

Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1108

**BRIDGING THE GAP AT THE ORIN ALLEN YOUTH
REHABILITATION FACILITY**

Are the Boys and the Taxpayers Being Short-Changed?

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

Summary

The Contra Costa County Probation Department's Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility (Orin Allen) offers a second chance for male youths with non-violent crime convictions to effect positive change in their life direction. Orin Allen has been the subject of two Grand Jury reports in the last seven years. The current Grand Jury found that the facility deficiencies noted in these past reports have largely been eliminated and that the Orin Allen facility is a cost-effective alternative to Juvenile Hall incarceration. However, two of Orin Allen's rehabilitative program aspects, school and work experience, fall short of their potential.

On an encouraging note, volunteers throughout the County provide much needed positive contact with the boys. Due to the tight budget situation in the County, more voluntary efforts are needed to bridge the gap in existing programs to provide the Orin Allen residents with the rehabilitation effort that the County claims to provide at taxpayer expense.

Background

The County Board of Supervisors established Orin Allen in 1959 and operates it under the auspices of the County Probation Department. The rehabilitation facility is maintained by General Services, and contains a number of buildings including dormitories, classrooms, a kitchen and dining facility, athletic facilities and administrative offices, which occupy about one-third of the total 50 acres. The remaining acreage is fenced off from the buildings but remains idle. Orin Allen was established to provide early rehabilitative intervention to non-violent male youths in a safe, drug-free environment that fosters improved social interaction and educational opportunities with the goals of strengthening the community and building stronger families. This is accomplished through four primary program aspects consisting of school, work experience, recreation, and counseling. It is further supplemented with optional programs such as auto repair, the Discovery Bay Garden Club, and the Rossmoor Senior Tutors.

Treatment programs are immediately implemented on the arrival of a resident to develop objectives that will improve his character, self esteem and life goals. Residency lasts three months to a year. The rehabilitation facility is neither security-fenced nor guarded and has the capacity to house 100 residents. It is staffed by a superintendent, probation counselors, office administrative staff, a part-time school principal, teachers and a nurse.

The Grand Jury investigated Orin Allen to determine if deficiencies noted in two previous Grand Jury reports (0503 and 0905) had been corrected. Data was gathered through interviews, on-site visits, and examination of records, reports and other documentation.

The Grand Jury found that the deficiencies noted in the two previous Grand Jury reports which focused primarily on food service and the physical condition of the facility have been remedied. There are, however, minor improvement opportunities remaining that could easily be mitigated with improved routine maintenance and continued inspection and replacement of dormitory bedding. Report 0905 also identified cost savings by closing the facility. However, the Grand Jury was provided with information showing an average cost per bed per day of \$306 for each resident at the Juvenile Hall and only \$167 for each resident at Orin Allen, making Orin Allen a cost-effective alternative to Juvenile Hall incarceration.

The Grand Jury found some of the rehabilitative programs to be deficient and in need of immediate improvement.

The school staff provides an educational experience commensurate with the needs of each resident. The school day begins at 8 a.m. and ends early afternoon. There are some optional sports activities but residents have free time for the remainder of the day. This idle time could be used to integrate and reinforce school work into some meaningful activity, such as industrial arts, that would benefit both the residents and the facility.

Though the County website (www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=689) outlines work experience programs at Orin Allen, there are no consistent janitorial, landscaping, cooking or laundry work experience programs being conducted. While the facility has a culinary arts classroom, it has been about one year since the formal program was functioning.

The auto repair program has access to a shop, but the instructor is only available two to three months out of the year and class size is limited. The animal husbandry program was described on the website (www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=691) as being more robust than what was observed. No outside help or direction from educational or animal farming groups, such as individuals from the 4H or high school FFA (Future Farmers of America) participants, was identified. These two programs are the stated backbone of the rehabilitation process.

Multiple requests for information made to different layers of management within the Office of Education resulted in contradictory and incomplete responses. No one could outline the educational offerings at Orin Allen or explain how each is being accomplished in the classroom. No evidence was found of strategic and collaborative planning among the leadership of the school, the Probation Department, and the Office of Education. While there is some enthusiasm

for helping the residents at the staff level, it does not carry throughout the organization. There is also no formal collaboration between these entities to plan and provide for programs designed to better prepare these youth to reenter society as productive members with new skills and interests.

The Grand Jury also found the acreage under-utilized. There is a fenced animal pasture which could be utilized for a volunteer-staffed County horse rescue sanctuary that could help revitalize the livestock program. Also, there is a separate gated road to gain access to unused farm acreage which could be leased for cattle grazing or hay-growing operations to provide income to the ranch to fund additional programs for the residents. There is also the option of using a portion of the grounds as an east county maintenance yard facility.

The enrichment programs provided by community volunteers foster positive, non-judgmental interaction between the residents and these community citizens. The Discovery Bay Garden Club provides an enrichment program for the residents from spring through fall, with instruction in vegetable gardening and ornamental horticulture. Also noteworthy is the teamwork and dedication of the Rossmoor Senior Tutors who bring a busload of volunteers to provide enrichment on a weekly basis. These volunteers help the residents build self-esteem and interpersonal skills by teaching social, educational, and life skills on an informal basis. The Tutors have been providing this outreach for the past 24 years and serve as an example of the positive impact concerned citizens can bring to the rehabilitation process. The Grand Jury observed the use of volunteers to be an effective way to provide increased positive experiences and relationships for the residents.

FINDINGS

1. Orin Allen is a cost-effective alternative to the Juvenile Hall facility.
2. There is no formal training in construction, food preparation or horticulture.
3. Residents do not routinely perform minor facility maintenance and repairs.
4. There are no regularly scheduled collaborative planning sessions between the County Probation Department and Office of Education leadership concerning the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility.
5. Management personnel at the Office of Education have varying levels of knowledge about the execution of their educational programs currently offered at Orin Allen.
6. The Rossmoor Senior Tutors provide a valuable service to the residents of the Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility.
7. Community volunteers provide additional enrichment opportunities for Orin Allen residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Orin Allen should remain open to provide programs for non-violent youth offenders.
2. Probation and Office of Education should explore adding vocational classes to supplement classroom education with the assistance of General Services.
3. Office of Education should consider incorporating minor repair and maintenance projects into the current woodshop curriculum to supplement classroom instruction.
4. Probation and Office of Education leaders should establish collaborative planning sessions concerning rehabilitation programs at Orin Allen.
5. Office of Education should identify a management person to be the Orin Allen site expert.
6. The Board of Supervisors should publicly recognize the Rossmoor Senior Tutors for their long and dedicated service to Orin Allen.
7. The Board of Supervisors should assign a liaison to solicit community volunteers to provide enrichment programs for the Orin Allen residents.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Findings

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	1, 2, 4, 6, 7
Contra Costa County Probation Department	1 through 4
Contra Costa County Board of Education	2 through 5

Recommendations

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	1, 2, 4, 6, 7
Contra Costa County Probation Department	1 through 4
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