

LOS PRIETOS BOYS CAMP AND ACADEMY

The following constitutes an Activity Report issued by the 2011-12 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) regarding a visit to the Los Prietos Boys Camp and Academy.

On September 30, 2011, several members of the Jury made a scheduled visit to the Los Prietos Boys Camp and Academy (Camp) as part of its annual charge, under the *California Penal Code, Section 919 (b)*, to “inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county.” The Camp is operated by the Santa Barbara County Probation Department for selected youthful offenders, ages 13 to 18. These youthful offenders are considered wards of the court and may be sent to Los Prietos for varying periods of time.

This program, set in a rural environment twenty miles from the City of Santa Barbara, provides residential services for designated adolescent males between 13 and 18 years of age. Wards being considered for placement at the Camp must meet specific intake criteria. These criteria include an initial phone screening between referring and program personnel, the submission and review of a screening checklist and attachments, completing a physical examination, with six months or more of custody time, and having the necessary self-control to benefit from a varied and challenging program in an open, minimum-security residential setting.

Throughout the visit, jurors were accompanied by the Director of the facility and the two supervisors responsible for the Camp. All supervisors and wards were responsive to each and every question jurors asked.

The Camp director made a presentation and provided a booklet of over 60 pages describing the curriculum including Programs, Educational, Vocational, and Fine Arts/Special Training.

Due to the closing of the juvenile hall in Santa Barbara, staff members were transferred to the Camp, therefore the Camp is fully staffed and authorized to house 136 boys.

The Director and his staff operate the Camp with an attitude of “accountability” and “a high expectation of success.” The result of the staff’s commitment to the ideals of the Camp and the success of its wards is evident. The academic progress that many achieve has been witnessed by prior grand jurors attending the Camp’s Los Robles High School graduation ceremonies. Success is also evident in the fact that 55% to 60% of the boys commit no new offenses within two years of their release.

Observations

- The Camp was neat and clean, both inside and out
- The grounds were well-maintained
- Staff had radios to enhance safety and security

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- All areas inspected, including the dormitories, were well-organized. The Director asked one boy to open his cupboard and everything inside was folded in neat military precision
- Boys encountered outside were formed into military-style lines
- The Camp's construction training program is no longer funded, and its computer program has less funding than before

Drama Kings

The Drama Kings, a small group of Camp residents, performed a personalized version of how each wound up at Los Prietos. The stories were entertaining as well as thought-provoking to jurors who had an opportunity to visit with members of the troupe following the performance. Since the dramatization's inception in 2002, it has been performed, off-site, for numerous schools, civic organizations and other groups. Year-after-year, schools and groups request repeat performances.

Dialog between Jurors and Boys

Jurors asked how boys get into gangs. An answer was, "It's not like we are exposed to a group of bad kids in junior high and then decide to join. We all grow up together. We know each other in kindergarten, in elementary school, in junior high school and senior high school. The entire group of kids just changes its direction (towards a gang)."

When asked what would make their stay at the Camp better, some boys mentioned:

- Better air conditioning and heating
- A swimming pool (Management stated this would be difficult as much of the Camp is on Chumash tribal grounds)
- More privileges like trips off-site (boys do earn privileges based on group accomplishments)
- More work details
- More free time

When asked what they wanted to do when they left, a majority said "graduate from high school and get a job."

After being reassured that the grand jurors were not there to "close down the Camp", one boy admitted, "I hate it here." When a juror suggested that the Camp was based on discipline and that now, maybe he knew he did not want to go into the military, he smiled and agreed.

When asked what communities can do to help kids stay out of trouble, one boy replied, "We need more free sports. Everything costs money now and our parents can't afford it."

The 2011-12 Santa Barbara County 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.

Under *California Penal Code Section 933.05* this report does not require a response.