

2000-2001 GRAND JURY REPORT

Riverside County Juvenile Probation Department

Background

The Juvenile Division of the Riverside County Probation Department seeks to demonstrate to the juveniles, in their custody, the road to which continuation of delinquency will lead, while at the same time attempting to preserve family ties. When juveniles are placed under the probation department's care, custody, and control, it is toward the end that justice is served and that reformation and rehabilitation of the juvenile is enhanced. The mission statement of the Riverside County Probation Department is:

- ! Serving courts
- ! Protecting our community
- ! Changing lives.

The Probation Department is responsible for operating locked juvenile halls in Riverside, Indio, and the Southwest Juvenile Hall in Temecula when it is opened later this year. Maximum capacities of these locked facilities are: Riverside 219, Indio 163, and Southwest 99. The Probation Department is also responsible for operating unlocked treatment centers at Twin Pines Ranch and Van Horn Youth Center.

There are approximately 4,000 juveniles on probation in Riverside County. Juveniles coming under the jurisdiction of the Probation Department have been arrested for a wide variety of crimes. However, in the majority of these cases the criminal behavior, which results in arrest, begins with drug use. Once the juvenile begins using drugs, other crimes are committed to support the drug habit. Prolonged use of methamphetamine, which is significantly less expensive than other drugs, often results in violent behavior, bodily harm to others, and in some cases, suicidal tendencies.

Findings

1. To complete staffing at all facilities, including the newer ones, an extraordinary number (283) of approved openings for Group Counselors now exists. The Probation Department is currently short of recruiting and processing personnel to bring these new employees on board in a timely manner.

2. New units and/or facilities take priority for assignment of available personnel. Until a sufficient number of new people are hired, staff is transferred or borrowed from existing units. Those units are then subject to closure and juveniles must be moved to wherever space permits.
3. Section 1321, Article 3, Title 15, of the Board of Corrections Regulations specifies minimum staffing requirements which must be met before a new facility is opened. In addition, restrictions on the \$5,000,000 grant received for the Southwest Juvenile Hall, required that it be opened within 90 days of completion.
4. The first step in hiring a new Group Counselor is the written state test. Riverside County administers this test quarterly. San Bernardino County has weekly testing, which provides a steady stream of potential employees entering the system. For every 100 people who begin the process in Riverside, only 13 will eventually be hired. Thus, to hire 283 Group Counselors currently needed, approximately 2,175 candidates must be recruited.
5. To address this critical need for recruiting and hiring the required additional personnel, the Probation Department recently submitted a request to the Board of Supervisors for 3 senior people and one clerk. Only the clerk was approved.
6. Many juveniles in detention have a history of methamphetamine use which may have serious after effects on the brain and central nervous system. The abuse of alcohol, cocaine, heroin, and other drugs also continues to create problems. Section 1321 requires that “sufficient” mental health staff be available so that other staff not be diverted from supervising minors.
7. There is no inpatient drug and alcohol treatment facility in Riverside County for juveniles. Whenever such placement is ordered, the juvenile must be sent to an Orange or Los Angeles County facility, or to private placement, which is extremely costly and can be located far from the minor’s home. Family involvement is difficult under such circumstances.
8. As a result of working parents who commute long distances and the increase in single-parent families, many juveniles receive little or no supervision at home. Consequently, many high risk “latch key kids” within Riverside County are coming in contact with law enforcement and juvenile probation services at an earlier age.

Recommendations

Riverside County Board of Supervisors and Probation Department:

1. Accelerate the hiring process so that all juvenile facilities are fully staffed to meet the requirements of the Board of Corrections.
2. Hire the following staff to expeditiously process applicants:
 - a. One Supervising Probation Officer to handle recruitment, screening, selection, and background investigation.
 - b. One Senior Probation Officer and one Group Counselor to assist in implementation of recruiting plans. Additionally, these individuals will serve in the selection process to interview and screen job applicants and assist in background investigations.
3. Research and implement additional advertising avenues to reach more potential employees.
4. Administer the state test weekly.
5. Develop new juvenile outreach programs aimed at reaching the “at risk” young people.
6. Assign additional mental health providers, where needed, to meet the “sufficiency” requirements of Section 1321.
7. Evaluate the feasibility of establishing an inpatient drug and alcohol treatment facility in Riverside County for juveniles requiring professional care.