

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY
JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSION
INSPECTION REPORT**

**SNELL HOUSE ADOLESCENT GROUP HOME
NOVEMBER 2007**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission conducted two announced visits to Snell House, an adolescent group home for boys owned and operated by EE's Residential Group Homes (EE's Homes), a non-profit corporation, for the purpose of routine inspection pursuant to California Welfare and Institutions (W&I) Code Section 229.5. Two Commissioners visited Snell House on October 30, 2007, at which time the facility was inspected and an interview was conducted with the EE's Homes program coordinator. A second visit was accomplished on November 7, 2007 by three Commissioners for the purpose of interviewing minors placed in the home. The findings and observations of this inspection and the interviews conducted are outlined in the following report.

II. POPULATION

During the October 30 inspection visit, Commissioners were told there were six boys, ages 14 to 18 years old, living at Snell House – one placed by Santa Clara County, one by San Francisco County, one by Santa Barbara County, one by Kern County, one by Contra Costa County and one by San Bernardino County. The minor placed by Santa Clara County had only been at Snell House for three weeks prior to this inspection visit. All minors at Snell House are on court-ordered delinquency status and are placed under Juvenile Court jurisdiction pursuant to W&I Code Section 602. According to the program coordinator, all of the EE's Homes facilities are licensed to accept W&I Code Section 300 (dependency) minors as well; however, they do not accept "300's" or "dual status minors." The program coordinator explained that EE's Homes was founded by a retired Santa Clara County juvenile probation officer and the current Executive Director is a former juvenile probation officer; therefore, the homes "are structured according to a probation concept." The EE's Homes facilities are licensed for 12- to 17-year-old minors, and "exception letters" are submitted to state licensing for those minors who turn 18 years old while in residence.

III. STAFFING

There are two shifts; one from Saturday at 6 pm to Wednesday at 10 am, and a second from Wednesday at 10 am to Saturday at 6 pm. A facility manager, supervisor and floater are assigned to each shift. The floater moves between Snell House and two other group homes on an as-needed basis. The facility manager sleeps on the bunk beds located in the office at night; therefore, an "awake-night staff" person is in the home

every night during sleeping hours. The awake-night staff person is required to periodically call in to a voicemail system during the night to confirm that he/she is awake. The night watch supervisor makes rounds between the homes and drops in to ensure that the awake-night staff person is awake. Two administrators share on-call responsibilities.

IV. FACILITY

Snell House is a Level 10 group home, state-licensed for a maximum of six boys, which began operation 25 years ago and serves 15 counties. It is one of six adolescent group homes operated by EE's Homes. Five of the properties are owned; however, Snell house is a leased property.

Snell House is located in a one-story house in a residential area on Snell Avenue in south San Jose. The front yard was found to be small but clean, and the lawn was freshly mowed. The large backyard is partially covered with a large wooden patio deck, on which sits a brick barbeque pit and a wooden picnic table with benches. Commissioners were told that additional backyard furniture had been stored for the winter. There is no grass growing in any of the backyard area. Commissioners noted what appeared to be a telephone outlet box partially attached to the house, hanging loose with wires visible inside. Some of the foundation air vent screens on the outside of the house are bent and not securely attached. A large overgrown tree with branches and limbs hanging only a few feet from the ground takes up a large part of the backyard. The backyard fence is leaning, and easily swayed when Commissioners pushed on one section. There is also a small shed in the backyard. The door to the shed was locked, and various items such as paint cans were clearly visible through the window in the door. The program coordinator explained that the "maintenance man" uses the shed and is the only person with a key. A portion of the shed's roof appears to be broken and is hanging. Commissioners were concerned with the repairs needed on the home.

There were no problems with past or current neighbors reported by the program coordinator; however, to avoid any potential problems, minors are not routinely allowed in the backyard area and are never allowed outside without a staff person present.

The living room is furnished with two couches, a coffee table and a television. Two minors are assigned to each of the three bedrooms. Each bedroom is furnished with two twin beds, a chest of drawers, nightstands and a large closet. The two "highest level" minors sleep in the larger master bedroom, which has a private bathroom. Minors in the other two bedrooms share a common bathroom. All bedrooms and bathrooms were found to be exceptionally tidy and clean. Bedtime for all minors is 10 pm to 6 am, Sunday through Thursday nights, and 11 pm to 9 am on Friday and Saturday nights.

A fourth bedroom has been converted into the staff office, where all records are kept. A closet holds household and cleaning supplies, a small supply of snacks for minors and minors' personal hygiene boxes. A four-drawer metal file cabinet secured by a padlock holds office records and minors' personal records. Minors' records include

court files, medical authorizations, incident and school reports, clothing allowance forms, phone logs, house rules signed by minors and vital information sheets. Materials such as doctor and medical provider contact information, prescription refill instructions, meal and chore information and paging instructions for administrators are placed on top of the metal file cabinet for quick staff access. Night staff persons sleep on twin bunk beds located in the office. A small toolbox-type container holding over-the-counter medication was placed on the floor next to a desk. There was no lock on the box and the program coordinator explained that another staff person had probably just taken medicine out for a minor who was ill. Commissioners noted that the minor from Santa Clara County was ill and was being tended to by a staff person in the living room. A second, smaller orange plastic toolbox-type container was secured by a small padlock and was placed on the floor under the lower bunk bed. According to the program coordinator, this box holds minors' prescription medications. Commissioners found this of concern in that the box was not secured to anything, and it would not be difficult to remove the box from the office.

Food

The kitchen was located adjacent to the dining room. Minors eat meals on a large folding table with six folding metal chairs. The kitchen refrigerator/freezer was reported to be the only cold storage unit for food. Commissioners were concerned that there was no additional space for storage of perishable food items.

Food is purchased by staff persons and delivered by the grocer each week for a rotating four-week fixed menu plan. Minors prepare all meals, relying on recipes filed in a binder. However, they can alter meals somewhat using available ingredients. A seven-day supply of emergency (non perishable) food items is stored in the garage, where there is also a minimal supply of bottled water. There is always fresh fruit available to minors and snacks are offered after school and at 8 pm.

The refrigerator contained cheese slices, eggs, tortillas and various condiments. Commissioners noted that there were seven over-sized tubs of margarine, but limited fresh vegetables in the refrigerator. The upper freezer section of the refrigerator contained frozen waffles, hash browns, hamburger patties, strawberry ice cream and frozen juice. Two 2½ lb cans of chili and two 8½ oz boxes of cornbread mix were placed on the kitchen counter for the evening meal, which would be supplemented with a green salad. Commissioners were concerned with the high fat and high carbohydrate ingredients and the restrictiveness of the menus.

Safety

Smoke detectors are located in all rooms except the bathrooms, and are checked daily; however, there are no audible fire alarm boxes on the property. A carbon dioxide detector is located in the hallway leading to the bedroom/bathroom area. There is a fire extinguisher secured to a wall in the kitchen/dining area and an attached tag confirmed that it was last inspected in April 2007. Fire and earthquake drills are conducted at the end of each month. The program coordinator informed Commissioners that the front

door of the home remains open during “business hours,” from 6:00 am until 10:00 pm. There are locks on all exits doors, but none on minors’ bedrooms or bathrooms.

According to the program coordinator, all minors are wards of the Court under W&I Code Section 602. Therefore, cursory searches can be conducted; but minors cannot be “strip searched”. Cursory searches consist of patting minors’ pockets and shirts, and lifting pant legs. Minors’ bedrooms are searched daily, and can be searched as frequently as two to three times daily. According to the program coordinator, if there is “grand suspicion” of a minor, the program coordinator notifies the probation officer and the following search process is administered. The program coordinator goes into the minor’s bedroom when the minor returns home. The minor is then given a pair of shorts and instructed to go into the bathroom to take off his clothes, put on the shorts and give the removed clothing to the program coordinator, who will then search the clothing.

The program coordinator reported to Commissioners that there have been ongoing problems with some neighborhood minors who throw rocks through windows of the Snell House bedrooms. According to the program coordinator, the last two times this happened, it was necessary to call the police (via 311); however, the police did not respond and, instead, faxed a police report to Snell House. The program coordinator described another incident, which occurred at another EE’s Homes facility (Kooser House) when a staff person’s clothing caught on fire while cooking. A minor living in the home called 911; however, according to the program coordinator, the 911 operator was rude to the minor, told the minor that he/she knew the call was coming from a group home, and that the minor was to stop crank calling. Both incidents were of concern to Commissioners. Since Snell House and Kooser House are both located within the jurisdiction of the San Jose Police Department, Commissioners reported the incidents to San Jose Police Department’s Juvenile Division and, after an immediate investigation of the incidents by the Division Lieutenant, Commissioners were informed of the following. With regard to the incidents reported via 311 phone calls from Snell House, patrol officers assigned to the vicinity of Snell House will be apprised of the ongoing problems with neighborhood minors and will be instructed to be proactive in handling this issue. With regard to the incident reported to 911 from Kooser House, a review of the 911 dispatch recording revealed that the accusations made by the minor making the 911 call were unfounded, in that the minor falsely reported the response of the 911 dispatcher.

V. PROGRAMS

Minors are treated to a meal outside the home once a month. Minors are not allowed to have personal cell phones, MP3 players, or iPods; however, they are allowed to have radios in their bedrooms. Tickets for various events such as San Jose State basketball, Stanford football, Oakland A’s and San Jose Giants baseball games, local zoos, museums, aquariums and video game arcades are obtained for field trip outings on weekends. Minors enjoy more outings during the summer months, also including hiking activities. Minors are regularly transported to Alum Rock and Camden Community Centers on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 3:00 to 4:30 pm, where they enjoy sports activities, air hockey and Xbox games. Commissioners were concerned that

minors have no recreational equipment at Snell House other than one television and one basketball.

Snell House receives \$250 to \$300 per minor from the California Department of Social Services (DSS) for clothing. Snell House has a strict dress code, which requires minors to wear jeans or Dockers pants, plain colored tee shirts with an outside pocket and no inappropriate logos or sayings, belts and black or white shoes. Minors must wear collared polo shirts when meeting with probation officers. Minors are not allowed to wear baseball caps or blue or red clothing. They cannot have long facial hair or sideburns, and cannot wear earrings or body piercing jewelry. In order to meet the stringent dress code requirements, the program coordinator purchases additional clothing for minors. EE's Homes is not reimbursed for these items.

According to the program coordinator, minors "run the home." Minors perform laundry, home cleaning chores and yard maintenance chores. Minors also prepare all meals on a rotating schedule, with any necessary assistance from staff. A list of daily chores is posted on the kitchen door.

VI. BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Minors advance through the four-level program based on merit, and not a point system. Minors enter Snell House on Level One, during which there are no home or outside visits, except for one initial in-house visit after placement. Minors are given one outgoing and two incoming phone calls while on Level One; however, these are subject to modification by the supervising probation officers. Minors remain on Level One for 30 days and are then eligible for Level Two. Minors remain on Level Two for 90 days and receive one 48-hour weekend home pass every 30 days, in addition to one eight-hour day pass between each weekend home pass. Minors are eligible for two home passes per month on Level Three and Four, which are also for a 90-day period. Level Four is the top level. The program coordinator can allow minors additional visitation; however, such decisions are made with input and approval of the minors' supervising probation officers. During the November 7 inspection visit, there were two minors on Level One, three on Level Two, one on Level Three and none on Level Four. All level advancements and reductions are decided by the program coordinator. Behaviors such as drug and/or contraband possession, absence without leave, constant/daily disruptive behavior and any law violation behavior warrant a level reduction.

Minors on Levels One and Two receive \$5 per week allowance. Minors on Level Three receive \$6.50 per week and minors on Level Four receive \$8 per week. Minors can hold \$10 total on their person, however, additional monies must be held by the EE's Homes bookkeeper. Minors have an opportunity to earn additional allowance through a weekend incentive program by completing a thorough cleaning of the home. An EE's Homes administrator randomly visits to inspect the weekend cleaning and, if the minors in the visited home have done a good job, each minor in that home receives an extra \$2 allowance.

Because it is “probation oriented,” the program coordinator states that Snell House is structured according to a strict behavior modification concept. Consequences for unacceptable behavior, such as being disrespectful to staff, can include “in-room time,” extra chores, allowance deductions, assignment of written essays and cancellation of events or outings. Disciplinary action can also include level reductions.

Rules, forms and procedures for filing grievances are kept in the office and are available to minors upon request. Completed grievance forms are first submitted to the on-duty “C3” staff person (first supervisor above staff person), who in turn submits the grievance form to the program coordinator, who then meets with the minor and involved staff person(s) for discussion. The final resolution is decided by the program coordinator.

VII. MEDICAL SERVICES

All minors placed at Snell House receive Medi-Cal benefits. Minors placed by Santa Clara County receive treatment from a medical practice located on Samaritan Drive in San Jose, and dental care is provided by Western Dental. Minors requiring immediate medical attention are taken to an urgent care center at Kaiser Permanente Santa Teresa Medical Center. If a minor requires medical care prior to being issued a Medi-Cal card, EE’s Homes pays for the minor’s medical treatment. A county health nurse informs the program coordinator when minors are due for medical/dental examinations.

VIII. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

According to the program coordinator, minors are transported to Gardner Medical Center for assessment, at the expense of EE’s Homes, if it is felt they are not emotionally stable when first placed at Snell House. In the event of “emotional emergencies,” minors are transported to Emergency Psychiatric Services (EPS) at Valley Medical Center. A licensed therapist or therapist intern, employed by EE’s Homes, meets with minors once a week and conducts family counseling biweekly. Minors also receive mandatory group counseling at Snell House weekly. The program coordinator, in conjunction with the minors’ probation officers, determines which minors are required to attend community Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and gang intervention meetings. Three minors are currently taking prescribed psychotropic medication. Minors placed by Santa Clara County are seen at Gardner Medical Center once a week and by a psychiatrist once a month.

IX. EDUCATION

One minor attends Beacon High School, two attend Calero High School, one attends Santa Teresa High School, one attends Pine Hill High School and one is in Adult Education classes at Independence High School. According to the program coordinator, Family Youth Services and minors’ probation officers assist Snell House to ensure that minors’ earned school credits are accurate. The program coordinator expressed a concern that minors are not being admitted to schools in a timely manner after placement at Snell House, as there is typically a delay of from one to three weeks. She added that Campbell

Union High School is of particular concern, as the Director of Student Assessment and Evaluation refuses to admit minors until all necessary paperwork has been completed. Similar delays, although not as lengthy, are experienced with San Jose Unified School District.

Minors return home from school between 1:30 and 2:30 pm, at which time they go to a local park or watch television. Most homework is completed at school; however, any additional work can be completed during quiet time between 6:30 and 7:30 pm. Minors do not have access to a computer at Snell House. Commissioners were concerned that minors do not have an opportunity to complete homework assignments requiring a computer, except at school or the local library. According to the program coordinator, a computer can be made available to minors in the home.

According to the program coordinator, minors meet with probation officers once a month. To avoid distractions, these meetings are held either at the Probation Department or the EE's Homes' main office located on Camden Avenue in San Jose. Probation officers visit Snell House once a month to conduct inspections.

X. FEEDBACK FROM YOUTH

Minors reported no complaints with policies or staff at Snell House, and they felt they are treated with kindness and respect. Minors reported that there is plenty of food, and they have no concerns in regard to meals. Minors commented that the responsibilities they have been given at Snell House, such as cooking and cleaning, have made them proud of themselves and they are encouraged to continue working hard. It should be noted the minor from Santa Clara County was ill when Commissioners visited the home on October 30. At the second visit on November 7, this minor reported that he received immediate medical attention and was taken to see the doctor that same afternoon. One minor asked why they were not allowed to play sports or video games. He also pointed out that there is no computer in the home and that the minors must finish all homework at school or go to a local library to use a computer. Commissioners were concerned that there are not enough activities for minors while at home.

XI. DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Commissioners noted that the operating license posted on a wall in the office was not current. According to the program coordinator, the "license renewals" are posted at the corporate office. Commissioners requested a copy of the license renewal during the October 30 inspection and were provided a copy during the November 7 inspection. Commissioners noted that the document was not a license renewal, but rather was a license billing statement from the DSS, with EE's Homes' check receipt copied onto the bottom half of the statement. According to the program coordinator, EE's Homes does not receive a license renewal form, but instead receives a billing statement annually and does not receive a receipt upon payment. Additionally, the program coordinator informed Commissioners that the DSS analyst has not visited Snell House for approximately 1½ to 2 years. This licensing renewal process was of concern to the

Commissioners, as there was no renewal or expiration date on the license maintained in the Snell House office or on the document provided to Commissioners during this inspection.

XII. COMMENDATIONS

1. The program coordinator should be commended for her cooperation in the scheduling of multiple visits to Snell House and for her prompt response and cooperation in scheduling inspection dates and providing requested documentation to Commissioners.
2. The overall cleanliness of Snell House is commendable. Minors should be commended for their efforts in maintaining a clean and tidy home.
3. Snell House should be commended for having safety equipment and procedures current, i.e., smoke detectors, earthquake drills, fire extinguisher.
4. Snell House should be commended for ensuring that minors receive necessary medical and psychiatric treatment when insurance benefits are not yet in effect.
5. Snell House should be commended for offering minors incentives to earn additional allowance, such as the weekend mass cleaning project.
6. Snell House staff should be commended for teaching minors important life skills, such as cooking, meal planning and home cleaning and maintenance.
7. Snell House staff should be commended for being respectful and caring, as described by minors during interviews.

XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Juvenile Justice Commission recommends that Snell House Adolescent Group Home:

1. Evaluate licensing procedures and ensure that an annual, dated license renewal is posted in the office at all times.
2. Make repairs to the outside telephone outlet box, air vent screens, shed roof and backyard fence, and trim the backyard tree. Additionally, secure or cover the window in the door to the backyard shed to prohibit entrance into the shed and access to toxic paint materials stored inside.
3. Replace, if possible, the metal folding table and chairs in the eating area, with items more welcoming for minors.

4. Store over-the-counter and prescription medications in a more secure location to prevent medication from being removed from the office by unauthorized persons or minors.
5. Lock the front door of the home earlier than 10 pm, especially during winter months, given the ongoing problems with neighborhood minors.
6. Adopt a more detailed process by which minors advance between levels, consistent with the behavior modification system, rather than based merely on merit as decided by the program coordinator.
7. Consider placing a second refrigerator/freezer unit in the garage for storage of perishable food items. Make more fresh vegetables available for meals and make the monthly menu less restrictive, with more variety. Also, increase the emergency food and water supplies.
8. Provide a computer with word processing for minors to use in completing homework assignments.
9. Immediately notify local law enforcement should there be no response to future calls for assistance.

XIV. SUMMARY

Based on the information gathered during this inspection, the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission reports that Snell House has met the standards and requirements for a group home.

Approved by the Santa Clara County Juvenile Justice Commission on January 8, 2008.

Patricia Khan, JJC Chairperson

Date

Pamela Serrano, JJC Inspection Chair

Date