

LOS PRIETOS BOYS CAMP AND ACADEMY

SUMMARY

The Los Prietos Boys Camp and Academy, located 20 miles north of the City of Santa Barbara within the Los Padres National Forest, is a residential correctional/treatment facility for 13- to 18- year-old male wards of the Juvenile Court. Established in 1944, the facility serves 75 wards today with a capacity for 96. Los Prietos provides a structured and predictable environment where wards are encouraged to modify their behavior, develop self-esteem, and prepare themselves to re-enter society. The 2008-2009 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury examined the programs provided the wards, staffing levels, and the criteria for a youth's successful transition back into society. Los Prietos Boys Camp and Academy is not at capacity due to understaffing in many areas. The Grand Jury is particularly concerned with understaffing, treatment of substance abuse and post-release guidance.

BACKGROUND

Los Prietos Boys Camp and Academy (Los Prietos) is a county-owned seven day-a-week, 24-hour correctional/treatment residential facility. It provides services for wards of the Juvenile Court¹ ages 13 to 18. Juveniles placed at the facility must meet specific court determined criteria. Los Prietos Boys Camp (Camp) was established in 1944 with a maximum capacity of 56 wards. In 2007 the average intake age was 17.3 years, and the average stay at the Camp was 150 days. Los Prietos Boys Academy (Academy) was established in 1997 as an intervention program for 40 younger wards. In 2007, the average intake age of Academy wards was 15.7 years, and the average stay for a ward was 147 days.

The ward's in-camp program length is initially determined by the Court and usually lasts from 120 to 180 days. The length is based on many factors including the ward's criminal and school truancy history. Wards who display positive behavior can shorten their stay in camp, but those who exhibit uncooperative behavior may have their stay extended or be returned to juvenile hall. Probation and school staff personnel evaluate a ward's behavior weekly.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the Jury made multiple visits to Los Prietos and attended the high school graduation ceremonies. The Jury interviewed management, staff and many of the wards. Programs and numerous documents related to operations were reviewed.

¹ California Welfare and Institutions Code, Article 14

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The Los Prietos programs are designed to provide consistent structure and a predictable environment where a ward is encouraged to make the necessary changes that will allow him to function in the community upon his release. Residing full time at Los Prietos requires social give-and-take, existing cooperatively with others, and accepting the responsibilities and consequences for one's behavior. The programs give wards the opportunity to develop an understanding regarding behavior controls and to improve their self-esteem.

During an October 2008 visit there were 45 wards at the Camp (capacity is 56) and 30 at the Academy (capacity is 40). Los Prietos was not operating at full capacity due to budget cuts resulting in reduced staffing. In addition, the follow-up support after release had been reduced. In fiscal year 2007-08 the cost for a Camp ward was \$189 per day; the average stay was 145 days with an average total cost per commitment of \$27,405. For the Academy, cost per ward was \$193 per day; average length of stay was 141 days with a total average cost per commitment of \$27,213. Families are required to contribute to the cost of the ward's rehabilitation.

Commitment

Once a judicial determination has been made and the juvenile offender has been placed in Juvenile Hall, probation officers screen the offender for possible placement at Los Prietos.

The wards receive a comprehensive evaluation by Camp personnel within the first two hours of arrival. Evaluations include: gang entrenchment, family instability, social deprivation, medical problems, teen fatherhood, drug abuse, as well as mental health disorders which may include attention deficit hyperactive disorder and bipolar disorder. To determine what services are needed, standardized screening instruments, as well as medical and mental health history are used. Many of the youth have medical or mental health problems as evidenced by 35 of 75 wards being on medication, 12 of these being prescribed psychotropic medication.

On admission, wards are assigned to various programs which include regular and special education curricula, contract work projects, as well as substance abuse counseling. The wards are supervised by Probation Department Institutional staff, Public Health staff, Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health clinicians, and County School personnel, who strive for the ward's rehabilitation. The organization of the programs provides a structured, consistent, and challenging environment in which wards can re-evaluate negative behaviors and attitudes. They are encouraged to develop self-confidence, personal accountability as well as community and family responsibility. All wards participate in programs designed to help them become aware of what causes stress and criminal or gang activity. They attend behavior therapy, peer group sessions, plus alcohol and drug education. All wards attend school five days per week and are required to complete homework. Additionally, they are all required to comply with clearly

defined behavioral expectations. During the last 30 days of their commitment, wards who display good behavior may be allowed weekend home visits.

Academic and Vocational Training

In accordance with *California Education Code Section 48645*, the teaching staff from Santa Barbara County Schools provides administrative and operational programs in conjunction with the Santa Barbara County Probation Department. Los Robles High School is located on the campus of Los Prietos, and each ward attends a minimum of four academic classes daily. Class size varies from 5 to 20 students. Classes are designed to help the student recover as much “lost ground” in learning as possible and to prepare for graduation. Some advanced academic classes are offered online through CyberHigh.

Los Prietos offers vocational education classes. Boys may receive training and earn academic credits in computer and construction technology. The wards are also encouraged to participate in job training positions while at camp such as: kitchen/culinary arts, laundry, clerical, maintenance, landscaping, hair cutting, calisthenics leader and carpentry crew. The Camp Forestry Crew Program and Horticulture Projects provide additional training. These programs stress teamwork, honesty, and task completion. Among other programs offered are fine arts and a literacy program. Letters of recommendation defining a ward’s job performance and resumes can be issued upon graduation.

Several non-profit organizations have awarded scholarships to wards who have graduated from high school. In May 2008, 11 of the 22 graduates from Los Robles High School were awarded scholarships, bringing the total number to 31 since the scholarship program was introduced in 2006. Out of 19 graduates in October 2008, 15 received scholarships. These scholarships are awarded in \$500 increments. To date there has never been a scholarship application denied and many have been renewed. The Los Prietos administration stays in contact with its graduates through the completion of their Associate of Arts degree or technical certificate.

Special Activities

Los Prietos offers a variety of activities that are aimed at building self-esteem and encouraging positive choices for the future. For example, the Drama Kings present throughout the community a dramatic interpretation of the boys' experience with gangs, drugs and family dynamics, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future. There are opportunities for the wards to work with the Forest Service in fire control, and assist in community events. Motivational speakers visit Los Prietos periodically and the wards may attend off-campus events. Religious services are offered several times weekly. Physical training and recreational activities are important aspects of the Los Prietos program. Fitness as well as sportsmanship and teamwork are stressed. Recreational activities are available as incentives to the wards to encourage improved behavior.

Counseling

There are several counseling components of the treatment program at Los Prietos. A Probation Institution staff member/counselor is assigned a caseload group of 5 to 10 wards. Members of these groups work together in many activities and in their daily routines. Additionally, each youth is assigned a Mental Health clinician who provides appropriate services and makes referrals if necessary. A county psychiatrist is at camp weekly, and is on call for consultations.

Volunteers from Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Cocaine Anonymous (CA) provide weekly meetings for the wards. With these programs the wards at their request could be matched with a sponsor who would maintain contact and help them through these programs to become clean and sober citizens of their community.

Los Compadres: The Young Men's Project was originally funded under the auspices of the Community Action Commission (CAC) as a pregnancy prevention program from the male perspective. It teaches young men to act responsibly in their relationships. The curriculum reinforces the positive aspects of family, culture and community and includes the following:

- Male Responsibility
- Fatherhood, Palabra Concept (A "fatherhood program based on the idea of 'palabra' which means 'word' or 'credence'. Through this concept the curricula and in-class discussion tie involved parenting to manliness. Taking one's responsibilities as a parent is taught as a crucial element to being a noble man.")²
- Destino (Destino teaches speaking, listening, and comprehension skills in Spanish.)
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- HIV/AIDS
- Contraception, Communicating about sex
- Alcohol/Drug Use
- Gang Involvement
- Violence Prevention, Racial Tolerance
- Community Awareness

Los Compadres offers group sessions once a week. In the past it offered mentoring services after the wards were released from Los Prietos. However, this was eliminated due to CAC budget cuts. Before funding cuts, Los Compadres conducted a drug and alcohol treatment program as well as an aftercare program. Staff at Los Prietos conducts drug and alcohol education but offers no treatment.

² SERVING INCARCERATED AND EX-OFFENDER FATHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES, A REVIEW OF THE FIELD: Prepared for the U.S. Department of Justice and The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, February 2001, by John M. Jeffries, Ph.D., Director, National Associates Programs, Vera Institute of Justice, Suzanne Menghraj, Program Associate, National Associates Programs, Vera Institute of Justice, Creasia Finney Hairston, Ph.D., Consultant

Substance Abuse

The Jury was informed that more than 80% of the wards entering the facility have a history of drug and/or alcohol problems. More than 50% of the wards at the Camp admitted they had used drugs and/or alcohol in the six months prior to being booked into juvenile hall and being committed to the Camp. At the Academy, self-reported use of drugs and/or alcohol in the previous six months was more than 68%. Participation in a 12-step program has been proven to be a strong step toward recovery, but these programs are only offered weekly or bi-weekly. Some wards are released before their addictions have been completely addressed. And some wards interviewed by the Jury stated they were not sure if they would resume using drugs and/or alcohol upon their release.

Mental Health Care

Los Prietos has two full-time mental health employees who are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. One is a licensed Marriage Family Therapist (MFT) and one is a MFT trainee. They see approximately 20 to 30 wards per week. An off-site MFT provides oversight management once or twice a month. There is one vacant mental health position at Los Prietos.

Gang Impact

Staff reported that 64% of wards at the Camp and 81% of wards at the Academy were affiliated with a gang. There is a zero tolerance rule regarding gang behavior at Los Prietos and they rarely have any gang related problems. However, during a Jury visit in October 2008, Santa Maria wards were not allowed weekend home visits they had earned because of an increase in gang activity in the Santa Maria area. An anti-gang program is currently being developed at Los Prietos to discourage wards return to gang life. The curriculum will include education about the negative effects of gangs in society and their community, and how gangs impact their lives.

Re-entry into the Community

To prepare wards for re-entry into the community, a four week program called Work And Gain Economic Self Sufficiency (WAGES) was recently implemented. The curriculum provides interview techniques including a mock videotaped interview, how to complete a job application, appropriate dress, and personal budgeting. There will be pre and post surveys to measure the success of the course. The WAGES program will include outreach to the local business community.

After the ward's release, Community Transition Officers (CTO) provide supervision and mentoring services for 90-120 days. If the youths need assistance with schooling, or job placement, the CTOs provide the necessary guidance. If they are experiencing difficulty with their transition back into the community, the CTO is a resource for the ward and his family. While there is aftercare support by CTOs, it is often inadequate to meet the needs of those released due to staff reductions.

Recidivism³

The wards are tracked for recidivism purposes for three years after their release. Despite the success of a majority of the boys, 33% will re-offend within three years. In the opinion of staff, this is due to a return to the pre-existing social environment, economic environment, and/or the breakdown of the family unit. Jury members visited with wards at the Camp and were told by some they feared returning to the same conditions which first contributed to their trouble. Wards have the option of requesting to live at a different residence upon release. Many said they would probably return to gangs because gangs are perceived as their real "family".

The 2008-2009 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury commends the staff and administration at Los Prietos Boys Camp and Academy. The mutual respect and commitment between the Staff and wards was apparent to the Jurors who visited the facility.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1A

For the Los Prietos Boys Camp to be at full capacity of 56 wards, the following additional staff is needed: one Senior Deputy Probation Officer and two Juvenile Institutions Officers.

Finding 1B

For the Los Prietos Boys Academy to be filled to capacity of 40 wards, the staff would need to be increased to include: one Senior Deputy Probation Officer; one Juvenile Institutions Officer; one half-time Administration Office Professional.

Recommendation 1

The Santa Barbara County Probation Department prioritize the hiring of staff to maximize capacity at Los Prietos Boys Camp and Academy.

Finding 2A

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) programs are offered once a week to the wards at Los Prietos Boys Camp.

Finding 2B

Cocaine Anonymous (CA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) are offered once every two weeks to Los Prietos Boys Camp and once every two weeks to Los Prietos Boys Academy.

³ The tendency to lapse into a previous pattern of behavior.

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Recommendation 2

Provide all anti-substance abuse programs (AA, CA and NA) in the daily curriculum at both Los Prietos Boys Camp and Los Prietos Boys Academy.

Finding 3

Mental Health personnel at Los Prietos Boys Camp and Los Prietos Boys Academy are understaffed by one position.

Recommendation 3

Fill the vacant Mental Health position.

Finding 4

Community Transition Officers (CTO) are understaffed by one position.

Recommendation 4

Hire one additional CTO.

Finding 5

Los Compadres mentoring program was discontinued due to lack of funding.

Recommendation 5

Los Prietos Camp and Academy implement a mentoring program.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

In accordance with *California Penal Code Section 933.05* each agency and government body affected by or named in this report is requested to respond in writing to the findings and recommendations in a timely manner. The following are the affected agencies for this report, with the mandated response period for each:

Santa Barbara County Probation Department – 60 days

Findings 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 4, 5
Recommendations 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 4, 5

Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services – 60 days

Finding 3
Recommendation 3