

**The Juvenile Hall Meal Preparation Program**  
Good Food Equals Love, Concern, and Support

2013-2014 Santa Cruz County Grand Jury

May 2014

## **Summary**

An often overlooked and undervalued aspect of the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall rehabilitation plan is the fresh-cooked meal preparation. The Grand Jury discovered it is an important part of a program that creates a safe and nurturing place for youth who are in custody in our county. As one staff member said, “Good food equals love, concern, and support.”

A Sheriff’s Office study<sup>[1]</sup> explored the possibility of moving its Main Jail kitchen processes to the Rountree Medium Security site. Meals for all in-custody county facilities would then be prepared at the Rountree facility and transported to the other county jail sites. The Sheriff’s Office Corrections Bureau says that at one time the study had included the Juvenile Hall meals.

The Grand Jury finds that the cooks at the Juvenile Hall are doing a good job in providing fresh, nutritious, family style meals to the residents and staff. This creates healthier, happier residents, who in turn perform at a higher academic level and are less prone to engage in violent or disruptive behaviors. Family style meals are also an important time for staff to interact with and mentor the juvenile residents.

In our opinion, it is vital that Santa Cruz County continue to support the meal preparation program at the Juvenile Hall.

## **Background**

As part of its required annual inspection, the Grand Jury toured the Juvenile Hall, which is managed by the Probation Department rather than the Sheriff’s Office. Administrators and staff said that a study initiated by the Sheriff’s Office regarding consolidating jail meal preparation might include the Juvenile Hall food program. Juvenile Hall staff expressed serious reservations about the possibility of such a change.

## **Scope**

We reviewed available documentation, conducted interviews with administrators and staff, and inspected all County jail kitchens to evaluate the alternatives.

## **Investigation**

We looked into four main areas: mentoring components, facilities and costs, juvenile nutritional requirements, and the Sheriff’s Office “Report on Centralizing Kitchen Operations to the Rountree Facility.”<sup>[1]</sup>

## **Mentoring Components**

Juvenile Hall staff often cite mentoring as an important element of the in-house meal preparation program. The kitchen staff talk to the residents as they are choosing their meals, and they know each resident by name. It is common practice for staff members to eat family style meals with the residents. Chatting together during meal time creates an

environment for residents and staff to talk frankly about issues that might not otherwise be discussed.

The importance of positive adult interaction with residents was highlighted in the 2013 Santa Cruz County Criminal Justice Council's *Status on Youth Violence Report*,<sup>[2]</sup> which states "...youth's beliefs about themselves and their abilities are shaped by the extent to which they perceive that the adults in their lives care about them and are involved in their lives." A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report from 2009 also stated that mentoring creates a "close, developmental relationship between an older, more experienced individual and a younger person, usually sustained over a period of time and involving mutual commitment, respect, and loyalty."<sup>[3]</sup>

Employees of the Juvenile Hall shared anecdotes involving casual, but significant conversations with residents during meal time. Some of the conversations with residents were as simple as discussing proper table manners and the use of inoffensive language.

Staff spoke about a cook who came to work on Thanksgiving, his day off, to help prepare a traditional Thanksgiving dinner for the residents. Another story involves a hunger strike planned by residents which was averted when they learned a favorite dish was being prepared for the meal.

Years ago, residents were selected to do KP (Kitchen Patrol) duty in the kitchen. However, reduced staffing levels and schedule conflicts eliminated the program. Employees commented that KP had allowed cooks more time to plan meals and handle administrative chores. Residents said they enjoyed KP because they would often be rewarded with a snack. The KP mentoring opportunity is now gone.

The meal program and guidelines are explained in the *Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall Resident's Orientation Booklet*.<sup>[4]</sup>

*"The meals you receive will be a well balanced diet based on nutritional standards approved by the State of California. Food is prepared in compliance with health and sanitation regulations. Medical diets or diets which address special religious restrictions are available for youth with special meal requirements.... Before each meal, staff will explain the expectations and give you directions about meal service. Please listen carefully and follow staff's directions. Appropriate table manners and behavior is required.... Failure to obey the rules will result in you being excused from the meal to eat in your room."*

Residents receive three meals per day plus an evening snack in the dining area. In contrast to the Juvenile Hall, the Main Jail cooks prepare meals which are then transported to the various cell areas.

## **Facilities and Numbers**

An inspection of the Juvenile Hall kitchen and cafeteria revealed that while much of the

equipment is old, it is clean and operational. The kitchen was designed to feed far more than its current average of around 24 residents; its two ovens have eight range burners and there is one convection oven. Jurors noted that tile was peeling up under the dishwasher, and the poorly insulated walk-in freezer was causing a mold problem on the hallway wall. Budget cuts had eliminated preventative maintenance previously handled by the County General Services Office. There is no current preventative maintenance plan.

According to the approved County of Santa Cruz Detail of Financing Sources And Uses, Governmental Funds, Fiscal Year 2013-14,<sup>[5]</sup> the Juvenile Hall food budget line item is \$79,591 (this does not include labor and non-food item costs). Employee contracts stipulate a meal for those Juvenile Hall employees whose positions require that they remain in the facility during meal times. Staff who can leave during meal time may eat with the residents but are charged for the meal.

The number of residents fluctuates, but based on 30 trays per meal the cost per individual serving is \$2.42. This figure does not include the Federal Surplus Food Program (also known as the School Lunch Program) reimbursement. When this is included, the cost per serving is \$1.48/food tray. In comparison, the Sheriff's Office staff estimate their meal cost for the three jails is about \$1.56/food tray.

### **Juvenile Nutritional Needs**

According to the US Department of Agriculture<sup>[6]</sup> and the CDC,<sup>[7]</sup> proper nutrition for young people reaps many benefits:

1. Proper nutrition promotes the optimal growth and development of children.
2. Healthy eating helps prevent high cholesterol and high blood pressure and helps reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.
3. Healthy eating helps reduce the risk of developing obesity, osteoporosis, iron deficiency, and dental caries (cavities).

The Santa Cruz Juvenile Hall is also a school (Hartman High School) and has several classrooms. The school is overseen by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. The Juvenile Hall qualifies for the National School Lunch Program by meeting required and monitored nutritional guidelines, and receives financial reimbursement. The budgeted reimbursement for 2013-14 is \$30,855.

On its website, the California State Department of Education offers the following benefits of the program.

*“For children, the National School Lunch Program provides a nutritious meal that contains one-third of the recommended dietary allowance of necessary nutrients. For parents, the program offers a convenient method of providing a nutritionally balanced lunch at the lowest possible price. For schools, the program enhances children’s learning abilities by contributing to their physical and mental well being. Studies have shown that children*

*whose nutritional needs are met have fewer attendance and discipline problems and are more attentive in class.*<sup>[9]</sup>

A five-year study took place from 1997 to 2002 at Appleton, Wisconsin, Central Alternative High School.<sup>[9]</sup> A new meal plan was implemented that replaced fast food and soda drinks with healthy fresh food and low sugar drinks. Some of the findings were as follows:

1. Prior to the meal change, the school had so many problems with discipline and weapons violations that a police officer was added to the staff.
2. After the change teachers reported class disruptions and behavioral problems were greatly diminished.
3. Students commented that the food was fresh and tasted good
4. Adults at the school were able to function more as role models, and less as disciplinarians.
5. Academic performance improved.

The Santa Cruz Juvenile Hall serves meals that reflect the findings of the Wisconsin study. Juvenile Hall attempts to buy its food from local sources and cooks all its meals from scratch, free from additives associated with pre-packaged foods and supplements.

In order to be reimbursed by the School Lunch Program, the Juvenile Hall meals would need to be prepared separately from the meals for the other jails if the kitchens were consolidated. In addition, on-site meal preparation allows cooks the flexibility to create individual meals to meet any special dietary needs of residents, including vegetarian meals.

### **Report on Centralizing Kitchen Operations to the Rountree Facility**

On October 9, 2013, the *County of Santa Cruz Sheriff's Office Inter-Office Correspondence: Report on Centralizing Kitchen Operations to the Rountree Facility* was filed with its administrators. The study grew out of a need to expand the Main Jail's kitchen facilities. Originally designed to feed 92 inmates, the small kitchen now feeds roughly 500 people. Additionally, the aging kitchen is in need of maintenance and replacement. The Rountree Medium Security Jail has a larger and newer kitchen that is able to produce meals for approximately 1000 people per sitting.

The study initially considered including Juvenile Hall in the consolidation. Although Juvenile Hall is not mentioned in the final report, Sheriff's Office staff acknowledged that the Juvenile Hall kitchen was visited as part of their research. Those involved in the study say they envisioned transitioning to a new meal preparation and delivery system for the jails in approximately 10 years.

The study focused on problems facing the Main Jail facility. While the study points out the need for a long-term solution, it also recognizes that using Rountree poses its own logistical problems:

1. Though it is newer, the Rountree Facility kitchen is in need of structural repairs. Remodeling is needed if a new consolidated food delivery system is implemented (such as larger freezers, etc.).
2. Transporting food from Rountree to the other jail facilities in Santa Cruz County creates the potential for trucks to be delayed in traffic. This could pose a problem for Juvenile Hall in particular because it maintains rigid school, counseling, and meal schedules for its residents, and because it is farthest from Rountree.
3. Meals will have to be prepared earlier, and will require more inmates on the kitchen crew. This also will require more Corrections Officers to assist cooks in supervision of inmates.
4. Many residents at Juvenile Hall (as well as the Main Jail and Blaine Street facilities) have special dietary needs. With the constantly changing daily population, satisfying these needs is a significant issue.
5. Because of the various transportation issues, hot food will be held much longer, potentially extending the time between meal preparation and consumption beyond four hours.

A partial summary within the study reads, “This plan has considerable start up equipment costs and food cost per meal will rise, but the resultant operation will be safe and reliable. The Achilles heel will be the direct, daily reliance on inmate labor and the loss of food quality with the extended holding times.”<sup>[1]</sup>

## **Findings**

**F1.** The family style meal system is a major part of mentoring Juvenile Hall residents and is an important educational function.

**F2.** Freshly prepared, nutritious meals have been shown to decrease youth violence in schools, develop healthy bodies, and enhance academic achievement.

**F3.** The Juvenile Hall kitchen is currently in need of maintenance as well as a preventative maintenance plan.

**F4.** The cost per food tray at Juvenile Hall is comparable to the cost at the three adult jails.

**F5.** Juvenile Hall no longer uses residents in the kitchen for KP duty. This has resulted in an increased workload for the cooks and missed mentoring opportunities for the residents.

**F6.** The Sheriff’s Office Kitchen Centralization Study revealed many logistical problems that require further research before implementation.

## **Recommendations**

**R1.** The Sheriff’s Office Corrections Bureau should exclude the Juvenile Hall from its kitchen consolidation. (F1, F2, F4, F6)

**R2.** Juvenile Hall administrators should work with General Services to respond to current

maintenance needs and develop a preventative maintenance plan. (F3)

**R3.** Juvenile Hall administration should reinstate the KP duty schedule. (F1, F5)

## Commendation

The Santa Cruz County Grand Jury would like to commend the Juvenile Hall administrators and staff (particularly the cooks) for their dedication to our County’s young people. The three main cooks have over 30 years experience in the kitchen, and the many anecdotes not mentioned in this investigative report make it clear that they do not take their jobs, or the lives of the residents, for granted. The comment by the staff person who said “Good food equals love, concern, and support” echoed the sentiments of all the Juvenile Hall staff with whom we spoke.

## Responses Required

| <i>Respondent</i>   | <i>Findings</i> | <i>Recommendations</i> | <i>Respond Within/<br/>Respond By</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Santa Cruz County Sheriff-Coroner                           | F4, F6          | R1                     | 60 Days<br>7/15/14                    |
| Superintendent,<br>Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall          | F1, F2, F3, F5  | R1 - R3                | 90 Days<br>8/14/14                    |
| Probation Chief ,<br>Santa Cruz County Probation Department | F1, F2, F3, F5  | R1 - R3                | 90 Days<br>8/14/14                    |
| Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors                      | F3              | R2                     | 90 Days<br>8/14/14                    |

## Sources

### References

1. County of Santa Cruz Sheriff’s Office. October 9, 2013. Inter-Office Correspondence: “Report on Centralizing Kitchen Operations to the Rountree Facility.”
2. Applied Survey Research. 2013. Prevention Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency : “Santa Cruz County Status on Youth Violence Report. 2013 Data

Report.” Accessed 1/1/14.

<http://www.appliedsurveyresearch.org/storage/database/juvenile-justice/status-on-youth-violence/Status%20of%20Youth%20Violence%20Report%20-%20FINAL%20Reportv3.pdf>

3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2009. “School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth. Atlanta, GA.” Accessed 1/1/14.

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf>

4. Santa Cruz County Probation Dept. Received December 2013. “Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall Resident’s Orientation Booklet.”

5. County of Santa Cruz Detail of Financing Sources and uses, Governmental Funds, Fiscal Year 2013-14.

6. U.S. Department of Agriculture: Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. 2010. “Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010, to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC.”

7. CDC. 1998. “Recommendations to prevent and control iron deficiency in the United States.” MMWR 1998. 47:1-29.

8. California Dept of Education: National School Lunch Program. Accessed 1/1/14.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/nslp.asp>

9. Pure Facts Newsletter. October 2002. “A Different Kind of School Lunch.”

Accessed 2/14/14. <http://www.feingold.org/PF/wisconsin1.html>

## **Resources**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Nutrition-Facts-Adolescent and School Health (<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/nutrition/facts.htm>). Accessed 1/1/14.

Santa Cruz County Probation Department. October 2012. “Continuum of Juvenile Services.”

## **Site Visits**

The Grand Jury inspected the Juvenile Hall kitchen and dining hall. Members also inspected the Main Jail kitchen and observed the food delivery process.