

CAMP WILMONT SWEENEY INSPECTION

INTRODUCTION

On January 22, 2019 members of the Grand Jury inspected Camp Wilmont Sweeney, a 24-hour unlocked minimum security facility run by the Alameda County Probation Department, located at 2600 Fairmont Drive in San Leandro, CA. Camp Sweeney is a residential facility that houses male youth ages 15 to 19 who have been found to have committed criminal acts and in the juvenile court's opinion cannot be returned to home. Youth are referred to the camp by the Juvenile Court with input from the Probation Department.

The facility has a capacity of 60 beds, but only 15 youth were living at the facility at the time of the Grand Jury's inspection. Camp Sweeney's comprehensive program focuses on reconnecting youth with their communities, and the average length of stay is about six months. The Grand Jury inspected all areas of the camp, and during the inspection the jury met with members of the Probation Department who managed the camp and its programs.

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There are 26 Probation Department employees assigned to the facility, including administrators, probation officers, and support staff. In addition, there are teachers employed by the Alameda County Office of Education, counselors, and a nurse working at the camp. During the work week (Monday – Friday regular hours) there are approximately twelve staff members on site. Swing shift includes five or six staff members and graveyard shift is staffed by two or three staff members. There is adequate staff to meet the needs of the youth in residence at the facility, although proper operation requires some overtime on the part of staff.

Facility

Camp Sweeney hosted two independent inspections in 2018, one conducted by the Alameda County Department of Environmental Health (ACDEH) and the second by the California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC). The Grand Jury reviewed each of these inspection reports prior to visiting the facility. Each inspection found Camp Sweeney to be in compliance with all applicable requirements, but did call for minor corrective actions. The Grand Jury was informed that the recommended actions were completed within 90 days of the respective inspections.

An on-site inspection by the members of the Grand Jury corroborated the findings of the ACDEH and the BSCC reports, and noted no compliance issues.

Health Care

On July 18, 2018, an inspection of Camp Sweeney by the BSCC covered a number of areas and included an in-depth medical and mental health evaluation. No deficiencies or non-compliance issues were found during the state's evaluation.

During the Grand Jury's inspection visit, rather than duplicate the state's inspection, additional questions not covered by the BSCC's evaluation were asked of staff. The Grand Jury was told that all youth are medically cleared at Juvenile Hall to ensure that medical, behavioral and mental health issues would be appropriately addressed while at Camp Sweeney. At Camp Sweeney, a licensed vocational nurse (LVN) is available on-site 8 hours per day, 5 days per week, to dispense medication and handle minor sick calls and first aid issues. Additionally, the Grand Jury found that Camp Sweeney has facilities for disposal of hazardous and medical waste, and there are appropriate containers and gloves in first aid kits in various locations throughout the facility. Shower and restroom facilities were clean, operational and appeared to meet the needs of the youth in residence.

If a medical issue develops that the LVN cannot handle (or is not available when the issue arises), the juvenile at the camp is evaluated and treated by medical staff at the neighboring Alameda County Juvenile Hall. Registered nurses are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week at Juvenile Hall. If anyone on the staff suspects that a juvenile may be suffering from a disorder which has not previously been diagnosed, appropriate medical tests are performed. Should a problem be diagnosed, a plan is then developed to ensure the juvenile can be properly treated. If medication is required, it is provided without cost to the juvenile or his family through Camp Sweeney's contract with UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital in Oakland.

In response to a question concerning the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), the Grand Jury was assured by staff that all privacy provisions of HIPAA are observed.

Policies and Procedures

Adequate camp policies and procedures appeared to be in place and accessible to all staff. The Grand Jury was told that the current policies are undergoing significant revisions to bring them current with recent Title 15 changes. Title 15 of the California Code of Regulations governs crime prevention and corrections. Specific changes were not discussed but some examples include inspections, surveillance, and release procedures at holding facilities.

Grievance forms are available and are managed by Camp supervisors. They are tracked and reviewed by probation department management as well. There were four grievances filed by juveniles at the facility in 2018. Three complaints involved being written up by staff for misconduct. After all three learned they hadn't actually been written up, the grievances were withdrawn. The fourth grievance was against another camper.

Education and Activities

The youth at Camp Sweeney either attend on-site high school/GED classes or off-site college classes (usually at Chabot Community College), or work at jobs within the community. The youth who study or go to college are allowed to wear their own clothing off-site to fit in better with peers. Staff provides transportation to and from jobs and school. Several staff members are bilingual and can assist youth who do not speak English as their primary language.

Aside from school or work, daytime activities include occasional camping trips, tending to a camp garden, and sports. A sports field, basketball court, and weight room are available. Pay telephones are available to the youth in the dormitory and at the activity center. The youth are also provided up to three free phone calls a day to family members. These calls are screened by probation staff.

There are programs to help strengthen family bonds such as monthly engagement nights to encourage connections with family, and community and parenting groups to improve family relationships.

Camp officials manage programs with the goal of transitioning youth successfully from the controlled environment of the camp back to their families and into the community. Family visits are encouraged and scheduled twice weekly; however, since strengthening family bonds is a key component of this program, the staff try to be flexible. There are also programs to help strengthen family bonds such as monthly engagement nights to encourage connections with family, and community and parenting groups to improve family relationships.

The Probation Department staff is investigating the possibility of setting up a program where youth can continue contact with their camp probation officer after release in order to ease the transition back into the community.

Security

When the 2014-2015 Grand Jury inspected Camp Sweeney, that Grand Jury took note of the lack of audio or video monitoring equipment anywhere on the camp grounds, with the sole exception of video surveillance in the dormitory building. The 2014-2015 Grand Jury also noted that no funds were available to pay for additional surveillance measures, but recommended that exterior cameras be installed as soon as possible at camp entrances and parking lots to bolster overall facility security and to help address issues with contraband entering the camp premises. At the

time of this year's inspection, the current Grand Jury was informed that video surveillance cameras are in the process of being installed at the camp entrance and at various other locations on the grounds. Staff advised that the Probation Department, after protracted consideration as to whether or not the cost of the camera installation project (\$230,000) was justified (given the county's plan to replace the current Camp Sweeney with a new facility at another location), had opted to proceed with the camera installation as previously recommended by the 2014-2015 Grand Jury. The decision to proceed was deemed prudent in light of continuing uncertainty about when the replacement facility will be built and ready for occupancy. During the Grand Jury's inspection of the facility, staff pointed out several locations where cameras have been or are being installed. The Grand Jury was informed that the new video surveillance equipment is expected to be operational in 2019. Staff will have the ability to review surveillance video footage 24/7.

When questions were asked by the Grand Jury about any contraband entering the camp, staff responded that most of the contraband consisted of items such as candy and potato chips. Staff explained to the Grand Jury that they have not had significant problems with drugs being brought into the facility.

The Grand Jury asked whether any of the camp buildings were equipped with emergency call buttons. Staff explained that staff members, who are in the rooms with the youth 24/7, carry radios that have emergency call capability, and staff are always present in the facility.

Staff indicated that there is an area in the administration building where youth may store personal items. By way of example, staff advised that youth who have jobs or go to school off-grounds use this area to change into appropriate street clothes. Renovation work that is currently underway (with an anticipated completion in the next few months) will expand this capability and give the youth greater access to lockers.

Regarding camp uniforms, staff indicated the youths are issued t-shirts that are color coded to indicate how far along each youth is in the camp program. The color-coding is not based on any form of risk assessment.

Because the camp is designed as an open facility without secure fences, the Grand Jury was told that it is not uncommon for homesick or anxious youth residents to walk off the campus without permission. In 2017, 26 youth left the campus without the approval of camp staff. Most juveniles were returned within 30 days. The Grand Jury learned that one of the 26 is still at large. In 2018, 23 of the youth residents left camp without permission, all of whom have been returned to the facility and had to face the juvenile court for reevaluation of their placements at the camp.

Food Service

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are prepared and delivered by Revolution Foods, who also provide meals for nearby Juvenile Hall. All regular meals are served in the camp dining hall. Upon inspection by the Grand Jury, the dining hall, adjacent kitchen, and food storage space were found to be neat and clean.

Breakfast and lunch meals meet the nutritional standards of the National School Lunch Program, and therefore, the cost is reimbursed by the state Department of Education. The camp supplements the three regular meals with morning, afternoon, and bedtime healthy snacks. Snacks consist of fruits, nuts, nut butter, and bread (e.g., residents can make PB&J sandwiches). Supplemental snack foods are ordered from Sysco and US Foods.

Because youth are transferred to Camp Sweeney from Juvenile Hall, staff at Revolution Foods is familiar with those who have special dietary needs. Special diet meals are delivered with regular meals. A special diet notebook for staff is kept in the dining hall kitchen and contains information and meal/snack requirements for any youth on a special diet. If staff know a youth is away from camp and going to miss a meal, they usually save a meal in a kitchen warmer. If a youth unexpectedly misses a meal, they typically are allowed to make a snack.

CONCLUSION

Although the Camp Wilmont Sweeney facilities are outdated, the camp is well maintained and well managed. Plans are in the works for the construction of a new facility nearby.

FINDINGS	<i>None</i>
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>None</i>
RESPONSES REQUIRED	<i>None</i>

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