MWC. The principal indicated that this is no longer a concern.

Programs

Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY)

FLY is a 12 week instructional program that provides legal education for incarcerated youth, as well as a mentorship program to provide youth with positive role models. During the year, the youth participated in an educational mock trial, playing the different roles of people in a courtroom. The youth also participated in a photography project, taking photos of various scenes around them. Commissioners enjoyed looking at the final posters, which contained meaningful descriptions explaining the significance of the photos.

Sports Program

The Sports Program offers organized team sports for the male minors of the Wright Center. Sports practice takes place twice a week before the actual program, which is once a week. The boys have been divided into teams, and are currently participating in a basketball tournament. Female minors have not been participating in the program, as there are not enough females to create entire teams. The girls have physical education classes daily and yoga twice a week. During Commissioners' visit one of the girls said that she would like the girls to have the opportunity to compete outside the MWC the way the boys do.

Pathway Society

Pathway Society (Pathways) provides chemical dependency treatment services for the youth. Pathways counselors hold drug awareness groups once a week with each individual pod. The program focuses on informing the youth about the seriousness of drug and alcohol use. Some youth also participate in individual counseling, where they can discuss specific issues that they may have. Pathways works closely with the Mental Health Therapist in order to provide the appropriate services and treatment plans for the youth.

Other Programs

Other programs offered at MWC include Victim Awareness, Religious Services, Anger Management, and CYO Gang Redirect. These programs are scheduled for each of the pods during the week. The girls at MWC also currently volunteer at the Santa Teresa Cluster, a K-6 school for disabled children, where they learn to assist children with special needs. The two girl pods alternate every eight weeks to participate in the Girl Scouts program, learning teamwork and leadership skills. Additionally, the youth have attended off campus activities including a college campus visit and a snow trip and numerous field trips through their school program.

Medical Services

The full-time nurse (RN) assigned to the MWC provided pertinent information to Commissioners regarding medical services at the MWC. The professional medical services staff consists of one full time RN, a coded float nurse from Juvenile Hall (JH), two relief per diem RNs, a pediatrician, and a psychiatrist. The two physicians alternate biweekly visits to the MWC. Dental care is available to minors at Juvenile Hall on an “as needed” basis. Clerical support for the medical staff is no longer available. A physician from JH is always available by phone for an off-hour consultation with the staff at the MWC. Additionally a teleconferencing system is available online to share patient concerns with JH medical staff if necessary. If they prefer, families can also seek medical and dental care for their children with private providers, but this is at their own expense and must be approved by Probation Administration in conjunction with the MWC medical staff.

The RNs schedule their work hours to effectively administer medication, conduct sick calls and provide patient care. The RNs work within their scope of practice pursuant to written protocol and standardized procedures. The standardized procedures/nursing standards manual is reviewed and signed annually by numerous County department heads. MWC Probation Supervisors are authorized by the nurse to administer a one time dose of Tylenol, if requested, in the absence of the nurse.

Due to time constraints, formal health education classes are not scheduled by the nursing staff. The nurses are, however, diligent in discussing health issues with individual minors as needed. The current nursing staff is made up of competent, experienced professionals who are well respected by the Probation staff and appreciated by the residents.

The minor’s medical record is reviewed by the JH physician prior to the youth’s transfer to the Wright Center. Minors have complete physical exams within 96 hours of admission to JH and immunizations are initiated or up-dated if the minor is detained. This medical record is transferred with the minor to the MWC facility and is also available online. It is current policy that each minor have an annual physical exam if he or she has been in custody more than a year. This exam is scheduled to be done prior to transfer, or by the MWC pediatrician if due while the minor is still in the MWC setting. Immunizations for all youth are kept up-to-date. Lab work (urine, blood tests, throat cultures, etc.) are obtained by the on-site nurse and transported to the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (SCVMC) Lab by the ranch courier, usually on a weekly basis.

The clinic is very compact but is well organized, uncluttered and inviting. The medication cupboard is kept locked and was arranged systematically. Expiration dates were apparent and the stock meds were limited to avoid waste. In the 2009 Public Health Department inspection, the Public Health Nurse who inspected the clinic noted that “the room is not air conditioned and medications are getting hotter than the storage temperature recommended by the manufacturer.” This was not a problem on the day of the inspection. The request for air conditioning has been made but at this time has not been completed. Probation Administration is aware of the need to improve the air temperature control in the clinic as well as in other parts of the building.

The nurse demonstrated the Electronic Medical Record (ELMAR) system and discussed the pros and cons of ELMAR vs. conventional paper medical records. Medical service statistics for the past year were provided to the Commissioners. It seemed that there was a significant reduction

in the sick call visits in 2010 compared to 2009. However, prior to 2010 every contact the nurse had with a minor was counted, but with the introduction of the computer entry system only contacts that meet a more formal definition of sick call are counted.

The nurse discussed her role in the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings and her collaboration with Probation personnel, the Mental Health Therapist, and school staff in regard to providing the best care for all minors at the MWC.

The Commission's recommendation last year regarding face masks and hand sanitizers for visitors has been remedied. These items are readily available at the front desk where visitors enter.

Mental Health Services

Commissioners met with the full time Mental Health Therapist ("MH Therapist") who works for Community Solutions, a local community based organization. Community Solutions contracts with the Santa Clara County Mental Health Department (MHD) to provide mental health services 40 hours per week at the MWC. The MH Therapist has a Master's degree in psychology and is currently completing an internship in Marriage and Family Therapy. She is at the MWC Tuesday through Saturday from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm. The hours are suited to seeing minors without interrupting school schedules and allow contact with parents who are unavailable during the regular work week. Her daily routine varies based on the unplanned critical needs of minors, crisis intervention, therapy, and case management. She usually sees at least three to four clients each day.

The MH Therapist shared pertinent information regarding Mental Health services provided to minors detained at the MWC. She orients, interviews and performs a mental health assessment on each minor admitted to the MWC within several days of admission. An individual treatment plan is developed and shared with the youth's counselor, the MWC medical personnel, including the psychiatrist, and the MWC school staff who will be directly involved with the youth for the duration of their stay. She attends MDT meetings, confers with parents and the MWC's Aftercare Counselor to ensure that the recommended treatment plan is followed when the minor is released from the MWC. She also works with Probation staff to establish continued mental health treatment when the minor is released into the Aftercare program.

In addition to working directly with the minors and involved staff, the MH Therapist monitors and evaluates the use of psychotropic medications and reports her findings to the physician and/or nurse. She also reinforces the prescribed therapy and employs crisis intervention.

The therapist stated that nearly all of the youth at the MWC have witnessed domestic violence in some manner. She reinforces the concepts that are learned through the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy of the Enhanced Ranch Program and TPS (Teaching Pro-Social Skills) program.

In the fall of 2010 between the departure of the previous psychiatrist and the hiring of a replacement, "extra help" psychiatrists from the Hall provided follow up care for patients on psychotropic medication, patients in crisis, and youth that were referred by the MWC nurse or the MH Therapist. In the absence of on-site visitation by a psychiatrist at MWC, minors were sometimes transported to the JH for appointments with a psychiatrist. This proved to be an

undesirable solution. With the hire of a new psychiatrist on-site visits at MWC have been restored. The clinic hours spent at the MWC by a psychiatrist have been extended in order to provide psychiatric intervention for identified minors in need of direct services.

In the JJC's 2010 Inspection Report for the MWC, Commissioners recommended that "all mental health reports and other relevant information about the youth should be made available to the Mental Health Therapist." The Juvenile Hall Mental Health clinic staff now communicates clinical information directly to the MH Therapist when a minor is transferred from the Hall to the MWC. The full-time Registered Nurse, a 15 year veteran at the MWC, stated that in her opinion, the current Mental Health program is far superior to care provided in the past. The MH Therapist, the psychiatrist, the nurse and the Probation staff have an extremely good relationship and all work together as a team for the benefit of each minor involved with the program.

Facility

The Commissioners visited the main activity room, several of the meeting rooms, the classrooms, the nurse's station, the isolation rooms, the dining room, the kitchen, the storage rooms, the office area and the outside areas of the MWC. All of the areas were clean and appropriately furnished or equipped.

The Commissioners also visited the four youth dormitory areas (called pods). The girls reside in pods A and B. Each of these pods has a public living area furnished with sofas, tables, a TV, and bookcases. There was abundant natural light. Off of the main living area is a hallway with a bathroom with showers. The girls' individual rooms are further down the hallway. The Commissioners were guided through the area by two of the resident girls who showed us their rooms. The rooms were simply furnished with a bed, a desk, and a closet, but the girls had added personal touches on their bulletin boards with photos of friends and family. When youth arrive at the MWC they are provided with clothing. Their clothing, as well as their linens, are laundered each week off site.

The boys share a dormitory building that is divided into two sides, pods C and D. As there are no doors between the two sides, and the wall between the sides does not reach to the ceiling, it is possible to hear activity from one pod while in the other pod. Activities for the units are staggered so that contact between pod C residents and pod D residents is minimized. Unlike the girls who have individual rooms in their pods, the boys share space, two to a room. The boys have a library room in their building. On their visit Commissioners were told that access to the library had been limited recently due to marking up "tagging" of the furniture, but that gradually the boys were being allowed increased access.

The Commissioners were shown the locations of the pod gardens and informed that the "Master Gardener" program would be starting again in the spring.

Commissioners toured the MWC kitchen and viewed the meal menus, which are prepared by a County nutritionist. Youth are provided with three meals a day. The nurse informed us at an earlier meeting that the total number of calories that are being provided each day to the youth have been reduced in the last year to provide a more healthful diet. Four of the Commissioners had lunch with the youth on the first day of the inspection, a hot lunch was served. The portions

were large, and included salad and fruit. The youth with whom we sat with expressed approval of the amount and quality of the food. Commissioners learned that youth help out in the dining hall by completing regular dinner setup and clean up assignments.

Touring the kitchen, the Commissioners noted the orderly appearance of the work areas and appliances and noted that proper temperatures were maintained in the refrigerator units. The pantries and refrigerators were well-stocked and receive weekly deliveries.

Incident reports, Grievances and Appeals

Commissioners reviewed incident reports for November 2010, December 2010 and January 2011. There has been a significant reduction in the total number of incident reports from November and December 2009 (62) to November and December 2010 (30). As in the past, many of the incidents (11 out of 30 incidents) in November and December 2010 occurred off-site during visits or furloughs, or as part of the Aftercare program. It should be noted that in January 2011 there were 8 “Aftercare Violations – Return to Ranch” incidents, 2 “Ranch Failures – Aftercare” incidents, and 3 “Escapes – Absconder from Aftercare Program” incidents.

Since the Commission’s last inspection there have been five grievances filed by youth in the MWC. Four of these grievances involved the cancellation of furloughs for all youth on Cinco De Mayo weekend because of safety concerns. Grievance forms are available in the pods and procedures for filing a grievance are covered in the MWC guidebook given to each minor as part of his or her orientation. There have been only three appeals from incident reports since the Commission’s last inspection.

Multidisciplinary Team Meetings

An initial Multi-disciplinary Team Meeting (MDT) takes place about a month after a youth is transferred to the MWC. The timing of the meeting gives the youth a chance to settle into MWC life and the staff an opportunity to get to know the youth personally. At the initial MDT meeting the youth’s parents, the Probation Counselors, and the medical, mental health and drug and alcohol services staff come together to assess the needs of the youth and develop a plan for services during the youth’s stay. The youth and the school staff do not attend the initial MDT.

Three Commissioners attended an exit MDT meeting for a youth who was scheduled to be released the following month. The team consisted of the two Aftercare Counselors, a Probation Community Worker, two Drug and Alcohol Counselors from Pathways, the MH Therapist, a representative from the youth’s school district, a Probation Counselor who had worked with the youth, the youth’s Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) mentor, a mental health therapist from Gardner and a Counselor from Community Solutions.

Before the youth and the youth’s mother arrived, the group discussed the youth’s background and home environment. Each member of the team who had worked with the youth added his or her assessment of the youth’s progress while at the MWC and shared with the group his or her opinions about what services and activities were necessary for the youth to make a successful transition to life outside of the MWC. There was a thorough discussion of counseling and

educational options. Team members gave specific reasons were given for preferring one school over others. The youth's mother and the minor then joined the group and were introduced to the participants. One could imagine that it might have been a bit overwhelming to see so many people in the room, but they were told that all of the people in the room were there to support them. The youth and the parent were given the opportunity to express their opinions on what would help make the transition to life outside the MWC easier. The youth's mother expressed strong preferences with regard to her child's school placement and a desire to have a counseling support system in place. The Aftercare counselor stressed the importance of communication throughout the process, and advised the youth to tell him when something wasn't working so that adjustments could be made.

There was a genuine spirit of collaboration in the room and a very strong desire to see that everything possible be done to insure a positive outcome for the youth.

Aftercare Program

The MWC Aftercare Program ("Aftercare") is six months long, and has two components. Phase I is called "Pre-release" and takes place during the first 10 weeks while the youth is out of custody. Phase II takes place for the remainder of the 6 months. During Aftercare, minors must comply with all court orders, attend programming and engage with counselors and a therapist. If a minor does not comply with these and other Aftercare requirements, he or she may end up with additional weeks of supervision, an additional 30 days in custody at the MWC or possibly a return to Juvenile Hall as an Aftercare "failure."

During Phase I/Pre-release (the first 10 weeks of Aftercare) the minors are under fairly intense supervision and receive multiple support services. Six weeks prior to release into Phase I, an MDT meeting is held designed to identify issues the minor will be dealing with during Aftercare and to develop an exit plan. The goal of this first Phase is to reintegrate the minor into the community, but provide enough guidance and structure so that he or she will be successful and will not return to the MWC or Juvenile Hall. In addition to the MDT, the youth is prepared for his or her reintegration by participating in home visits and weekend furloughs.

During the first 30 days of Phase I, the minor is on "house restriction" which is essentially house arrest and means that the minor must be at their home except when he or she at school, work, court ordered programs or is accompanied by his or her parent or guardian.

During Phase I, minors are supported by an Aftercare Counselor, an Aftercare Probation Officer and a Community Worker who monitor the minor's reintegration into the community, as well as by community based organizations and the mental health and substance abuse workers. The Aftercare Counselor has personal contact with the youth 2-3 times a week. The Counselor also checks in with the youth nightly by phone and makes impromptu school and home visits, conducts drug and alcohol screenings and helps with enrollment in school, and provides transportation to school, work etc. The Aftercare Probation Officer, who also oversees youth's progress, is an agent of the court and therefore assigned to protect public safety. His or her role is to ensure that the minor follows court orders. Unless the youth is assigned to the Probation Gang Unit or the Family Violence Unit, this Probation Officer is specifically assigned to the ERP.

Community Workers provide assistance to the Probation Officers and monitor youth in the community. They are not law enforcement officers, but provide extra support to the Probation Officer with transportation, drug and alcohol testing, etc.

During Phase II of Aftercare, minors have fewer restrictions and the responsibility for the monitoring of the youth transfers to the Probation Officer. The youth is still required to attend programs, but this phase of Aftercare is more akin to a general probation supervision which involves less contact with the Probation staff.

Aftercare “failures” result when a youth absconds or is arrested for a felony. Minors who chronically violate court orders may also be “failed” from the program. Aftercare is considered a progressive process where minors take incremental steps back into the community and there is an acknowledgement that youth will make mistakes. In most cases, the minor will not necessarily “fail” from the program for misdemeanors or other violations, such as not complying with the rules of his contract. In some cases, a minor who commits a misdemeanor can return to the MWC for one or more weekends or for up to 30 days, while still avoiding the court process.

According to the 2010 NCCD report, youth face many challenges that face the youth while in Aftercare that may impede their goal of not returning to the MWC or Juvenile Hall. These include:

- Home environments that are disorganized and semi-functional
- Poor or inadequate parenting
- Minors with drug and alcohol dependency issues who return to families, friends or neighborhoods where drugs and alcohol are readily available – 70% of those who failed Aftercare had tested positive for drugs/alcohol while in Aftercare.
- Poor connection to and utilization of services
- Gang involvement

Commissioners were able to observe an MDT meeting (described above) and had an opportunity to see how many of these issues may interfere with the minor’s ability to successfully reintegrate into the community. In our review of descriptions of Aftercare “failures”, it is clear that many of these juveniles face challenges that would be difficult for most adults to overcome.

According to the NCCD report, between 2007 and 2009, there was an increase in the number of youth who had a Violation of Probation (VOP) within one year of their release. The percentage of youth who had a VOP within the first year of Aftercare rose from 22% in 2007 and 2008 to 32% in 2009. (So far, the percentage of youth in Aftercare with VOPs in 2010 is 15%, but we will not be able to compare this number until the end of 2011). However, there was a lower percentage of youth with a new arrest (within one year of leaving the MWC) in 2009. This percentage went down to 23% from 35% and 37% in 2007 & 2008, respectively. So far, in 2010, the percentage of youth with a new violation is 12%.

While the number of incident reports (for fights, insubordination, etc) has decreased significantly in the ERP (as compared to the program previously offered at the MWC), there has not been a comparable change in youth recidivism rates. This may be due to the difficult circumstances to which many of these youth return when they exit the MWC.

The NCCD report makes many recommendations for preventing youth from re-offending:

1. Revise the minor's case plan as necessary to accommodate the changing needs of minors and families.
2. Provide intensive transitional support.
3. Provide specialized school and job assistance
4. Address issues of culture and environment
5. Increase peer support and positive mentoring
6. Improve gang intervention
7. Provide additional parental support
8. Address substance abuse and lack of programs
9. Improve staff understanding of the ERP

Most of these recommendations are self-explanatory. However Recommendation #9 does warrant some discussion. The 2010 NCCD report found that “evidence exists of a disconnect between staff that work at the ranches and Probation Officers that work in other areas.” As a result of this disconnect, traditional Probation Officers may “violate” a minor more quickly based on behavior without considering the dynamics of each youths' situation. This approach is counter to the philosophy and interventions provided at the MWC and may result in an “Aftercare Failure” that takes the youth deeper into the system instead of successfully addressing the issue that lead to the violating behavior.

During the course of the MWC Inspection, there was a change in personnel in the Aftercare Counselor position. For the past two years, the person filling the Aftercare Counselor role has been a Spanish-speaker. The new Aftercare Counselor is not, but is able to communicate in Vietnamese. Given that 71% of the youth at the MWC are Latino, it is reasonable to assume a large percentage of their parents are Spanish-speaking. In order to develop a trusting relationship with the parents of MWC youth, it would seem important to have an Aftercare Counselor who can communicate with them in their primary language. While the Aftercare Probation Officer is a Spanish-speaker, this individual does not have as much contact with the youth and their families as the Aftercare Counselor does.

A note about terminology: While the JJC understands there may be legal or other reasons to call a youth's re-engagement in ERP or a return to JH from the MWC a “failure,” we are concerned about the message using this sort of language sends to both the youth and the counselors and officers working with the youth. The reality is that often when a youth “fails” Aftercare or the ERP, s/he is able to return to the MWC if his/her behavior improves while in JH, or with a “booster shot” provided by spending some additional time at the MWC to reintegrate into the community successfully. The JJC encourages the Probation Department to consider adopting language that better portrays what actually happens when the youth returns to JH from the MWC and returns to the MWC from Aftercare. Our goal - and from our conversations with Probation Department Staff, we believe the Probation Department share this goal – is to see these youth succeed. The Commission does not want youth to “fail” but to learn from their mistakes and successfully reintegrate into the community.

Feedback from parents

The Commissioners visited the MWC on one Sunday afternoon during family visitation. One parent noted a positive change in her son since he came to the MWC, and is happy that he is kept busy. This same mother expressed concern about the costs associated with services her son

might be mandated to complete after he leaves the MWC. She noted that the cost of a VTA pass is more than her family would be able to afford. Another parent expressed an interest in receiving parenting classes.

Feedback from youth

Commissioners talked with youth in the classrooms, housing units and during parent visitation. The students expressed a desire for more visitation time, off-site field trips and a gym.

One of the girls indicated that she would like the opportunity to participate in intramural sports. Currently, as discussed above, team sport activity with games against other teams outside the MWC is available only to the boys.

One of the boys spoke highly of the specific programs that he attended including Victim Awareness and Teen Dating Violence. He also said that he was grateful that the MWC school paid attention to the number of credits he needed for graduation from high school.

Commendations

1. The Mental Health staff, both County and Community Solutions should be commended for creating an environment of cooperation and information sharing.
2. The Multidisciplinary Team should be commended for their collaborative efforts to structure services to make each youth's transition to the home and community environment as smooth as possible and for their focus on each youth's strength. The MDT should also be commended for effectively soliciting input from the youth and the youth's parent at the MDT meeting Commissioners attended.
3. The MWC nurse should be commended for her many years of service and her willingness to work on a very flexible schedule in order to better serve the youth of the MWC.
4. The County Office of Education and Probation should be commended for working together and implementing innovative instructional delivery methods.
5. We commend everyone at the MWC for contributing to, and creating a culture that focuses on each youth's progress and the goal of each youth's success.
6. We commend the Probation Manager of the MWC for being both a partner with, and an advocate for both the staff and service providers at the MWC. She listens to suggestions and works for positive change.

Recommendations:

1. The County should expedite the installation of an air conditioning system for the common areas of the MWC before the summer of 2011. In particular we recommend installing air conditioning in the nurse's office given the need to store some medications at moderate temperatures there.
2. Enhanced Ranch Program training should be a priority on the Probation training calendar and the Probation Manager should attend the training.
3. We recommend that the MWC staff schedule regular Site Team Meetings for the Probation Department, Community Solutions, Pathways, the medical staff, CYO, Girl Scouts, Victim Awareness, Chaplaincy and the Blue Ridge High School staff for program discussion.
4. Seek additional vocational training opportunities for youth in the 11th and 12th grades.
5. Ranch counselors who are already present in the classrooms should assist the teachers with the delivery of the lesson plan. This practice would provide more individualized support and would display to the students the counselors' interest in their education. We believe this can be accomplished without sacrificing security.
6. The teaching staff should be invited to the preliminary MDT meeting when individual youth plans are developed.
7. Given the largely Latino population at the MWC, the Commission recommends that placing a Spanish-speaking individual in the role of Aftercare Counselor be given high priority in order to encourage open communication and trust with family members.
8. Explore alternative terminology to "ranch *failure*" and "Aftercare *failure*" to describe situations where youth are returned to Juvenile Hall during a MWC or James Ranch commitment, or are returned to the Enhanced Ranch Program from Aftercare. More positive terminology would reflect the continued efforts toward a positive outcome.
- 9.) Cyber High should be an option as part of the school day or as an after-school program so that youth would not be credit deficient upon their release.

Documents Reviewed

National Council on Crime and Delinquency

"Aftercare Study, Enhanced Ranch Program," April 30, 2010.

"An Assessment of the Enhanced Ranch Program" July 24, 2009.

State of California

1. Corrections Standards Authority Biennial Inspection of the Muriel Wright Center, June 14, 2010.

Santa Clara County Probation Department

1. Wright Center Program Schedule – Boys (Revised 12/02/10)
Wright Center Program Schedule – Girls (Revised 12/02/10)
2. Muriel Wright Residential Center – Shift Schedule (12/27/10 – 1/23/11)
3. Muriel Wright School Bell Schedule 2010 – 2011
4. Chief Probation Officer response letter, October 19, 2010
5. Muriel Wright Residential Center Program List (Revised 3/24/10)
6. Muriel Wright Center Procedures Manual - undated
7. Muriel Wright Residential Center Guidebook, Feb. 2010

County of Santa Clara – Other Departments

1. Office of the Fire Marshall Inspection Report, June 16, 2010.
2. Facilities and Fleet Walk Thru Report, July 19, 2010
3. Santa Clara County Office of Education, Staff Handbook, August 19, 2009
4. Public Health Department Inspection Report, July 7, 2010

Response to 2010 Recommendations

The Commission made eight recommendations made in the 2010 Inspection Report. The Chief Probation Officer’s response, dated October 19, 2010 discussed each response. Several of the recommendations were discussed in the text of this report.

Summary

The Juvenile Justice Commission has completed its annual inspection of the Muriel Wright Center.

Based on this inspection, the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission believes that the Muriel Wright Center meets the requirements for assuring the safety, well-being and rehabilitation of youth in a juvenile detention facility.

Approved by the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission on

Pam Serrano, JJC Chairperson

Date

Mary E. Ryan, MWC Inspection Chair

Date