

## Santa Cruz County Correctional Facilities: Are They Effectively Utilized and What Are the Options?

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### **Summary**

Santa Cruz County Correctional facilities are currently facing many challenges, including continued reduction in funding for staff, facilities and programs as well as the looming return of inmates from state prisons. Educational programs have been shown to reduce recidivism; however, there are no performance assessment tools in place to determine if the current programming is effective. In addition, the lack of measurements hampers the ability to prioritize programs and utilize declining funds in the most beneficial manner. These issues led the Grand Jury to investigate whether options and strategies exist to improve efficiency that may help improve program effectiveness, development of an efficient jail population distribution and provide adequate services to incarcerated individuals.

### **Definitions**

- **Capacity:** The number of inmates each detention facility was designed to hold (rated capacity) or the number of inmates that can safely be housed in the facility (maximum capacity).
- **Friends Outside:** A national non-profit organization providing services to incarcerated individuals.
- **Gemma:** A program provided by the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc., dedicated to preparing women in jail for their reentry into society and to reunite with their families. The program provides diverse life skills classes to help prevent the women from falling into the recidivism cycle.
- **Infirmary:** A healthcare unit set up and operated for the purpose of caring for inmates who need skilled nursing care but not in need of hospitalization or placement in a licensed nursing facility and whose care cannot be managed safely in an outpatient setting.
- **LVN:** An LVN is a Licensed Vocational Nurse licensed by the state to provide routine patient care. An LVN must be supervised by either an Registered Nurse or physician. The LVN is unable to provide medical assessments.
- **Medium Security:** A locked facility in a dorm-like setting, rather than individual cells, for inmates that do not pose a high security risk.
- **Minimum Security:** An unlocked facility for inmates who pose very little security risk.
- **“O” unit:** The observation unit that includes rooms within the medical unit where physically and mentally ill inmates are monitored by video and medical staff.
- **Recidivism:** Habitual or chronic relapse especially into criminal or anti-social behavior.
- **Registered Nurse (RN):** RNs are nurses that have been licensed by the State of California Board of Registered Nursing. RNs go to college for two to four years and must pass the National Council Licensure Examination in order to obtain licensure in California. They typically independently provide a wide range of complex health care in many types of settings.

- **Sally Port:** A secure, controlled entryway, as at a fortification or a prison. The entrance is usually protected in some way, such as with a fixed wall blocking the door which must be circumvented before entering, but which prevents direct enemy fire from a distance.
- **Sheriff's Treatment Program:** This is a program established in Santa Barbara County that is designed to help inmates who are serving time to eliminate their alcohol and drug use, establish a foundation in recovery and reduce their involvement with law enforcement. The program accommodates inmates at different levels of sentencing.
- **Title 15:** Regulations adopted by the State of California that set minimum jail standards for operation and administration of detention facilities covering classification of inmates, safety issues, educational programs, disciplinary guidelines and medical services.
- **Title 24:** Regulations adopted by the State of California that set minimum standards for the physical plant, furnishings and equipment for local correctional facilities.
- **Warrant Reduction Project (WRAP):** WRAP is a program developed by the Santa Cruz County Probation Department in conjunction with Friends Outside to reduce the number of released prisoners who may re-offend due to probation violations. The individuals with Friends Outside are also able to provide resources for peer and group support as well as aftercare management.

## **Background**

The correctional system in Santa Cruz County consists of four facilities: The Main Jail on Water Street, Rountree Medium and Rountree Minimum (which is currently only being utilized for day programs) in Watsonville, and Blaine Street behind the Main Jail which is a minimum security facility for women only. Over the years, there have been ongoing overcrowding issues in the Main Jail.<sup>[1]</sup> The Grand Jury decided to investigate how the Rountree Facility could be better utilized to assist in overcrowding as well as reintroducing medical services at the facility. In addition, we began to look at the educational programs that were offered at all of the facilities. How effective were they and, more importantly, did they help with the reduction in recidivism? Another area that came to our attention was Blaine Street and how it appears to be under utilized. The potential for increased jail populations exists due to the state's decision to send prisoners who have less than three-year sentences back to local facilities. The Grand Jury determined it is timely to explore options for improving program effectiveness, development of an efficient jail population distribution and provide adequate services to incarcerated individuals.

## **Scope**

Under California Penal Code Section 919 (b),<sup>[2]</sup> the Grand Jury is charged with inspecting the correctional facilities for the county on an annual basis to ensure they are in compliance with the California Correctional Authority and Standards contained in Title 15 and Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations. After conducting our inspections, we decided to investigate further potential strategies the correctional system could employ in their efforts to manage the County's jail population. The investigation concentrated on three main areas: jail population distribution, medical/dental services and the inmate program assessment/tracking process.

We used the following methods to gather our data:

- Jail Inspections
- Interviews with correctional staff
- Interviews with medical staff
- Interviews with inmates
- Interviews with program providers
- Researching programs/practices of other counties throughout California
- Distribution of jail populations

### **Investigation**

The Grand Jury’s intent was to provide a constructive report that could assist the County in addressing some of the chronic issues with its various correctional facilities.

#### **A. Jail Population**

We observed overcrowded conditions in the Main Jail and under-utilization of the capacity at both Blaine Street and Rountree Minimum Facility.

The Main Jail has a rated capacity of 311 inmates; however, the average number of inmates per month in 2009 was 336 and by 2010 it had increased to 350.<sup>[1]</sup> The Rountree Facility includes two separate buildings. One is designated for minimum security inmates and the other for medium security inmates. All minimum security inmates are housed in the medium security building at present and no inmates are being housed in the minimum security building. Blaine Street Women’s Facility is for minimum security inmates and has a rated capacity of thirty-two. For the past two years Blaine Street has not been utilized to its fullest with an average monthly population of twenty in 2009 and nineteen in 2010 (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Jail Population from 2008 - 2011<sup>[1]</sup>

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Rated Capacity</b>	<b>Average Monthly 2008</b>	<b>Average Monthly 2009</b>	<b>Average Monthly 2010</b>	<b>Average Monthly 2011 (Jan-Feb)</b>
<b>Main Jail</b> Maximum & Medium	311	314	336	350	339
<b>Rountree</b> Medium Minimum	96 162	61 97	51 77	93 n/a	94 n/a
<b>Blaine Street</b> Minimum	32	23	20	19	15

A variety of factors determine the security classification of an inmate, whether minimum, medium, or maximum. This classification is the basis for where an inmate will be housed. To make the decision, the intake officer will ask a series of questions about previous crimes, gang affiliation, medical issues/medications, etc. If inmates of any classification require specialized medication such as insulin or psychotropic drugs, they will automatically be housed in the Main Jail due to the lack of medical services at Rountree. In addition, if inmates are unwilling to give up their gang affiliation, they must be housed at the Main Jail even if their classification is minimum security. Women are housed at the Main Jail if they are classified as a maximum or medium security risk prisoner, or at Blaine Street if they are deemed a minimum security risk. Blaine Street has operated below capacity for the last several years.

## **B. Medical/Dental**

Currently, the Main Jail is the only facility that has an infirmary as well as medical personnel on-site. The Rountree Medium Facility does have an infirmary but, due to budget constraints, it was closed in 2008 and the medical staff and equipment were moved back to the Main Jail. The medical staff at the Main Jail consists of a medical director, a special services Lieutenant (responsible for court security, transportation and medical services), two Assistant Nursing Directors, eight Registered Nurses (RNs), three Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs), and three medical assistants. The Assistant Nursing Directors are also RNs which brings the total of RNs to ten at the Main Jail. In addition, the Main Jail has on-call staff to cover vacations of medical staff but they are not allowed to cover furlough time. The current furlough hours are 156 hours per person/per year which equates 19½ days per year for an eight-hour workday. The nursing staff is scheduled for eight-hour shifts, with coverage 24/7. The Assistant Nursing Directors work ten-hour day shifts, where they overlap one day a week to complete administrative tasks. The minimum nursing staff is one RN and one LVN for a shift.

An RN is required to assess all new intakes in the sally port/holding area to determine if they are medically able to be incarcerated or if they need to be transported to Dominican Hospital for further observation. This assessment consists of a quick interview history, to determine if they are currently taking any medication or have any psychological problems. The average number of inmate bookings per month at the Main Jail in 2009 and 2010 were respectively 1068 and 1061<sup>[3]</sup> equating to approximately thirty-five intakes per twenty-four hour period. The result is that most RN staff time is utilized to perform the required initial assessments with little time to assist in medication distribution or daily contact and care of the incarcerated.

Medication distribution is a large task and part of the RN and LVN staff responsibility. The Main Jail has two major medication distributions during the day with several other minor distribution periods, resulting in an average of 800 to 850 medications per major distribution. The LVN staff is allowed to distribute medications but they are not allowed to handle the initial inmate assessment process during the intake procedure.

Inmates that require extensive medical observation, primarily individuals undergoing detoxification, are housed in the "O" unit within the Main Jail, so the RN staff can monitor their vitals to evaluate the need to transport them to another medical facility.

In addition to medical services, the Main Jail provides dental services to inmates on a limited basis when warranted. The sentiment that dental services for the inmates needed improvement

came up repeatedly during our investigation. A majority of inmates are often in need of basic dental treatment upon entry into jail, due to prior limited access to dental services and poor lifestyle choices of inadequate nutrition and drug use. Furthermore, inmates' self-esteem is negatively impacted by their appearance resulting from poor dental hygiene, as was noted by several of our interviewees. Inmates must currently rely on outside dentists to perform more complex procedures such as root canals, because of the limited dental services available at the Main Jail. This entails the use of an officer and van to transport inmates to off-site dental facilities for their appointments, resulting in an increased security risk.

### C. Programs

Title 15 of the California Correction Standards Authority requires the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's office to provide a variety of offerings in the areas of education, recreation, and religion. Many types of programs offered are facility-dependent and gender-specific. Examples of these programs are the auto body classes offered only at the Rountree Minimum Facility, and Gemma, a life skills program for women at Blaine Street. GED classes leading to a high school equivalency diploma are offered at all four facilities, but at the Main Jail the classes are hit and miss. The Sheriff-Coroner's Office report from October 2010 stated Santa Cruz County combined jail facilities provided about 200 hours of programming per month to inmates.<sup>[4]</sup> The Main Jail has the largest number of inmates in the County and the inmates are not required to be enrolled in any educational programs. In contrast, Rountree and Blaine Street inmates are required to participate in programs and most of the classes are provided on a continuous basis.

To date there are **no** measurements in place to evaluate the programs offered in the jail facilities. A 2009 report about the inmate programs in Santa Cruz County stated the following: *"Evaluating program efficacy is elusive, as the measure most commonly used is recidivism: or the number of people who return to custody."* However, the report also noted that there is no consistent operational definition of recidivism.<sup>[5]</sup> In a recent *Good Times*<sup>[6]</sup> article Sheriff Wowak stated, "It's because we don't do a good enough job in teaching corrective behavior to keep them from coming back into the system."

Several different databases in the County – Health Services, Courts, Jails and Probation – do track a variety of information on inmates.<sup>[5]</sup> Unfortunately, these databases are not linked, preventing staff from cross-referencing the data and using this valuable information to assist in program development and evaluation. Furthermore, tracking of inmates' success upon reentry into society is anecdotal instead of being based upon data.

Santa Barbara County has developed a funded and successful substance abuse program called the Sheriff's Treatment Program (STP). The STP began in 1996 in the Male Honor Farm and has expanded to include participants in both male and female facilities. The STP has measurably reduced recidivism:

*National and Regional statistics state that 75% to 80% of all inmates incarcerated have committed their crime as a direct result of using chemical substances (alcohol and/or drugs). These statistics also say that 75% of those inmates will be re-arrested within the next two years for a similar offense... still as a result of alcohol and/or drug usage. We have*

*reduced the recidivism rate for the inmates participating in STP to approximately 35 to 40%.<sup>[7]</sup>*

The result of the reduced recidivism has contributed to fewer jail beds being occupied and reduction in law enforcement hours needed as well as dollars that can be utilized in other important areas.

In contrast, Santa Cruz County reduced funding by 90% for substance abuse programs from 2003 to 2009 and those funds were reallocated to other programs.<sup>[5]</sup> Unfortunately, we were unable to determine the impact that this reduced funding had upon the recidivism, since there is no mechanism to track this data in Santa Cruz County.

A study by the U.S Federal Bureau of Prisons<sup>[8]</sup> found a strong correlation between inmates' successful completion of educational programs and reduction of recidivism. Most of the programs were designed to supply tools for the inmates' reintroduction into society. Although the federal prison inmates in this study had a much longer length of stay than Santa Cruz County inmates, the data illustrates the strong correlation between educational programs and recidivism.

Another inmate educational program with proven success is a horticultural program in Sonoma County.<sup>[9]</sup> This program places emphasis on the practical use of horticultural techniques necessary to maintain five acres of ornamental flowers and trees, shrubs, and various annual plants, as well as a summer vegetable garden. The flowers and plants are sold to the public by appointment twice a year. Programs such as this could be used to provide produce within the jail system to save money and offer more nutritional options for inmates.

In Santa Cruz County a successful program that has been implemented is the Gemma Day program. Unfortunately, this program reaches only a limited number of inmates, as it is only available to women who are housed at the Blaine Street Facility. The participants are involved in a life skills curriculum which includes parenting, relapse prevention, job preparation and other classes. The classes are approximately twelve hours per week for nine weeks and released inmates are allowed to live at the facility for up to eighteen months.

Another area of concern we learned through our interviews was the lack of transitional support for released inmates. A need exists for additional support in the form of housing and jobs, as well as therapy for these individuals, such as the Gemma Residential program. We were made aware by volunteer counselors that many of the inmates have nowhere to go upon leaving the jail facility. Some transitional housing is available, but there is no process to ensure that all inmates are aware of how to sign up and take advantage of the housing.

Rather than reverting back to the environment that led to their incarceration, released inmates can choose to integrate back into society. To help them, the Santa Cruz County Probation Department, in conjunction with the non-profit organization Friends Outside, has instituted the Warrant Reduction Project (WRAP). The program provides assertive outreach to individuals who have failed to check in with their probation officer and are about to have a warrant for their arrest issued. In addition, the WRAP specialists are also able to assist individuals with peer and support groups and aftercare case management.

*Since inception of the program in December 2005, WRAP has averted over 390 warrants saving an estimated 15,600 jail bed days, with 10,140 at the main jail. Probation bench warrants issued has dropped by 62% since the program began in 2005. This successful innovation has been recognized by other jurisdictions who plan to implement similar programs.<sup>[10]</sup>*

## **Findings**

- F1.** The overcrowded conditions of Santa Cruz County Main Jail will be exacerbated with the transfer of state prisoners back to their originating county.
- F2.** Rountree and Blaine facilities are not fully utilized with respect to capacity.
- F3.** Security, staff and vehicles are required to transport inmates to the Main Jail for medical/dental needs due to limited medical services at the Rountree Facility.
- F4.** The lack of sophisticated dental equipment at the Main Jail requires secure transportation to off-site facilities for those inmates requiring more complex dental work.
- F5.** There are no program performance assessment tools, which prevents staff from evaluating the effectiveness of the educational programs.
- F6.** Due to a lack of consistent communication from jail personnel, not all inmates are aware of reentry programs offered at the time of their release.
- F7.** There are inadequate programs and resources to assist inmates in their reentry into society, such as job skill training, treatment programs, counseling, and transitional housing.

## **Recommendations**

Reduction of recidivism should be one of the primary goals for the correction system. Anything contributing towards that goal should be encouraged and continued.

- R1.** Conversion of the Blaine Street Facility into a transitional housing facility or consolidation with another facility should be considered.
- R2.** The Sheriff's Office should perform a cost-benefit analysis of re-opening the housing portion of the minimum security facility at Rountree to reduce overcrowding at the Main Jail.
- R3.** The Sheriff's Office should perform a cost-benefit analysis of providing medical services at Rountree, such as staffing a physician assistant, nurse practitioner or a physician on site, versus the current need for secured transportation costs and associated risks.
- R4.** The Sheriff's Office should perform a cost-benefit analysis of the acquisition and installation of more sophisticated dental equipment for the Main Jail versus the current method of securely transporting inmates off-site for dental care.

- R5.** The Sheriff’s Office should implement a mechanism to track the effectiveness of educational programs within the 2011-12 fiscal year.
- R6.** Based upon analysis of the tracking data, the Sheriff’s Office should modify their existing educational programs where warranted or consider implementing successful educational programs in use in other jurisdictions, such as Santa Barbara County.
- R7.** Inmates should be better informed of post-release resources, such as job skill training, treatment programs, counseling, and transitional housing.
- R8.** Santa Cruz County should perform a cost-benefit analysis of the implementation of additional programs and resources to assist inmates in their re-entry into society.

***Commendations***

The Grand Jury would like to commend the entire corrections staff of the county. They were extremely accommodating, informative, and helpful in providing information, arranging tours and interviews. Each interaction with staff revealed caring and compassionate individuals who were able to perform their duties diligently and provide strict parameters for expected behavior in a safe and orderly environment.

A special commendation should be given to the staff of Blaine Street. The average population has been reduced from thirty-three in 1998 when it was opened to fifteen in 2011, through the ongoing efforts of the dedicated staff.

***Responses Required***

<b><i>Respondent</i></b>	<b><i>Findings</i></b>	<b><i>Recommendations</i></b>	<b><i>Respond Within/ Respond By</i></b>
Santa Cruz County Sheriff	F1-F7	R1-R8	60 Days September 1, 2011
Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors	F1-F7	R1-R8	90 Days October 1, 2011

## Sources

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4. County of Santa Cruz Sheriff-Coroner's Office, Inmate Welfare Fund Report of Expenditures for FY 2009/2010, September 28, 2010, as presented to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors on October 26, 2010.
5. Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, Corrections Division, Inmate Programs, 2009, provided by a representative of the Sheriff's office on January 4, 2011
6. Hamel, Jessi, "Breaking Out," in *Good Times*, June 1, 2011, accessed 6 June 2011. <http://www.goodtimesantacruz.com/santa-cruz-news/santa-cruz-local-news/2563-breaking-out.html>
7. Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, Sheriff's Treatment Program, accessed: May 31, 2011, <http://www.sbsheriff.org/stp.html>
8. Office of the Inspector General, "The Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Release Preparation and Transitional Re-Entry Programs," Report No. 04-16, March 2004, accessed: May 31, 2011, <http://www.justice.gov/oig/reports/BOP/a0416/index.htm>
9. University of California, "Jail Industries Demonstration Garden," accessed: May 31, 2011. [http://ucanr.org/sites/scmg/Demo\\_Garden/](http://ucanr.org/sites/scmg/Demo_Garden/)
10. Santa Cruz County Probation Department, Jail Alternatives - Summary and Impact of Programs 2005-2010, accessed: May 31, 2011. <http://sccounty01.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/prb/rpts/JailAlt.pdf>

## Interviews

### *Administrators and personnel:*

Main Jail  
Rountree  
Blaine House

### *Administrators and personnel:*

County Board of Education  
Santa Cruz Adult Education  
Volunteer Program providers  
Health Services Agency