

Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission Annual Report 2013

BACKGROUND

Section 225 of the Welfare and Institutions Code requires each county in the State of California to have a Juvenile Justice Commission. The role of the commission is set forth in Sections 229, 230, 270 and 271 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. Each commission is enjoined to inquire into the administration of juvenile justice in its county.

The law mandates that the Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission inspect Juvenile Hall and all institutions used by the county for the confinement of minors and report its findings annually to the Juvenile Court and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

In Sonoma County the commission is charged by the Board of Supervisors to act as the county's Delinquency Prevention Commission. In this role, the commission works with private and public agencies in developing delinquency prevention services and in supporting programs of benefit to youth in Sonoma County.

The commission consists of between seven and fifteen members appointed by the Juvenile Court. At least one of the members should be a juvenile between the ages of 14-21. Members of the commission are not paid for their services.

MISSION STATEMENT AND DUTIES:

The mission of the Juvenile Justice /Delinquency Commission is to advocate for and protect the safety and well-being of dependent and delinquent youth as well as promote intervention and prevention services and programs for youth in Sonoma County.

Commission responsibilities include:

- Inspecting juvenile facilities including detention facilities and group homes used for the placement of minors in Sonoma County.
- Conducting investigations into complaints brought to the commission concerning the welfare of children in the Juvenile Justice system.
- Conducting hearings on matters relating to juvenile law in Sonoma County.
- Advocating for needed services for youth in the justice system.

COMMISSIONERS:

Gayle Ballinger
Mary Cone
Jody Edwards
Wendy Evans (resigned 3/4)
Loren Larsen (resigned 12/13)
Manuel Lopez
Hank Mattimore
Susan Moreno (appointed 3/13)
Sarah Rappensperger (appointed 3/13)
Alan Rosenthal (resigned 6/13)
Laura Rosenthal (resigned 8/13)
Patrick Veeninga (appointed 3/13)
Eric Williams (appointed 3/13)
Anastasia Zita

INSPECTIONS:

The Juvenile Justice Commission conducts annual inspections of Juvenile Hall, the Probation Camp, and Valley of the Moon. Additionally, the commission is mandated by law to inspect any jail or lockup within the county that is used for the confinement of minors and report the results to the Juvenile Court.

The Commission also inspects group homes housing dependent or delinquent juveniles within the county and reports the results to the Juvenile Court, the Probation Department, and to Community Care Licensing.

Inspections of group homes are normally conducted by two commissioners. Facilities are notified in advance that they will be inspected on a designated date and required to fill out a pre-inspection report prior to the Commissioners' visit. This form contains relevant information such as the number and ages of youth served, average stay, staff training requirements, grievance procedures, etc.

The actual inspection includes a session with house staff and private interviews with house residents. Emphasis is placed on whether the residents judge that they are safe and being treated fairly. Commissioners also look into safety procedures, educational and recreational opportunities for the residents, maintenance of the facility, and anything else relevant to the fair and safe treatment of the youth.

During this year, one or more commission members inspected the following group homes:

- The Children's Village of Sonoma County
- Family Life Center
- Greenacre Homes Inc.
- Hanna Boys Center
- Plumfield
- R House
- Sierra Girls' Center
- TLC Child and Family Services
- Victor treatment Center
- Valley of the Moon Children's Home

All of the previous inspections will be on our website beginning February 1, 2014 at www.juvenilejusticecommission.org

Other Services and Activities of the Commission:

TELEPHONE GRIEVANCE LINE:

The Juvenile Justice Commission operates a grievance telephone line for youth in the facilities served by the commission. Youth are encouraged to handle their own grievances in-house but, if they feel that they have not been treated fairly, they can call our hot line at 565-8164. The commissioner assigned to the particular house will talk personally to the person with a grievance and consult with appropriate staff to reach an amicable solution.

YOUTH ESSAY CONTEST:

The JJC invites youth residing in group homes, county-run youth facilities, or who are attending alternative community schools to submit essays on selected topics to share their experiences in a meaningful way. Participation certificates are awarded to every youth submitting an essay and special gift cards and certificates are awarded at a public ceremony. This special occasion is presided over by the Juvenile Court Judge and is attended by other dignitaries and the families and friends of the participants.

ACADEMIC AWARDS FOR YOUTH:

The commission presents annual cash prizes to youth in Juvenile Hall and the Probation Camp who have earned their GED or high school diplomas. The awards are made to the individuals in person by a commissioner and, if possible, in the presence of the youth's peers. The commission presents these awards to group home residents as well.

ACTIONS TAKEN DURING THE YEAR 2013

1. The commission expanded the scope of its website to include commission inspection reports on both county operated facilities housing youth and group homes operated privately in Sonoma County.
2. The commission installed a new business phone line, 707-800-7191, for the Commission and continued a separate grievance line for youth at 707-565-8164
3. The commission accepted resignations of long time Commissioners Wendy Evans and Loren Larson and would like to thank them for their years of excellent work on behalf of youth. Additionally, we accepted resignations of Alan Rosenthal and Laura Rosenthal and welcomed new commissioners, Sarah Rappensperger, Susan Moreno, and Eric Williams.
4. The commission clarified the commission's procedure in responding to media questions and requests for information and developed a set of frequently asked questions (FAQ's) for use in responding to inquiries. This has been added to our website.
5. The commission welcomed Nick Honey, Director of Youth and Family Services for Sonoma County, to address the commission on matters relevant to our mission.
6. Preliminary plans were made to initiate a power-point presentation that will be used to explain the goals and mission of the commission.

Respectfully submitted on January 16, 2014 by

Hank Mattimore
2013 Chairperson