



2009 – 2010
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Central California Women's Facility

Prepared By: Safety & Welfare Committee

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Introduction:

Pursuant to California Penal Code 919 (b) which states, “. . . the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county”, the Madera County Grand Jury conducted an inspection of the Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF) on October 22, 2009. The Correctional Counselor II/Litigation Coordinator for CCWF coordinated the visit.

Findings:

CCWF is the largest female correctional facility in the United States. Current population is 3,915 inmates, which is 195% of its designed capacity. CCWF opened in October, 1990 and is managed by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. It covers 640 acres and houses prisoners of all security levels. This is the only female prison in California that has housed the death row/condemned since 1991. California ranks third in the number of women sentenced to death behind North Carolina and Florida.

The Correctional Health Services Administrator II led the inspection of the Paris–Lamb Health Center. A total of 39 beds are in the unit. Twelve of the beds are reserved for crisis/mental health inmates. The Comfort Care Hospice Program has been established within the health care center to keep a vigil over those inmates whose lives are coming to an end. Selected inmates are trained to perform, with compassion, a vigil over the dying patients 24 hours per day.

Within the health center are programs involving comprehensive mental health services and group therapy. A full service pharmacy handles an estimated 2,000 prescriptions daily. A licensed technician performs mammograms and sonograms as necessary for the inmates. CCWF has contracted an outside MRI and CATSCAN technician for those services. CCWF and Valley State Prison for Women have complimentary health care facilities. CCWF specializes in mental health care.

Recent changes in the State’s policy on medical reimbursement have gone from 140% to 110% of the Medicare rate. As a result, nearby hospitals will no longer accommodate inmates due to this reduction. Inmates are now escorted to hospitals as far away as Bakersfield and Pasadena for services that were originally handled within a 40 mile radius of CCWF.

Meals are prepared within the kitchen facility by 250 inmates who are supervised by 70 staff. There are two hot meals prepared at CCWF daily and a cold boxed lunch, which is provided by an outside vendor. The meals are prepared flash-chilled up to two days in advance and re-heated prior to consumption. Meals are on a 13 week cycle program set by state nutritional guidelines. In addition, CCWF accommodates those inmates that have religious and dietary preferences with a kosher kitchen and vegetarian meal preparation.

The prison provides inmate academic education, work and vocational training, counseling and specialized programs for the purpose of successful reintegration into society. It is estimated by staff that approximately one half of all inmates benefit from these educational programs. All inmates are evaluated within 90 days of entering CCWF for educational aptitude. There are numerous programs for vocational training including welding, electronics, office services, graphic arts, cabinet making, cosmetology, and more. Cosmetology is one of the prison's most advanced courses with 1600 hours required for board certification. Successful inmates in this program are tested and licensed by the appropriate state agency.

CCWF is anticipating a 50% cut in their educational staff effective January 1, 2010. It is estimated that the remaining teachers will have over 200 students per class. Among the classes being cut are the ones dealing with substance abuse. Substance abuse is an overwhelming factor for a majority of the inmates imprisoned at CCWF.

The Administrative Segregation Unit (Ad Seg) currently houses 16 death row inmates and other high security inmates. On death row there is one inmate per cell. On the opposite side of the Ad Seg, the mentally challenged are housed for isolation from the general inmate population.

The Madera County Fire Station #5 Chief led the inspection of the fire station. The fire station was built in 1990 and became a shared fire station with Madera County in 1993. Response area covers 150 square miles. The department is comprised of one Fire Chief, five Fire Captains, one Hazardous Material Specialist, seven inmate Firefighters and one inmate Dispatcher/Cook. The inmates live at the fire station and are on-call 24/7 for immediate response to emergencies. The fire department responded to 884 calls from January, 2009 through September, 2009. It was noted that the inmate shower is in need of repair.

The Dispatcher/Cook prepares all meals for the Fire Department at the Fire Station kitchen. Meals are prepared on a very old outdated stove. There is no dishwasher at the fire station.

Services provided by the fire station include fire suppression, rescue, hazardous materials response, decontamination and compliance, medical aid, fire prevention and code enforcement, licensed extinguisher maintenance, public education, and safety and environmental compliance.

The self-powered circular K12 saws were found to be approximately 20 years old and inoperable. These saws are a very important tool necessary for cutting through metal and dry wall in fighting fires.

It was found that the anticipated grant funds to purchase new Jaws of Life equipment, based on the Grand Jury recommendation in 2008 – 2009, were not received. There is still a vital need.

CCWF has one of two regional air compressors in Madera County that is used as a fill station for breathing air apparatus. In addition, 2000 fire extinguishers are serviced annually by Fire Station #5 inmates. Due to the extensive training at Fire Station #5, inmates have had some success in obtaining employment in this field after their release. Recidivism is very low among those inmates that are honored to be a part this department.

Conclusions:

CCWF staff was found to be professional, well qualified and courteous. Concerns found include the downsizing of the educational programs and the implications of the reduction of educational programs and staff.

Some of the fire station equipment was found to be outdated and inoperable and in dire need of replacement. It appears that routine maintenance of the inmate shower fixtures has not been attended to on a timely basis.

Recommendations:

- Replace two K12 saws for Madera County Fire Station #5.
- Update the kitchen in fire station to include new stove, range hood and dishwasher.
- Repair inmate shower in fire station.
- Obtain Jaws of Life equipment as a recurring recommendation by the Madera County Grand Jury.
- Seek alternative funding for educational services and teachers to overcome the anticipated reductions.

Respondents: Written response required pursuant to PC933(c)

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Respondents: Response Optional

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