

Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission

Annual Report 2015

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.

The commission consists of between seven and fifteen members appointed by the Juvenile Court Presiding Judge. Commissioners are not paid for their services to the county.

MISSION STATEMENT AND DUTIES

The mission of the Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Commission is to advocate for and protect the safety and well-being of dependent and delinquent 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
Michael Charpiot
Mary Cone
Gina Crozier
Jody Edwards

Bob Faux
Hank Mattimore
Richard Miller
Dennis Ruggiero
Edy Ullman

Jim Weathers

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 Sonoma County Juvenile Justice 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.

Two commissioners normally conduct inspections of group homes. Facilities are notified in advance that they will be inspected on a designated date and are required to fill out a pre-inspection report prior to the Commissioner's 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 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 the year 2015, one or more commission members inspected the following group homes:

- The Children's Village of Sonoma County
- Family Life Center
- Greenacre Homes
- Hanna Boys Center
- Plumfield
- R House
- Sierra Girls' Center
- TLC Child and Family Services
- Victor Treatment Center
- Valley of the Moon Children's Home – monthly incident report reviews

Commissioners completed annual inspections at Sonoma County Juvenile Hall and Probation Camp, as well as review of monthly incident reports at each facility.

Additionally, commissioners inspected the following police stations:

- Healdsburg Police Station
- Petaluma Police Station

It was brought to the Commissions attention is that youth may be held for some time at the County Psyche Services – now known as Crisis Stabilization Unit, and re-located in

Roseland. Commissioner Crozier is preparing to inspect this new facility and make connections with staff there.

These reports can be found on our website at www.juvenilejusticecommission.org. During 2015, Family Life Center was closed by Seneca, and Children's Village closed.

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 hotline at 707-565-8164. 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. All the phone calls received from youth this year were taken care of promptly and with ease.

Investigations prompted by phone calls or email

The Juvenile Justice Commission was sent an "Opinion Paper" on September 1, 2014. Investigation and responses continued into 2015. Numerous attempts to discuss the paper with the author were unsuccessful. The situation has been put on an inactive status by the Commission. Monthly visits by a Commissioner to Valley of the Moon Children's Home to review incident reports continues as a result of this situation.

Commissioners also participated in reading and researching the Boy Town document, an article about a troubled group home in Davis, CA, various articles that appeared in the local paper *The Press Democrat*, and several articles published by ProPublica regarding group homes.

Youth Essay Contest

The Juvenile Justice Commission agreed to continue with our annual essay contest begun almost ten years ago. It was again agreed to not hold a community ceremony for the winners, but to ask each facility or group home to plan their own celebration and ceremony for their contest winners. The theme was altered this year to allow entries in prose, poem or song. We had 127 youth participants representing 9 facilities or group homes. As usual there were three winners from each group home and two overall winners. Participation certificates are awarded to every youth submitting an essay and special monetary gifts and certificates are awarded. Some commissioners attended celebrations at their liaison group homes.

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.

Revised Commission Documents

The commission revised, reviewed and adopted a redesigned Pre-Inspection Report document as a pdf for ease of completion by Group Home Directors. Extensive work was done to re-design the Group Home Inspection Form as a pdf, however this project has been put on hold due to difficulties with the format. The Grievance Call cards which are posted at each facility and group home, were revised and updated, including approval from the Juvenile Court. The revised cards have been distributed with a "revised" date at the bottom to ensure the proper version is available to youth, both in English and Spanish.

Membership Committee

Commissioners created a recruitment and interview plan for new JJC applicants using the standard interview questions approved by the Commission. Over the past year the JJC has held interview panels for new commissioners on two occasions. Notices for volunteers were submitted and published in multiple community publications. Approximately 10 candidates interviewed and five were selected and subsequently sworn in. One student expressed an interest and was interviewed. The student decided against joining the commission. In our effort to recruit an adolescent/young adult to the commission the four year commitment was reduced to two years. Over the year two members of the commission resigned for personal reasons prior to the completion of their terms.

New Commissioner Orientation

Commissioner Jim Weathers developed a new Commissioner Orientation plan. This created a standard orientation for new commissioners.

ACTIONS TAKEN DURING THE YEAR 2015

- Recruitment of New Commissioners: The AA provided announcements 4 times in 2015 to 20 different publications and organizations in Sonoma County, and to SRJC and SSU AJ department chairs. The commission had 10 candidates who applied as a result of announcements and four were selected to join. Some special efforts by individual Commissioners was made to recruit youth applicants,

however this continues to be a difficult role to fill due to transportation and scheduling issues, as well as expectations for a formal internship by applicants.

- “Close to Home” article in *The Press Democrat* authored by Commissioner Hank Mattimore. Commissioner Mattimore was also highlighted in a piece he wrote for the Seniors newspaper about his experiences mentoring a boy.
- The commission began an initiative about Advocating Quality Group Home Care in light of AB403. Senator Mike McGuire toured Plumfield with Chair Cone to observe a quality group home facility. Discussion has been ongoing among the Commission about how to best address the AB403 and the changes inevitable for existing group homes.
- Inbound Education: The commission agreed that we must continue to educate ourselves to ensure we are knowledgeable about juvenile justice issues in the county. Speakers over the course of the year included:
 - Nick Honey, Department of Social Services.
 - Bob Ochs, Sonoma County Probation Department Chief
 - Judge Virginia Marcoida, Presiding Judge of Sonoma County Juvenile Court, with Steve Nielsen, School-Court Liaison for Truancy Court; Lisa Valente, Keeping Kids in School Program Manager, Sonoma County Probation Department; Ariel Spindell, Director of PRIDE and ACT programs, Sunny Hills Services.
 - Matt Martin, Social Advocates for Youth (SAY).
 - Darcee Drakulich, Director of Plumfield and Jill Davidson, MSW.
- Website: The website was kept up-to-date in a timely basis with roster revisions, form revisions and completed inspection reports.
- The commission reluctantly accepted resignations of Hank Mattimore and Manual Lopez. Mr. Mattimore and Mr. Lopez served the commission for many years, and both were quick to volunteer for an inspection and were deeply involved with the youth. The Commission also accepted resignations of Susan Moreno, Eric Williams, and Anastasia Zita. We welcomed new commissioners: Edy Ullman, Dennis Ruggiero, Gina Crozier and Bob Faux who bring a wealth of experience and knowledge.

Respectfully submitted on February 25, 2016 by

Mary Cone

2015 Chairperson