

**Contact: Leslie Lea  
Foreperson  
(925) 957-5638**

Contra Costa County 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report No 0905

**COUNTY YOUTH REHABILITATION CENTER  
IS ON LIFE SUPPORT  
IT'S TIME TO PULL THE PLUG**

**The Grand Jury's Financial Analysis of Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Center  
Shows a Potential Savings of Millions of Dollars if it is Closed**

**TO: Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors  
Contra Costa County Probation Department**

**SUMMARY**

Contra Costa County has an opportunity to create a positive out of its most negative financial forecast in two decades. The County Probation Department assigns male juvenile offenders to the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Center (Youth Center), a minimum security facility in Byron California. Currently the Youth Center houses about 100 youth offenders in a complex on approximately 50 acres of land. The Grand Jury has concluded that the Youth Center is not doing an adequate job of rehabilitating its residents, and has not corrected many of the deficiencies, especially in food service, as recommended in a prior Grand Jury Report (Report No 0503). A financial analysis shows that closing the Youth Center, and assimilating the youth offenders into the County Juvenile Facility at Martinez, has the potential to save the County up to \$5 million annually. Additionally, closing the Youth Center could give the county opportunities to generate future revenues from private sources.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Center, originally known as the Byron Boys' Ranch, was built in 1960. The Youth Center consists of 50 acres. A number of buildings, including dormitories, classrooms, a kitchen and dining facility, athletic facilities and administrative offices occupy about one-third of the land area. In September 2008, the Grand Jury conducted an unannounced inspection of the Youth Center. In addition to examining the grounds and buildings, interviews were conducted with the residents and staff. The following are findings from this inspection.



The Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Center has a pond and marsh on the Eastern side of its property (to the left) and an abandoned barn and unused field in the center. The Youth Center is on the right. This 50 acre property is ½ mile long and 800 ft wide. The Youth Center uses about one-third of the available land (about 18 acres).

## **FINDINGS**

### **Rehabilitation Youth Center's Mission:**

1. According to its mission statement, the primary objective of this facility is to rehabilitate, that is to *“provide a safe, drug free program that helps youth meet their social and educational dreams. Its goal is to guide treatment that will help youth strengthen the community and build stronger families.”* This Youth Center was not meant to be simply a detention facility that houses youth offenders.

### **Financial**

2. There were nine escapees from the facility during the calendar year 2008. According to the Sheriff's Office, the average cost relating to capturing escapees is over \$1500 per hour. The only fences on the property are intended to keep the animals from roaming. There are no security fences along the perimeter of the Youth Center to prevent youth offenders from simply walking away.

3. The maximum capacity of the Youth Center is 100 youths. The new state-of-the-art Juvenile Hall in Martinez has the capacity, with alterations, to absorb all of the youths now housed at the Youth Center at a cost savings to the County.
4. Based on its 2007-2008 Expenditure Ledger, the gross annual savings to the County resulting from the closure of the Youth Center would be about \$6.2 million dollars. The Grand Jury estimates there will be variable cost increases that should not exceed \$1.2 million dollars to house the reassigned youth in the Martinez Juvenile facility, leaving a projected net savings to the County of \$5.0 million dollars.

## **Facility and Grounds**

### **Kitchen:**

5. After purportedly spending in excess of \$500,000 two years ago on kitchen renovations and other improvements, grand jurors found that the majority of the deficiencies outlined in Grand Jury Report 0503 still exist. In addition, this grand jury found other deficiencies such as rusty steam table containers, a dirty sock on a rusty food scale, and other inadequacies.



Steam table in kitchen



Scales in kitchen with dirty sock

6. The only restroom in the cafeteria building has been out of service for several months. This restroom was used by both staff and youth offenders.
7. The staff could not provide evidence of training and/or medical clearance for youth workers in the kitchen.

### **Main Dormitory:**

8. Our inspection found worn out mattresses in the dormitory for older youth.

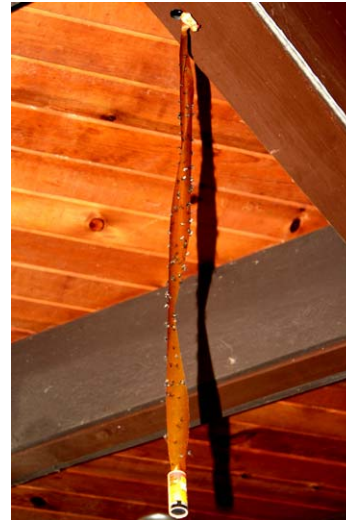


Lumpy and cracked mattress

9. An air conditioning system was not in evidence in a building that frequently reaches temperatures in excess of 100 degrees.
10. The insect eradication program consists of fly strips hanging from the ceiling. A heavy infestation of insects, particularly flies, is due in large part to the close proximity of the living quarters to compost piles and animals.



Manure and compost



Fly strip

#### **Nurses Office:**

11. A nurse is available Monday-Friday from 9:00am-5:00pm. Youths needing medical treatment are transported to the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center in Martinez at all other times, including weekends, holidays, at night, or if there is a life-threatening emergency.
12. There were hypodermic needles in an unlocked cabinet and a dirty sink in the nurse's office.

#### **Grounds:**

13. The rehabilitation complex is on approximately 50 acres of land, most of which is not being utilized. The property is strewn with old cars, an abandoned challenge course, incomplete projects, abandoned computer equipment, broken tools, debris, and junk.



Inoperative vehicles, hazardous equipment and clutter



Abandoned Challenge Course at the rear of the property



Broken wheelbarrow



Computers and other junk



Debris between two storage containers

14. Commercial metal shipping containers, now being used for storage, contain dangerous electrical wiring and open gasoline containers.



Electrical connections in a storage container



Open gasoline container

15. A dilapidated barn with parts of the roof and sides missing is located in the center of the property. A large abandoned plastic tank is stored near the horse corral along with debris.



Barn in Disrepair



Unused tank and junk

16. Abandoned electrical switch panels and water pumps, some of which may be hazardous, are present throughout the property.



Abandoned electrical panel and water well near the barn

**Livestock:**

17. The animals at the Youth Center include a horse, a few goats, chickens, and llamas. None of the animals appeared to have shelter from the sun, rain or cold.



A horse coral is located on the upper left, goats on the lower left, and a few goats and Llamas in the pasture on the lower right.



One of three Llamas at the Youth Center

## **Youth Programs:**

18. The Youth Center's staff supplied the Grand Jury with their Residential Handbook and also with a draft of a Youth Guide. The Guide is intended to supersede the handbook. However, as of January 2009 this guide has not been approved by senior management.
19. The following treatment/program options are listed in the Residential Handbook: Family Counseling, Therapeutic Community, Restitution Service, Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous, Drug and Alcohol Assessment, Drug and Alcohol Counseling, Transition Program, Anger Management, Life Skills, Gang Diversion, Residential Commissary, Teen Parenting, Senior Tutors, Religious Guidance, Work Crew, Athletic League and Field Trips. Many of these treatment programs and services are inadequate or unavailable. Only court ordered programs are mandatory.
20. The Youth Center's manual describes an Animal Husbandry Program. The Grand Jury could find no evidence of instructors, a formal curriculum, or any youth involved in such a program. Animal Husbandry, apparently once a viable program at the Youth Center, is no longer functioning.



A bulletin board at the Youth Center  
touts an Animal Husbandry Program that no longer exists.

21. Delta Vista High School offers a program through which the youths can obtain their GED. This program is funded by the Contra Costa County Office of Education.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Grand Jury is concerned that the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Center is not cost effective and is not accomplishing its primary mission of rehabilitation. An alternative exists which potentially would save the County millions. This waste of County resources is unacceptable when the current budget crisis is leading to elimination or cuts in other important County services.

In addition to financial benefits that would be realized by closing the Youth Center, there will be no rehabilitation loss to the County's youths since there is no evidence of any existing viable

programs. Most of the programs offered in their Handbook are understaffed, unstaffed, or nonexistent.

Little or no improvement has been noted since the previous Grand Jury Report 0503 criticized food services at the Orin Allen facility. Violations of numerous health codes, as found in the California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law, still exist at the Youth Center.

The Youth Center should be closed because the benefits it provides to the County and its youth are so marginal they cannot be justified.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. With the goal of closing the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Center, conduct a feasibility study and develop an exit strategy. Both objectives shall be accomplished within 6 months. The feasibility study will determine how the Youth Center population can be integrated into the Martinez Juvenile Hall, and what cost savings would be realized.
2. Within 6 months, the County shall investigate all possible productive uses and revenue sources which might be realized from the closure of the Youth Center. Alternatively, the County shall consider the sale of the land and buildings.

## **Required Responses:**

### **Findings:**

**Contra Costa Board of Supervisors 1 through 21**  
**Probation Department: 1 through 21**

### **Recommendations:**

**Contra Costa Board of Supervisors 1 and 2**  
**Probation Department: 1 and 2**