

Juvenile Justice Commission County of Santa Clara

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INSPECTION REPORT

MURIEL WRIGHT RESIDENTIAL CENTER FEBRUARY 2008

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, although a boy's term of commitment may extend into the early months of age 17. 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) inspected the Muriel Wright Residential Center on February 22 and 26, 2008, 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 Commissions 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 February 22, 2008, the youth population was 12 girls and 34 boys. Residents are assigned to 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. All activities and movements of the youth are

designed to minimize contact and conversation between the boys and the girls. The Wright Center Manager and two other staff members characterized the male residents of the Wright Center as more challenging, because the boys are more immature than the girls and older boys.

At the time of the visitation, there was one out-of-county youth resident, a girl from Santa Cruz County, which has no residential center for girls. A Santa Cruz County probation officer visits her once a month. The Aftercare program in Santa Clara County will not extend to this girl upon her release from the Wright Center.

The presence of five young fathers among the male population is unusual for this age group. At the time of the inspection, the Manager was exploring parental training services which might be provided to these youth.

Youth who arrive at the Wright Center are generally from unstructured and dysfunctional home environments. The Manager reported that many have been victimized at home, necessitating that the Wright Center maintain a more structured mode. Sixty-two percent of the youth at the Wright Center come from Spanish-speaking homes. The Manager has ensured that some materials are printed in Spanish as well as English to more quickly involve these parents in their child's rehabilitative program.

The ethnic breakdown of residents at the Wright Center reflects the imbalance of youth in the correctional system. Three minors (7%) are of Asian descent, seven minors (15%) are African American, twenty nine minor (62%) are of Hispanic origin, three minors (7%) are classified as "other," and only four minors (9%) are Caucasian.

III. STAFFING

The Probation Department staff at the Wright Center includes the full-time Manager, three supervising Probation Counselors, 24 Probation Counselors, 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 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 fully 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. 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 two of the youth assigned to the unit.

The Manager has been at the Wright Center for three years. At the time of the 2007 inspection, the Manager also managed the Women's Residential Center Work Furlough Program. The Probation Department subsequently reduced the Manager's

offsite duties so she could concentrate her full attention to the new construction at the Wright Center as well as provide for an integrated ERP and the cross-training of all personnel on the site. Most staff members interviewed during the visitations in February 2008 had worked at the Wright Center from three to five 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.

Probation Counselors previously worked 16-hour shifts, but a new schedule has been implemented with the intent of providing overlap between shifts to facilitate communication of the day's issues. The inspection team was informed that the complicated, irregular schedule now being used is not popular with many of the staff, who would prefer to return to the previous 16-hour shifts. While to do so would mean less overlap for staff communication, the Counselors believe their morale would be higher, their stress level lower and the youth better served by the more regular shifts.

The Manager remarked that the present level of staffing is eight Probation Counselors and one Supervising Probation Counselor per shift. She added that the present level is the bare minimum and does not allow time for transporting youth, and providing support for special projects, field trips and sports programs. The Manager said there is a need for at least ten more staff members, and there are currently four vacant "coded" positions

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) and Pathway Society.

The Probation Department retained a consultant, who developed the "Missouri Model," to provide ongoing staff training and consultation for the ERP. With one exception, Counselors have completed the required 96 hours of training. Newly hired staff members will also have to complete this training. School, Mental Health and Pathway staff members have requested more training so they can better integrate their activities with those of the Probation staff. Several Probation staff members have completed "train the trainer" classes and are now capable of providing ERP training.

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 Community Worker for the Aftercare program.

The repainted buildings are attractive, and the grounds now include a very small planting area for the Master Gardener program. One of the outside trailers will be demolished soon, giving more room for parking emergency vehicles. The other trailer will function as a storage area now that the Mental Health program formerly housed in the trailer has been moved into the new building. The outstanding central lawn area was planted and cultivated by the youth themselves.

The Fire Inspection Report noted that one of the water lines coming down from the reservoir was not designated for use by the Fire Department only. There is now a sign on the water outlet faucet noting that use is for Fire Department only.

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 basis. Menus are planned by the Probation Food Services Managers, who also purchase the food. In response to a grievance filed in January 2008, complaining of rat feces in the kitchen area, the inspection team asked the kitchen crew if there was a known rat problem. The kitchen crew showed the inspection team several traps that had been placed in various areas, and informed the inspectors that, unfortunately, the rat has not yet been captured.

The Commissioners ate a hot lunch with the minors on two occasions and found the meals to be quite good. The youth expressed general satisfaction regarding both the amount and the quality of the food. Their only complaints about the food were facetious, including having the same menu every Wednesday and the lack of Chinese food on the menu. Minors more seriously complained that one of the food service crew had an unsanitary habit of flossing his teeth in the kitchen area. This complaint was expressed in a January 2008 grievance submitted by a youth who noticed both the kitchen worker's flossing and the rat feces during her turn at kitchen duty. The Food Services Manager responded to the grievance that these deficiencies were being addressed.

V. PROGRAMS

Enhanced Ranch Program

The Enhanced Ranch Program (ERP) 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. All of the full-time staff participates in on-going training to learn to use these techniques. Fitting training into the Counselors' already demanding schedules is reported to be problematic. Both youth and Counselors generally report satisfaction with the new ERP.

A Ranch Orientation Counselor, who works twenty hours a week at Juvenile Hall, provides orientation for minors on the waiting lists for the James Ranch and the Wright Center. Orientation includes explaining the ERP, the level system, special programs, the sports program, school and field trips, reviewing the Guide Book page-by-page, and answering questions. The Orientation Counselor continues to check back with minors on the waiting lists until they are transferred to the James Ranch or the Wright Center.

Volunteerism

The Wright Center makes excellent use of volunteers. The importance of volunteer programs can not be overstated, both in providing helpful services and in demonstrating vividly to the youth that they are not merely "out of sight, out of mind," but rather have a connection to the broader community to which they will one day return. As an example, the Manager has added a clothing closet overseen by staff members because many of the residents have few clothes. Upward Bound volunteers make donations, including Christmas gifts. The Manager has also pushed for expansion of the tutoring program, again demonstrating that when she sees a need she will move to fill it, even if it is not a specific job requirement.

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 are designing and implementing a garden between Units A and B.

Journalism Program

Presently, some of the higher level girls are publishing an in-house newspaper, the Spartan Times, giving them hands-on journalism experience. Copies of the newspaper provided to visiting Commissioners were outstanding.

Sports Program

The Sports Program fields separate teams of boys and girls. The girls compete in basketball and volleyball with Foothill High School, the Santa Clara County Alternative Schools Department at Calero School and the Alternative Placement Academy. The boys participate in competitive sports with the ranch facilities of nearby counties.

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 now trained to conduct TIPS sessions, though Mental Health Therapists may also be included in the sessions when time permits. 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. Usually a Mental Health Therapist attends this session.
- 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

The inspection team interviewed the Aftercare Counselor for the Wright Center. Aftercare is a ten-week program for youth who have completed the six to eight month Wright Center program. The 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 Wright Center, 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 Wright Center.

Supervision is provided by the Aftercare Counselor, who formally joins the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) process two-to-three weeks before the youth’s scheduled release. There is also a Probation Department Community Worker who assists the Aftercare Counselor in monitoring youth on the Aftercare program.

Aftercare supervision is also provided by a Probation Officer who is housed at the Wright Center. 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.

An Aftercare contract is prepared, discussed in detail and signed by the youth, parent(s)/guardian(s) and a Probation staff member prior to the youth’s release. There are 24 standard conditions, including such things as: (1) obeying all laws (including curfew, traffic and school laws); (2) following an approved school or work program; (3) attending all assigned programs; (4) submitting to drug testing as well as search and seizure; (5) distancing oneself from gang culture; and (6) maintaining regular contact with the

Aftercare Counselor. The contract also provides for the addition of specific behavior expectations as appropriate. During the Aftercare period, the youth's status is that of a Wright Center resident on 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.

The Aftercare Counselor has contact with every youth on Aftercare several times each week. He will visit the youth at his or her home or school at least twice a week. The Aftercare Counselor said that the period of time after release from the Wright Center is of great importance to the rehabilitation of the youth as it is a period of transition from a strictly controlled environment to one with little or no control. He stressed that a Counselor from the Wright Center should be involved along with the Probation Officer because the Counselor often has a better rapport with the youth and a lighter caseload. Due to the need to see youth at home and also away from home at all hours of the day, the Aftercare Counselor's hours are extremely flexible, with visits occurring on nights and weekends. Currently, the Aftercare Counselor's caseload varies between ten and twenty youth, which he advised is a reasonable size. The Aftercare Counselor conducts routine drug and alcohol testing, and makes inquiries to appropriate local school administrators regarding the youth's school and/or work attendance. School personnel contact the Aftercare Counselor as necessary. The youth has the obligation to contact the Aftercare Counselor as soon as possible if there is any situation which will interfere with school or work attendance.

The MDT process involves the Probation Officer, the Aftercare Counselor, school faculty (though not routinely so), Medical and Mental Health personnel, Gardner Health Center and Mentally Ill Offenders Crime Reduction (MIOCR) counseling staff members, parent(s) and youth, and the Probation Department's Educational Liaison Specialist. The latter individual works for the Probation Department on a contract funded by a special grant, and is not a credentialed educator.

At two MDT meetings at which boys were being considered for release within two weeks, the Educational Liaison Specialist indicated difficulty getting the first boy's former district to take him back because he'd had behavior issues in more than one middle school in the district. There were also problems regarding placement of the second youth back into the regular high school program because the school felt it was too late in the semester. The school's position raises concerns because there were still three months of the semester remaining.

Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT) is implemented by CBOs, such as Starlight (now defunct) and Community Solutions, which contract with the Probation Department for one-year periods. The sessions conducted by these organizations must be conducted in the home. A MIOCR grant pays for BSFT.

According to statistics provided by the Probation Department, 55% of the youth (17 of 31) committed to the Wright Center between January, 2007 and February, 2008 "graduated" from the program. Graduation includes successful completion of the

Aftercare program. An additional nine youth (29%) completed the initial program, but failed Aftercare. Only four youth (13%) failed the initial program. One youth was returned to the program due to an Aftercare failure, and is currently counted as neither a success nor a failure.

Discontinued Programs

The Vocational Program, which had been provided at the James Ranch, was eliminated due to the expanded school day. The Vocational Program is offered in the morning when the James Ranch boys are not in school. However, at the Wright Center, youth attend school in the morning. This scheduling conflict resulted in the Wright Center youth being removed from the Vocational Program. The concern that the Wright Center residents were not receiving meaningful job training has been partially addressed by focus on developing new Wright Center vocational education programs including computers, Master Gardeners and art classes.

The Santa Teresa Cluster Program (formerly Gateway Program), a second off-site program that was temporarily discontinued due to an on-site fire, was an opportunity for Wright Center girls to provide help at a local center for developmentally disabled children. This program is expected to be reinstated when relocated to the Calero Center in the near future.

VI. BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

Level System

The core of the ERP cognitive behavior program is the “level system.” Youth are introduced to the Wright Center 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 Wright Center 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 Wright Center at Level 1, represented by wearing a white belt, and must actively work toward Level 4 – a black belt – in order to graduate. The four designated levels and their approximate durations are as follows:

- Level 1 (Orientation, white belt) – one month
- Level 2 (Program/Treatment, yellow belt) – two months
- Level 3 (Family Reunification, brown belt) – two months
- Level 4 (Continuing Care Plan, black belt) – one month

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 is 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 are documented. Individual youth in any one pod may be at different levels. They do not graduate from the Wright Center as a group, but rather complete the program as individuals.

The level system is explained in great detail in the MWC Guide Book, which deserves note. The Guide Book gives guidance on how to progress through the levels, and these rules and regulations are voluminous. The "Facility Rules" are specified in addition to pages of certain "expectations," and pages of requirements of the level system. In addition there is a "Behavior Scale," which may be described as incomprehensible. There are even more pages of "expectations" and "additional expectations." The number of written rules is daunting and must present difficulties for youth, especially those youth who have limited reading and comprehension skills or whose primary language is not English. The Guide Book is now printed only in English, although the Manager reports that a Spanish edition is being considered. The Manager agreed that a more simplified version of the Guide Book would be desirable, but efforts to simplify have not been fruitful as yet.

Incident Reports

The Inspection Team reviewed twenty Incident Reports (IRs) written for November 2007, twenty eight reports for December 2007 and twenty one for January 2008. Data from these reports were compared with statistics provided to the Commission via the monthly Salient Features Reports. There were some discrepancies between the IRs reviewed and the serious incidents listed in the Salient Features Reports.

In November there were only three incidents listed on the Salient Features Report, yet there were four more relevant IRs which had not been listed. Likewise, in December there were nine incidents listed on the Salient Features Report but there were three more relevant IRs not listed. Probation Department management has in the past explained similar discrepancies as being caused by incidents being mis-categorized. However, mis-categorization does not seem to explain the regular under-reporting of serious incidents.

Appeals and Grievances

During November, December and January, only three appeals were filed by residents of the Wright Center. These were for minor issues and were appropriately addressed by Wright Center staff.

All minors receive a written notice of the right to appeal penalties when they receive written notification of the alleged violation from the supervisor. The Manager noted that the supervisor also verbally explains the right to appeal when providing the violator with the written notice.

One grievance was made in February 2008, by a girl reporting rat feces in the kitchen and a kitchen staff helper who she alleged was seen flossing his teeth in the food preparation area. The matter was referred to the Food Services Manager, who reported on the grievance form that the issues were being addressed. The girl, however, maintains she was not advised of the outcome of the grievance. Other girls, while talking with Commissioners at lunch time, stated the problem regarding the personal hygiene of the kitchen staff member still persists.

Commissioners asked several youth whether they had ever submitted a grievance or if they knew what grievances are for. Most knew they could file a grievance, but generally believed it was for complaining about unwarranted punishment. None of the youth questioned thought it would serve any purpose to file a grievance. 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. When one of the girls was asked to show the Inspection Team a grievance form, she was not readily able to obtain one. After asking a Counselor, a form was obtained from a file-type box, although not labeled "Grievances," and containing a number of other forms and fact sheets. Once completed, the form must be delivered to "any Probation Counselor." There is no posted grievance procedure in the living areas, nor is there a locked box, accessible only by a supervisor, into which grievance forms can be deposited, as is the policy at Juvenile Hall. The policy of insulating the grievant from confrontation with Counselors by ensuring the grievance goes directly to a supervisor helps to prevent any "loss" of grievances or retaliation.

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. 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." Working a split shift is very wearing under the best of circumstances, and could result in a tired nurse who is not at her best. So far, under this system, they have not had an emergency requiring outside help. 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 feels she is headed

for burnout, especially because of the demands of the female youth at the Wright Center, who need attention at the rate of three times more than each male youth. It was noted that there are many more sick calls at Wright Center than at the larger James Ranch. The nurse hopes for the ideal situation of one full-time nurse and one half-time evening nurse.

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 new addition to services.

There was one pregnant girl at the facility at the time of the inspection. Her condition requires regular Monday appointments with a nurse and monthly checkups at Valley Medical Center. The nurse also provides neonatal and mother/baby education.

A new tele-nursing system has been installed to allow for diagnosis and treatment at times when a nurse or doctor is not readily available at the Wright Center. The tele-nursing system is a closed circuit television with two cameras at the Wright Center and a camera at the location where a doctor or nurse will observe the youth and decide how to proceed. According to the nurse, this is an important addition, especially for those times in the evenings and on the weekends when a nurse is not on duty. Efforts are underway to link this service to the Valley Medical Center to obtain even more high-level medical evaluations in cases of emergency.

The nurse's station recently received new furnishings. However, the new furnishings tend to emphasize the lack of adequate space. The nurse's station must function as the nurse's office, a medication supply point, an examination room and a counseling office, yet the room is as small if not smaller than most examination rooms in a doctor's office. It is quite cramped.

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 latter leads the TIPS Program three days a week. There are also two part-time Family Partners, who assist parents by providing peer adult support. One of the Family Partners says she speaks Spanish and can be an effective mentor to some of the parents/guardians of the youth. The Mental Health unit was short-handed at the time of the inspection because the Wright Center and the James Ranch were forced to temporarily share Mental Health staff due to staff members being out on leave.

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.

IX. EDUCATION

The Muriel Wright School, which is now housed in permanent buildings, is one of sixteen programs of the Santa Clara County Office of Education, Alternative Schools Department. The school program focuses on Language Arts and Math so that youth can pass the high school exit exam or obtain a high school equivalency certificate by passing the General Educational Development (GED) exam.

Staff

The Principal shares his time with the Osborne School at Juvenile Hall and Blue Ridge High School at the James Ranch. There are three full-time regular teachers and one Special Day Class Teacher whose classroom consists of twelve to thirteen students. A Special Education Resource Specialist and his assistant are at the Wright Center two days a week to work with students needing special education instruction. One of the Probation Counselors is certified to administer the GED exam at the Wright Center. The Wright Center Manager provides tutors for the minors through a community volunteer program. These volunteers work with students preparing for the GED exam in addition to providing general educational tutoring.

A credentialed Education Counselor, who is shared with other schools of the Alternative School Department, provides some liaison services with local schools. Most often, a non-credentialed Educational Liaison Specialist in the Probation Department provides liaison services when incarcerated youth are released from court-ordered commitment time. The two Specialists responsible for providing services for youth being released from Juvenile Hall, the James Ranch and the Wright Center have developed close working relationships with school districts in which most of the youth are residents.

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 now 300 minutes a day, rather than the former 240 minute minimum day, four days a week. On the fifth day, one classroom period is used for student assessment and staff development activities. Once a month, staff meetings occur for exchange of information regarding student progress. Instead of school starting at 8:10 am, it now begins at 7:50 am to accommodate a pod meeting in the classroom in which current or emerging issues are discussed. Counselors are more evident during class time, whereas last year their presence was very inconsistent.

School staff members provide for the educational needs of those students who could benefit and matriculate from a regular comprehensive educational program. Staff members assigned to the school from the Special Education Department of the COE

provide additional services to students with identified special education needs. The Special Education staff members collaborate with the regular school staff, and work with local school districts to obtain student records, conduct Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, as well as write both IEPs and Placement Reports for students with special education needs.

The Principal said they are not receiving IEPs in a timely manner, so Muriel Wright School staff must retest and reevaluate their students in order to place the youth more efficiently. The transfer of IEPs is still a major obstruction and time commitment for staff.

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. Classes are held in the mornings and after lunch until 2:30 pm.

The California English Language Development Test (CELDT) is administered to non-English-speaking or limited English-speaking students, as appropriate, to reflect their skills in acquisition of English as a Second Language. This is usually administered when the students first enter Juvenile Hall. An annual retest takes place between July and October. The school staff is also certified to implement specific strategies in working with the English Language Learner population.

Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

An ILP is developed for each student, with input from students, their Counselors, Probation Officers and parents as appropriate and available. The ILP helps both staff and students in focusing on specific academic and socio-emotional goals that are measured every three months. These plans act as an additional record for the students as they transition back to their home school districts or to other Juvenile facilities. All teachers have access to a student's educational history and transcripts (as available). Some students, if previously enrolled in school at Juvenile Hall, will have an accompanying ILP. The Principal pointed out that conducting a review every 90 days ensures that the student is aware of, and committed to, the educational and social goals.

School and the ERP

The COE has supported the involvement of school personnel in the new broader rehabilitation programs. The Wright Center Manager has also included school staff in ERP training.

According to the Principal, the school uses many avenues for building self-esteem and improving school spirit. Positive behaviors and academic efforts are recognized in a variety of ways, and students receive a minimum of negative school experiences because teachers are enforcing standards consistently. The three top students who have

maintained “B” grades in all subjects for two consecutive weeks are nominated to the Superintendent’s List. These students are provided extra privileges/rewards.

The school staff maintains close contact with the Counselors by providing the Counselors with details of each student’s classroom and social performance and successes. The Principal says this essential relationship helps reinforce and provide continuity in helping students process through their program in developing the necessary resiliency skills.

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 coherent programs addressing the needs of the students.

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. FEEDBACK FROM YOUTH

During the visit of February 22, 2008, two female residents, who were scheduled to be released from the Wright Center in a few weeks, conducted the tour of the facility. Both had earned, and wore, their black belts. One would soon be 18 and the other was 16. Both reported that they have been promised jobs and both plan on going to college some day.

The two female tour guides said at first they were apprehensive about leaving Juvenile Hall and entering the Enhanced Ranch Program at the Wright Center, because they would have preferred to remain at Juvenile Hall with its familiar faces. It took a period of time before they were comfortable in the new setting and with the rigors of the ERP. However, both said the program turned around their lives. They were enthusiastic about what the ERP had done for them. Both were looking forward to continuing their education when they return home and enter the Aftercare Program. Both were “cheerleaders” for the ERP and would be excellent representatives to “market” the program to youth incarcerated in Juvenile Hall who may harbor the same uncertainties about leaving a familiar setting to enter a different program.

The tour guides described the level system, and said girls that had completed the highest level were to be mentors for new youth. They talked about events, sports that they loved, and cultural events. They described the interaction between staff and youth as structured but caring. They said there are some runaways from the Wright Center, but it is usually new boys. The tour guides were well spoken, which illustrated their

communication skills and overall confidence and underscored their successful performance in the program.

Commissioners had lunch in the dining rooms on each of the two visitation days. Individual Commissioners made the following observations:

- “The girls appeared to be happier and more forthcoming (they are generally older than the boys). The girls also seemed ready to gain from the Wright Center program and were more responsive to the cognitive behavior program in a positive mode. The boys I interviewed were just ‘marking time,’ waiting to get out of the program. One girl and three boys lamented that they seemed to be in meetings all of the time. All comments about the sports program possibilities were laudatory.”
- “I talked with five boys who all agreed that the servings at meals were too small. I also talked with five girls who said they liked the food (though one wanted Chinese food occasionally) and loved the ERP, especially the privileges.”
- “I had lunch with three of the girls and it was very pleasant. They had no grievances or problems they wanted to discuss. One of the girls talked about plans for college and to study law. Another girl talked about enlisting in the military as well as furthering her education.”

The Manager noted that there is a continuing emphasis on attaining consistency in the application of rules by the staff, although no youth voiced this concern to the visiting Commissioners.

XI. 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, February 2006
3. Facilities and Fleet, Annual Building Inspection, January 2008
4. Office of the County Executive, Children and Family Services, Public Safety and Justice, February 9, 2006
5. Office of the Fire Marshal, Inspection Report, November 6, 2007
6. SCCOE, Annual Report to Department of Corrections, MWC, July 1, 2007
7. SCVHHS, Annual Review, JPD Medical Services, 2007
8. SCVHHS, Public Health Dept., MWC Inspection, December 27, 2007
9. “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. Muriel Wright Center: 6-8 Month Proposed Program, November 26, 2007

4. James Ranch and Wright Center Enhanced Ranch Program, February 20, 2008
5. Muriel Wright Residential Center Guide Book
6. Muriel Wright Residential Center: Juvenile Services, November 26, 2007
7. Response to JJC Recommendations dated June 11, 2007
8. The Spartan Times: Monthly Center Newspaper

XII. 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.
3. Probation staff members for completing 96 hours of Enhanced Ranch Program training.
4. The Probation Department for changing the Wright Center Manager's position to full-time.
5. The Wright Center Manager for her efforts to obtain volunteers to tutor the youth.
6. 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.
7. The Probation Department and the Muriel Wright School Principal for maintaining the "Superintendent's List," giving recognition to students who have maintained high academic standards.
8. The Muriel Wright School Principal for his diligence, the highly professional standards he provides staff, the outstanding curriculum development and his leadership in overseeing the special education programs.
9. The Probation Department's Educational Liaison Specialists for maintaining regularly scheduled meetings with local school districts that have a higher portion of youth transitioning back from Probation facilities.
10. The Aftercare Counselor for extraordinary efforts to provide significant supervision and assistance to youth in transition to life outside the Wright Center.
11. The Nurse, who deserves special recognition for having to work a split shift and being especially caring for the Center's youth.

XIII. 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.
2. Revise the grievance procedures in conformity with the procedures used at Juvenile Hall to make forms more readily accessible. Post procedures for filing grievances and provide a locked box for deposit of completed grievance forms.
3. Ensure that residents are informed of the outcome of a grievance.
4. Revise the appeals procedures in conformity with the procedures used at Juvenile Hall.
5. Contact Santa Clara County Vector Control for assistance in controlling the rat population.
6. Explore the possibility of reinstating vocational training.
7. Improve the accuracy of the monthly Salient Features Reports.
8. Provide additional Enhanced Ranch Program training to School, Mental Health and Pathway staff.
9. Provide some measurement of the effectiveness of the Enhanced Ranch Program. This may be, for example, in the form of a failure rate, a success rate or a recidivism rate as compared to the previous program or programs in other jurisdictions.

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 a larger nurse's station at the Wright Center.

2. Provide for additional nursing staff so it is not necessary for the nurse to work a split shift.

XIV. SUMMARY

Many favorable changes have taken place at the Muriel Wright Residential Center, with construction having been completed during 2007. The Probation Department met the challenges of continuing to develop and apply the Enhanced Ranch Program (ERP) during construction. The Probation Department also had the foresight to keep the same Manager in place, as well as to eliminate her former off-site responsibilities during the transition.

Management, staff and many of the youth express satisfaction with the ERP. However, the Commission notes that the ERP is expensive relative to the previous program, and accommodates significantly fewer youth. Therefore, there soon needs to be some measurement of program effectiveness that justifies its continued use.

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 3, 2008.**

Patricia Khan, JJC Chairperson

Date

Robert W. Campbell, Wright Center Inspection Chair

Date