

# **Sacramento County Sheriff's Department Work Release Division**

## **Issue**

The Grand Jury evaluated the Sheriff's Department Work Release Division to determine whether the department is efficient, properly staffed and sufficiently promoted in the community.

## **Reason for Investigation**

California Penal Code section 919(b) requires the Grand Jury to inquire into the condition and management of county jails.

## **Method of Investigation**

The Grand Jury toured the Work Release Division facility and spoke to the following individuals:

- Administrative Supervisor, Work Release
- Supervisor and Field Coordinator, Work Project
- Sheriff's Deputies, Toy Project
- Finance and Collections Supervisors, Revenue Collections Unit
- Supervisor, Home Detention Program
- Supervisor, Revenue and Recovery Warrant Unit
- Civilian booking employee
- Inmate

The Grand Jury also reviewed:

- The Work Release Division Grand Jury Tour Booklet, August 23, 2006
- Sacramento County Sheriff's Department 2005-2006 Budget

## **Background and Facts**

In August 2006, the Grand Jury conducted its mandatory tour of this correctional facility. The staff and deputies interviewed were enthusiastic and motivated about their programs.

Since 1979, the Work Release Division has conducted Sacramento County's alternative sentencing program for inmates. It allows qualified inmates to serve their sentences on electronically monitored

home detention or by participating in community work projects. Inmate counts usually range from 1,800-2,000 on Work Project at any one time and Home Detention is consistently over 323, and increasing.

This alternative to incarceration allows the inmates to maintain employment and family relationships. The community benefits from inmate labor provided to groups such as school and park districts, churches, civic groups and other nonprofit organizations. The county benefits from reduced jail population and related incarceration. There is also a cost recovery benefit, as inmate participants are required to pay application and daily fees based on the applicant's ability to pay.<sup>1</sup>

### **Home Detention Program**

Home Detention is an alternative to traditional incarceration. Participants are allowed to live in their homes and are monitored by electronic equipment that tracks their movements. The equipment also conducts alcohol breath tests randomly throughout each day for those inmates with alcohol related offenses. All participants are also required to provide samples for drug analysis when requested.

### **Work Project Program**

The Work Project Program was created in 1978 to allow specific inmates, who are sentenced and considered low risk, to work in their community instead of serving time in Sacramento County jail facilities. Inmates are recommended by the sentencing judge to participate in the program. If accepted, they are assigned to one of more than 25 work sites throughout the county. They work one or more days per week on a work crew supervised by a deputy sheriff. Good time is computed into their sentence and release dates are adjusted accordingly.<sup>2</sup> Participants are monitored for their attitude, dress and productivity. Currently, 84 percent of inmates complete the program, and program failures are returned to jail.

There are more than 22 entities receiving the benefit of work performed by Work Project participants. The type of work ranges from cleanup after community events, weed abatement, landscape maintenance, trenching, fire breaks, trash pickup, homeless camp cleanup and debris removal. The California Penal Code limits the use of inmate labor to public domain and nonprofit entities. There are five public entity contracts for services, with each entity paying the cost of the deputy's supervision. A sheriff's deputy supervises all job sites.

Currently, one Work Project Field Operations sergeant provides supervision to 17 full-time deputy sheriffs and as many as 19 on call deputy sheriffs over a seven day week. These 19 on call deputy

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<sup>1</sup> California Penal Code section 1208.2(g) states that participation in these programs cannot be denied due to inability to pay. According to the Sheriff's Office, up to \$40 in cost per sentence day may be assessed per inmate on Work Project, and up to \$41.73 per day may be assessed to the inmate on home detention. (The actual cost of Work Project was last calculated at \$61.03 per work day, and \$41.73 per day for Home Detention.) After waivers due to "ability to pay," and a small failure rate, actual collections for fiscal year 2005-2006 were approximately \$30.20 per work day for Work Project and \$21.16 per day for Home Detention.

<sup>2</sup> "Good time" is time reduced from an inmate's sentence for participating in a work program. "Worktime credits shall apply for performance in work assignments and performance in elementary, high school, or vocational education programs." (Pen. C. §2933.)

sheriffs are scheduled from a changing roster of academy graduates and retired annuitants. Consequently, this sergeant may supervise 50 individuals annually. There is no other sergeant post in Sacramento County charged with supervising this many individuals over a seven day week.

As noted in the Work Release Division Grand Jury Tour Booklet, the Work Project has evolved into one of the largest alternative correctional programs in the nation.<sup>3</sup> The current average number of inmates participating in the program is over 1,800 a week. Without the program, more jail beds would be required. The benefit of the labor provided by inmate work crews is worth in excess of \$5 million per year to the community.

One little known fact about the Work Project Program is that during times of local/state emergency or crisis, this group can be mobilized quickly, and up to 450 people can be placed in an area within a short time period. For example, during the 2006 flooding, Work Project inmates assisted in sandbagging efforts in high water areas.

### **The Toy Project**

The Toy Project is a charitable function of the Sheriff's Department in which participants of the Work Project spend their sentence making toys, building furniture and refurbishing donated computers and bicycles. The Toy Project has operated since 1984 and has provided children in the community with over 60,000 gifts. In addition, it has refurbished and distributed over 5,300 bicycles. Last Christmas, food boxes and gifts were given to more than 1,200 families, with each child up to 17 years of age receiving an average of three gifts.

Although the Toy Project emphasizes the winter holiday season, it also fills special requests throughout the year from individuals and families in need. These requests come from agencies such as the Fulfill-A-Wish Foundation, Mustard Seed School, Omni Program, River Oaks Center for Children, Sacramento Children's Receiving Home, Trinity Foster Care, Wind Youth Services and other schools and organizations throughout the community.

There are several sources of funds underwriting the Toy Project. Inmate work crews participating in the Work Project collect recyclables while doing roadside cleanup. The revenue generated from recyclables is donated to the Toy Project. Also, 10 – 15 employees of the Work Release Division volunteer once a week at a local bingo hall. From the efforts of these volunteers, approximately \$600 a week is donated to the Toy Project. Partnerships with organizations such as YES (Youth Education Sports), Heald College and the Salvation Army help make Toy Project items available to children throughout the Sacramento region. The Toy Project serves as an outreach program for members of the Sheriff's Department as they work to build strong ties with the Sacramento community.

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<sup>3</sup> The Work Project Program has a current annual budget of approximately \$6 million and generated approximately \$3.7 million in fee revenues in fiscal year 2005-2006. The Home Detention Program has an annual budget of approximately \$3 million per year, and generated approximately \$1.2 million in fiscal year 2005-2006.

## **Power Program**

The Power Program is a community correctional program that helps offenders reintegrate into the community. This innovative program also offers the offenders something tangible, increases self-esteem and encourages compliance with the Sheriff's Department alternative custody programs.

The Power Program offers educational and pre-employment skills to offenders while serving their sentence on Work Release. A wide range of resources is available such as job training programs operated by the federal government, Sacramento Employment Training Administration, California Employment Development Department and Job Club (operated by the County Department of Human Assistance).

## **Problem Oriented Policing (POP)**

The POP officer is responsible for meeting with community members, schools, parks, churches, Sheriff Service Centers, and nonprofit community based organizations. The POP officer identifies and prioritizes work that could be accomplished in the community and coordinates with other community contacts and the Work Project to get the work done.

The POP partners with the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office Multi-Agency Graffiti Intervention Committee to identify areas affected by graffiti vandalism. Once affected areas are identified, the POP officer utilizes Work Release participants to remove graffiti and/or repaint the blighted areas. Graffiti removal is also provided to the elderly or financially challenged individuals at no cost. To date, POP has worked throughout the County of Sacramento in parks and trailway systems, wetland preserves and nature areas, historical buildings, memorial gardens, abandoned residential lots, churches, schools, parking accesses in the delta and roadways.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding 1.** There is inadequate staffing in Work Project Field Operations. The Work Release Division has requested an Additional Growth Request for a position in this project five times since 2002, but the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors has denied its request due to budgetary restraints.

**Recommendation 1.** One additional Work Project Field Operations sergeant must be allocated to address this workload. This sergeant would share in the supervision of up to 36 deputies per week.

**Finding 2.** The Sheriff's Department Toy Project is a valuable asset to the community. With little public promotion or advertisement, the Toy Project provides much needed help to Sacramento's families in need. The Toy Project is a nonprofit 501c(3) organization which allows corporations and private persons to make tax deductible donations for equipment and materials in order for them to continue their mission to serve families and children in our community.

**Recommendation 2.** Both the Sheriff and the county should facilitate increased funding for the advertisement and promotion of this exceptional program.

### **Response Requirements**

**Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to both the findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Sacramento Superior Court by October 1, 2007, from:**

- **Sacramento County Sheriff**