

Jail Observer Program
in the
Office of Human Relations
for Santa Clara County

CY2014 Annual Report

Kate Jones JD, Coordinator



“...Your effort to reach out to me...really touched me, and reassured that people do care.”

Thank you letter from Main Jail Caller.

“Thank you once again for your very insightful and prompt support. I don't mean to take up so much of your time, but I just simply cannot watch this unfold. If it's happening to me and my son, it's happening to all the other families in Main Jail South as well. It is not only horribly painful for the families but no doubt very detrimental to the inmates. I just can't let it go without comment/ complaint.”

Email from parent of young first-time offender housed in Main Jail South.

Jail Observer Program

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Acknowledgements

The Jail Observer Program of the Office of Human Relations would like to acknowledge the inmates, their family members and friends, and health care and jail staff in discussing difficult and sometimes intensely personal concerns regarding the function of our county jail system. Their decision to trust a stranger's promise of confidentiality in a highly regimented environment required courage and enabled this program to support best practices and the humane function of a large incarceration department.

Kate Jones, J.D.
Program Coordinator

Santa Clara County
May 27, 2015

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Executive Summary

The 24 year old Jail Observer Program (JOP) provides a neutral office focused on the human rights of inmates and supporting best practices by the Department of Correction (DOC). It looks to the U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners as an independent guideline for inmate welfare and to the International Ombudsman Association for ethical best practices of this ombudsman-style office. The program operates under an MOU between the DOC, Office of Human Relations (OHR) and the Human Relations Commission (HRC), most recently signed in 2014 (Attachment A).

A key value of this program is its independence from the DOC. Inmates and their loved ones are reassured to know that someone outside the DOC is tracking inmate complaints and communicating with DOC administrators on complaint trends. Further, first-time suspects and offenders often need information on how to navigate this new and confusing environment. One year in jail may be referred to as ‘short’ in criminal law circles, but businesses, jobs, homes, transportation and child custody can all be lost in that one year hiatus while waiting on a sluggish legal system.

The JOP functions primarily by confidentially answering free phone calls from inmates at all 3 facilities and posting questions to jail and Custodial Health Services (CHS) administrators when the caller authorizes such disclosure. JOP staff enjoys the privilege of a security clearance that allows for unescorted movement around the jail facilities, which allows prompt in-person follow up when a caller appears to be in unusual distress. JOP staff coordinates HRC jail tours several times a year, visiting each facility and reports to the HRC Justice Review Committee (JRC) monthly. Annual reports of calendar year activities are submitted to the Public Safety and Justice Committee of the Board of Supervisors. This is the first such annual report.

Reasons for calling the JOP fall into 6 main categories:

1. Facility environment problems,
2. Legal assistance or information request,
3. Medical care or medication issues,
4. Mental health medical care issues,
5. Officer treatment and
6. Other, which is further detailed below under Statistics.

Areas of primary concern in 2014, based on calls and tours, are:

1. Equitable resources for female inmates,
2. Mental health care for all inmates, and
3. Living conditions in Main Jail South.

The DOC took an important first step for the unique needs of female inmates by creating a dedicated lieutenant position to bring best practices to that unit, but physical plant improvement and educational resource availability are still much needed. Female inmates do not have GED classes because they cannot meet the minimum class size of 12 students, yet they are typically the main source of child support their offspring receive. It will be of signal importance to see the dedicated lieutenant position is re-staffed after its current incumbent rotates out.

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Mental health care (MHC) services are organized. MHC staff Ms. Jones has spoken with are conscientious and knowledgeable. But like CHS, they are understaffed and under-resourced, (MGT of America, Dec 2014, pp. 250-251). With 200 inmates under special management scattered over 3 facilities and tens of acres, they cannot operate with efficiency. Filling any empty position codes on a priority basis could help, based on the benefits seen after an additional dentist was hired. After an additional dentist was hired, calls about dental problems plummeted.

Main Jail South (MJS) living conditions are probably the worst in the jail. Women's W1 offers the only real contender for that assessment. MJS also offers some of the worst, most stressful, working conditions for county employees, thanks to the failing or inadequate plumbing, sewage and HVAC. The current work to replace this building is essential. The problem is that replacement will take several years. Meanwhile, some segregation cells deny inmates any outdoor program time (so no fresh air or natural light) and most inmates in MJS lack assets such as warm bathing water or regularly available hot pot water that the majority of inmates value so much.

Program Development

The JOP was established in 1990 to ensure the human rights of county jail inmates. A dedicated toll-free direct phone line at all facilities for inmates to call the OHR front desk was established around 1992 to ensure any inmate could reach JOP resources. The program was loosely organized with informal communication, no written reports, no independent standards identified to follow and no formal neutrality training for staff. There was no written public outreach beyond the 2 word description in the back of the Inmate Orientation and Rulebook that read “Human Relations” and the toll-free phone list posted at inmate program phones.

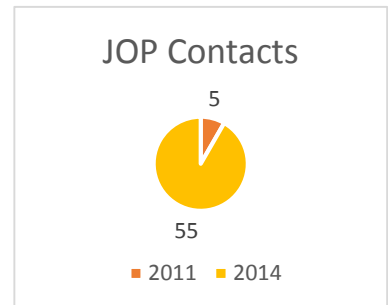
This County Executive staff position requires that the incumbent meet jail security clearance standards high enough to be allowed free, unescorted movement through jail facilities, within applicable safety restrictions.

JOP revitalization began in 2009 when retirement led to staffing changes. OHR’s Manager Ms. McKee-Stovall supervised the program personally for a year until new staff (Kate Jones) was available to take over in 2011. Ms. McKee-Stovall adopted the U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners as a guideline to reasonable treatment of inmates.

The current coordinator, Kate Jones, J.D., completed 20 hours of training with the International Ombudsman Association (<http://www.ombudsassociation.org/Home.aspx>) in October 2012 to establish standards of neutral behavior for JOP staff. This is the same training relied on by the Juvenile Welfare Ombudsman Office for its staff and establishes an independent, neutral Code of Ethics for organizational ombudsmen.

Recent program advances include:

- JOP increased tenfold its ability to serve the jail community discreetly and efficiently since 2011. When Ms. Jones entered the program JOP’s contact list held 5 names with phone numbers. Staff now has over 55 pertinent contacts in the DOC and related CHS offices.
- Program recordkeeping upgraded in May 2013 from a simple spreadsheet to a detailed database which allows more efficient demographic and topic reporting.
- In 2014 JOP designed and printed the first JOP brochure in both English and Spanish. See Attachment B. The program established its first connection with the jail facility maintenance office and arranged for the toll-free inmate line to ring directly at the JOP staff desk.
- Community and family members reach the JOP by dialing staff directly at 408.792-2346 or through OHR’s general number. Newly established is the easily recognized email address: JOP@ohr.sccgov.org, included on the JOP brochure front page.
- JOP staff has made 10 visits to Elmwood (Men’s and Women’s) and 11 to Main Jail over 4 years while each facility was under the direction of 3 different captains,
- Current staff identified and began attending Committee meetings relating to the DOC, namely:
 - ✓ DOC reports to PSJC,
 - ✓ IWF quarterly reports,
 - ✓ Reentry Program reports and
 - ✓ CHS reports on the DOC service contract.



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The Human Relations Commission (HRC) has given varying levels of support to the JOP through the decades. Currently the Justice Review Committee tours each facility several times a year and receives monthly verbal status reports from the JOP staff.

Current Status – in 14 hours weekly, JOP does:

- Enjoy direct connections with pertinent authority
 - For custodial health services including mental health,
 - Main Jail, Elmwood Men's and Elmwood Women's and
 - Chaplaincy at both sites,
- Understand assignment rotations in the DOC,
- Mail the JOP brochures to inquiry messages from inmates and community members,
- Receive direct phone calls from inmates at all facilities directly at coordinator's desk,
- Connect with community and family members who contact the JOP, individually and through DeBug, a local non-profit agency,
- Maintain the VistaShare database for tracking calls, complaints and ideas, and
- Provide a minimum of one calendar year annual report to the Public Safety and Justice Committee, with additional reports as may be requested by the DOC administration.

Actions in 2014:

- Coordinated two jail tours for JRC of HRC, one half-day tour of Main (North & South) and one full day tour of Elmwood, visiting both Men's & Women's in the second half of 2014. Earlier tour plans were cancelled when HRC suffered a rash of unfilled seats;
- Personal "eyes on" comparison of high need inmate's complaints to JOP with DOC grievance cards;
- Visited callers from all sites (Main South, Main North, Elmwood Men's and Elmwood Women's) to determine the appropriate response level for an unusually distressed caller. Visits require a minimum half-day of staff time, plus follow up with appropriate parties;
- Originated the first JOP brochure, designed for inmate convenience with writing space and heavier weight paper for sturdiness (Attachment B);
- Attended or monitored public meetings and reports on the Inmate Welfare Fund, the DOC and Custodial Health Services to incarcerated patients;
- Wrote informal Table of Contents to the Inmate Orientation and Rulebook, which is 46 closely filled pages long. The sheet is sent to callers with questions about the Rulebook to help them find the information they need (Attachment C);
- Received over 280 calls;
- Assisted 148 inmates;
- Assisted family and community members with questions and concerns about their loved ones;
- Alerted administration to rumors among inmates of Ebola running rampant in a neighboring county;
- Raised level of plumbing, boiler and HVAC repairs in Main Jail South – original 50 year old faucets replaced, blocked gas line to hot water boiler repaired, multiple leaks identified and addressed; and
- Received thank you note from inmate caller, emailed thanks from parents as well as telephoned verbal thank yous.

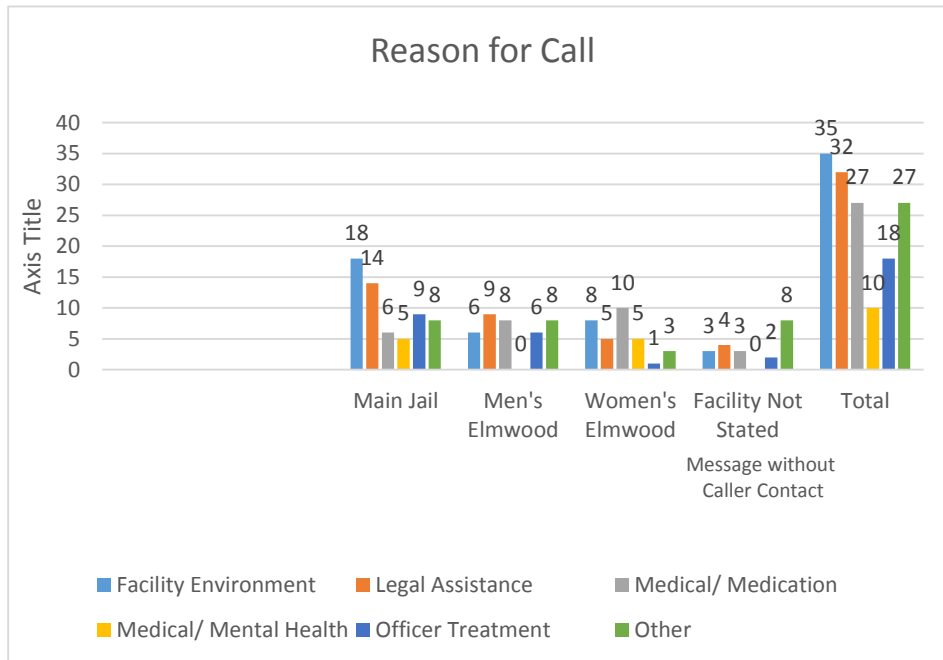
Call Statistics

Inmates reach the JOP by the toll-free phone #37, identified by the brief label “Human Relations.” Family members reach the JOP by dialing staff directly at 408.792-2346 or through OHR’s general number. Newly established is the easily recognized email address:

JOP@ohr.sccgov.org.

The greatest number of calls regard the jail facility environment, half of which originated from the Main Jail, primarily from Main Jail South.

Requests for legal assistance stand in second place, with callers asking for information in both criminal and civil matters. Inmate legal research service appears to be buried treasure to many inmates, especially first timers.



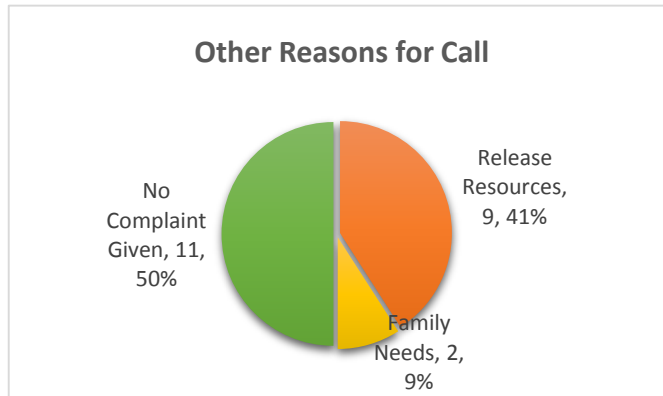
When combined, medical care calls – physical health, dental care and mental health – total the highest level of concerns. Primary concerns given are long waits for care, especially mental health and dental appointments, with extra worry and confusion arising from miscommunication. There are also ongoing complaints of excessive charges for requesting follow-up medical care, though this may be another example of miscommunication between nurses and inmates.

Officer treatment of inmates is a recurring source of calls. Reports of unnecessary rough handling and verbal insults occur regularly, although with caller acknowledgment that only some correctional officers are unnecessarily rough. Many of the reports come from inmates with mental health problems or in sections where security cameras are few or non-existent. The DOC does require an extra 40-hour training for COs working in the mental health unit.

The catchall “Other” reasons inmates call the JOP fall into 3 primary categories:

1. Release Resources. Most of these calls asked about housing, either after release or for placement into transitional programs. There is a lack of information about Transitional Housing Units (e.g. names, services, available spaces, how/when a designee will enter the program). The multi-layered approval process for transitional housing is confusing and frustrating to inmates eager to try to rebuild their lives.
2. Family Needs. While only 2 calls were specifically about family needs, this was a recurring theme in other calls, especially from women inmates. In these calls, Ms. Jones noted that men called primarily about their elderly parents, but women called about their children.

3. No Complaint Given. A problem with all calls is the fact that all outgoing inmate phone calls may be monitored. There are signs near the toll free phones reminding inmates of this fact. Callers also indicate they fear being overheard by other inmates. This translates into a pattern of incomplete or inaccurate reporting of names, times and locations, as callers say they fear reprisal from other inmates or staff. As a result, follow through investigation, assistance or resolution is virtually impossible.



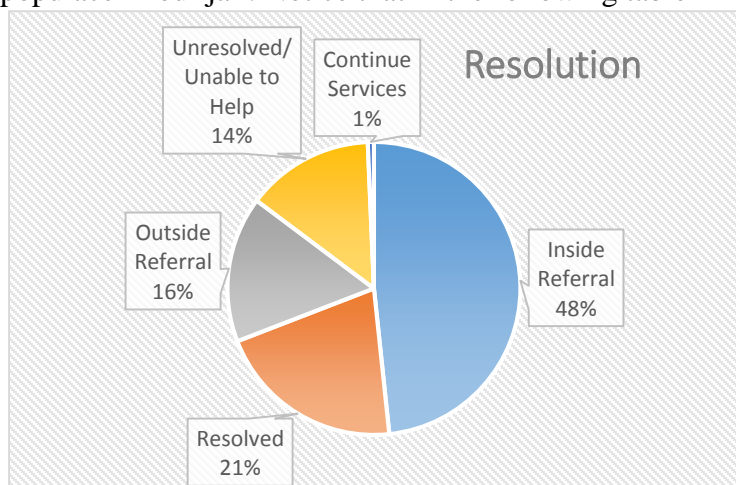
Resolution of Calls. Nearly half of 148 calls were resolved by internal referral to either the DOC or CHS.

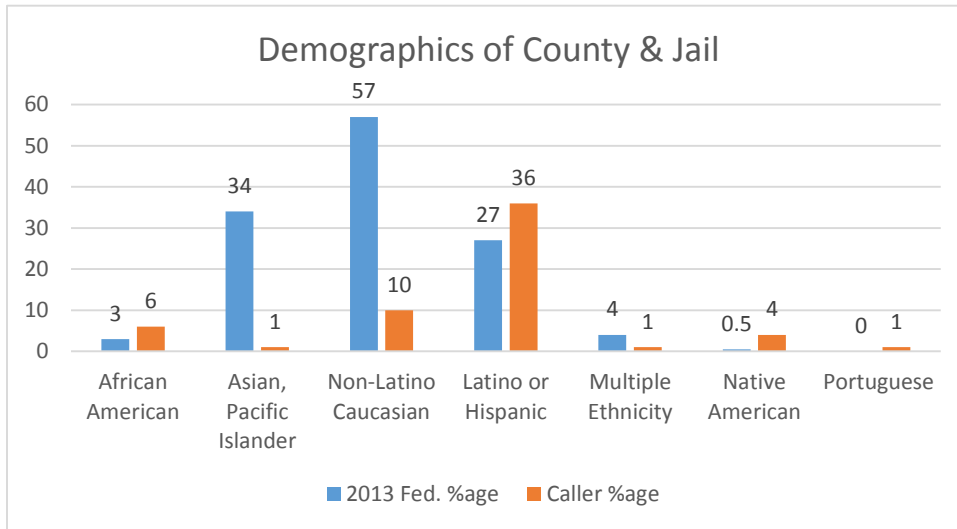
More than one in five of calls were resolved directly with information provided by the JOP, sometimes provided in conversation, sometimes by hard copy mail.

Approximately 16% of calls were resolved by outside referral to non-governmental agencies, including community-based human rights organizations, state and federal agencies. Of the unresolved matters (14% of calls), they are either outside the authority of the JOP MOU or no reason for the call is given, preventing resolution.

Continued services refers to one call active over the period of December 2014 and into January 2015. Calls with prolonged response periods typically included the topics of mental health, dental care and MJS facility condition calls. Dental appointment calls virtually disappeared after an additional dentist joined staff in 2014.

Demographics. Our county is highly diverse. Based on those callers who answered JOP’s ethnicity question (90 of 148), so is the populace in our jail. Notice that in the following table one caller identified as Portuguese American. Although our county has a distinct community of Portuguese origin, federal census data tracks this community under the vague label of “Latino/Hispanic,” despite some objection nationally by members of the Portuguese community. To match JOP caller self-identified ethnicity to federal census data, the 1% attributed to the Portuguese American community should be added to the 36% of the Latino or Hispanic American community percentage for a total of 37%.





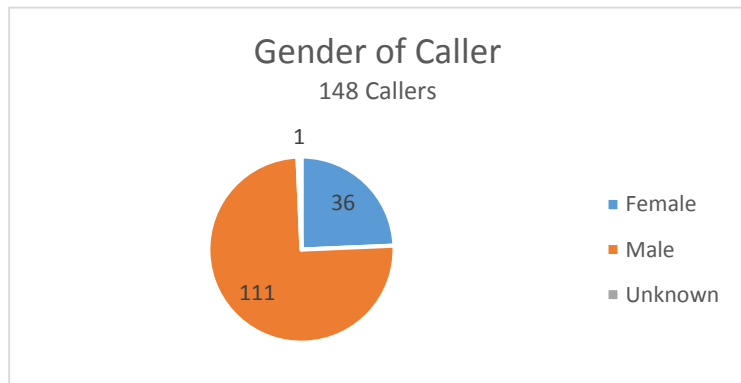
Caller ethnicity does not reflect the county’s ethnic distribution. The demographics table shows the ethnicity provided by 90 of JOP inmate callers in orange. The blue bar shows the ethnicity reported by the Census Bureau for the county as a whole in 2013, the most

recent available census figures when this report was written.

Varied factors may determine whether a person is willing to call an office vaguely identified as “Human relations.” Callers reported trying the Human Relations toll free number out of curiosity, at the recommendation of another inmate and even at the recommendation of a custodial officer. The JOP line also receives and helps callers who are not English proficient

Gender of Callers.

Gender breakdown of callers is about 24% women, 75% men and 1 caller who spoke so softly in their message that their gender was not identifiable.

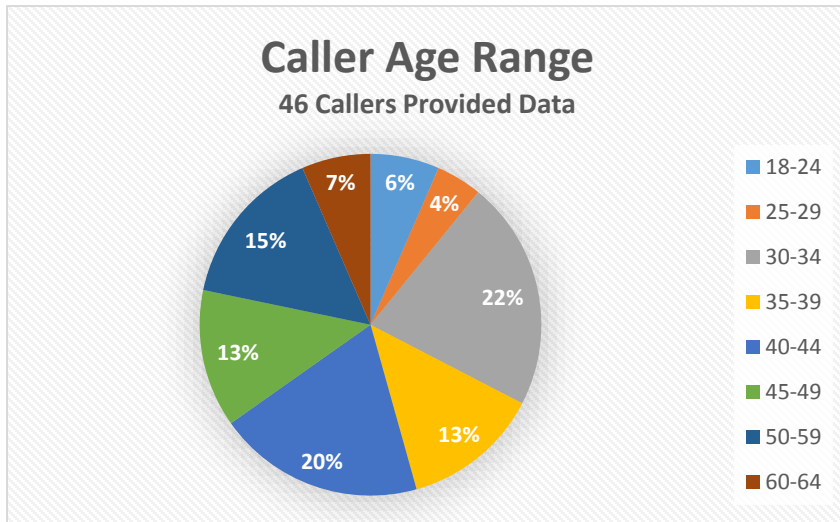


The number of calls from women is higher than their typical 14% jail population portion. National research suggests multiple reasons for this higher level of contact.

Incarcerated women are more likely to be custodial parents, suffer chronic and/or communicable medical problems, and have symptoms of current mental health problems than incarcerated men. (The Sentencing Project, 2011) These heightened family connections and health care concerns are consistent with the nature of calls the JOP receives from women inmates. Multiple women callers have contacted the JOP worried about the status and safety of their minor children. This expresses in the state pattern that 10% of children with incarcerated mothers will be placed in foster care, as compared to 2% of children going to foster care who have incarcerated fathers. (California Research Bureau, 2007) Recent work in this county to empower foster care children success emphasizes how serious this loss of parental care is for the fostered child.

The JOP has received community calls, inmate calls and has personally observed the differences between women’s resources (library, exercise spaces and GED availability) from those of

minimum camp men inmates. These disparities require deeper analysis than practical in this report.



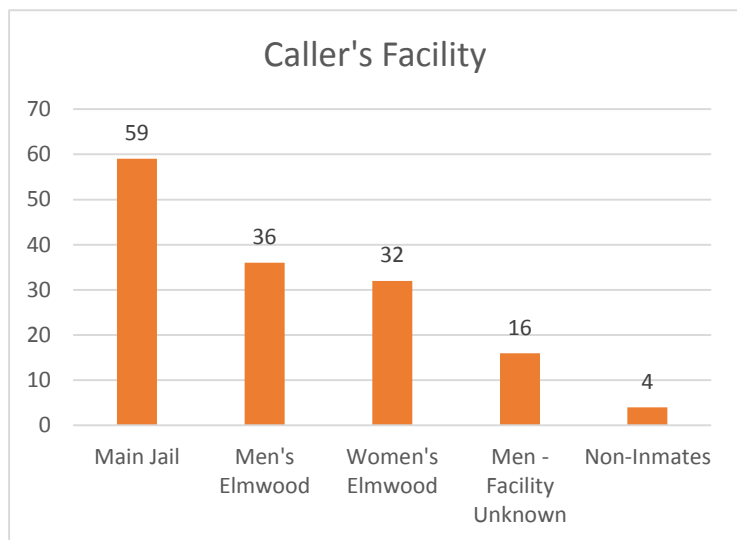
Age Range of Callers. Over one-third (35%) of age-identified callers were 45 years or older, although this age group constitutes roughly 20% of the total jail population.

This higher rate of resource use fits the widely acknowledged trending that older inmates require more and different resources than inmates 18 – 35 years of age.

Many inmates have lived resource-poor, unhealthy lives, so that they are reported to need senior health care as much as 10 years earlier than the general civilian populace. (Abner, 2006)

Caller's Facility

Nearly 40% of calls originated from the Main Jail, almost all of those from MJS. The MGT Report discussed the many problems of the MJS building. Excluded from its assignment was exploration of the impact the old building has on the people living and working there.



Main Jail South

Bad plumbing appears in complaints to the JOP and the DOC as used (that is, filled or soiled) toilets that cannot be flushed because either the water lines or the sewage lines are not working. People with arthritis or chronic back problems find cold or tepid water when they are scheduled to shower. When an inmate wants to add bulk or warmth to his diet with commissary purchased items, there is rarely hot pot water available for reconstitution. Support staff are regularly displaced from an administrative work area because of flooding or other plumbing problems that intrude into their work space. Unfortunately, repairs do not always remove the smell.

The HVAC system bakes some inmates and leaves others shivering 24 hours a day. While staff have the chance to leave these uncomfortable environments when they complete their 12-hour shifts, it must impact their stress and fatigue level. Inmates have no relief. Inmates express their frustration and discomfort by attempting to moderate the system with paper blocks on vents, willfully blocking drains and propping faucets open. Fleets and Facilities is working on

developing a preventive tool for blocked toilets that cannot come soon enough. While these behaviors only worsen the situation, with many residents suffering from communication and mental health problems, it is not surprising.

Under Captain Hoyt, some valuable improvements have been effected at MJS:

1. Established on-line reservations for visiting MJS inmates, allowing people to visit who were unable to spend a day waiting in line to obtain a visitor's time slot. The online system has created its own set of problems, which continue to be addressed;
2. Finessed the existing Main Jail budget to increase the total number of visit times available for MJS inmates;
3. Before online reservations were available, visitors would line up outside the jail the night before to reserve one of the inadequate number of visitor spaces available for MJS inmates. The Captain opened up the lobby so that would-be visitors could wait inside out of the weather; and
4. Program areas for fresh air and exercise for MJS inmates were reconfigured to allow the outside time to occur during normal waking hours.

Observations based on tours and inmate contacts (visits, calls and letters):

- Each **tour** taken has shown staff a new area of a facility. The repeated areas offer a chance to compare conditions with previous visits, while new areas offer insight into changing methods, needs and the extended detail that incarceration requires. A first tour can give the impression of a solid overview of the facility's functions and spaces. Additional tours make it clear that Santa Clara County Jail is much too large to fully experience in a single tour of either site.
- Many **human hours** are wasted as people stare at the walls or are assigned daytime bunk hours. Inmate requests to be more productive include:
 - Programming classes,
 - Religious gatherings,
 - Opportunity to work,
 - Better availability of books, including Spanish books and Spanish Bibles, especially in medium and high security units and
 - Early Release and Transitional Housing Programs.
- 'State' inmates (present in the jail based on **AB109**) are asking for:
 - Paid work, based on state practice and longer term of incarceration,
 - One-way computer access to receive emails, pursue education or read current events,
 - Fresh air and sunlight for their 3 minimum hours a week outside their cell, and
 - Access to pen refills (style selected for security) used with paper wrapping for letters and journals. Pencil writing is difficult to read for older family members and hard for recipients to scan to share or save online.
- **Phone call costs** are exacerbated by the short 15-minute period of one call. The practical reality is that an inmate redials and continues the conversation, so cut-off of each call

only serves to disproportionately increase phone call cost and to benefit wealthier inmates, who can better afford to redial.

- **Female inmates** are shorted in library environment, life skill programming, formal education and physical assets in housing. The reactivated building W1 was barely mentioned for replacement in the MGT Report, although it was built in the same era as MJS. When W1 was out of commission, requests to tour it were refused in 2011/2012 based on safety concerns. Once re-opened, inmates reported smelly, even backed up shower drains and bugs around the drains.

Limited services to women can result in heavier negative community consequences than limited services to men. In state prisons 64% of mothers lived with their minor children but only 47% of fathers did so. Correlative data supports the real-life impact: Bureau of Justice statistics show 10% of children of incarcerated mothers are placed in foster care, while only 2% of children of incarcerated fathers enter the foster system. Among ethnically identified women callers to the JOP, 77% were of Latino/Hispanic, mixed race or African American background. These ethnic groups are much more likely to experience single mother households and corresponding poverty-driven challenges than in non-Latino single mother households. (Jonathan Vespa, August 2013).

- **Main Jail South.** Two distinctive groups of calls originate from MJS: 1. from inmates placed in crowded multi-occupancy cells and 2. From inmates in newly hardened high security, isolation cells. Some of the multi-occupancy cells are double-bunked cells with oppressively low, damaged ceilings. The high security cells are isolation cells that deny inmates all access to fresh air or sight of the sky. MJS inmates consistently report miserable ventilation (on both ends of the extreme), health concerns related to malfunctioning plumbing (water and sewage issues), frustration with boredom, reporting no TV for a month, lack of books or other reading material and no educational program classes. Officer roughness complaints come most often from Main Jail South, although such complaints are often about 1 officer or 1 rotation team rather than a general complaint.
- Custodial **mental health care** concerns prompt at least 10% of the JOP calls. Studies indicate 16% as a conservative estimate of incarcerated populations suffering mental health concerns. (Treatment Advocacy Center , May 22, 2010) During tours commissioners have met mental health care patients (at the patient's initiative) and been privileged to see some of their care records. Staff has been contacted by and met with inmates at all 3 sites (Main Jail, Elmwood Men's and Elmwood Women's). Some of these visited patients have been in and out of the 8th floor, but not at the time of the JOP visits. The 8th floor of Main Jail North is the dedicated mental health services and housing unit for the entire jail (Elmwood and Main). CHS staff has told JOP staff that about 200 inmates are under mental health care heightened monitoring outside the 8th floor. These men and women are housed throughout the jail facility because CHS lacks adequate dedicated housing for the real needs of their patients. This means they are held to the same behavior standards as healthy patients, which may explain some of the calls the JOP receives about rude and rough officer behavior. At current staff levels, it is impractical to send every officer through the special 40-hour training for working with mental health patients, despite the fact that every officer will encounter them.

Meetings and interviews with mental health patients have brought out the impacted level of mental health care available in our jail. Reports indicate that MHC positions are chronically unfilled. Per the MGT Report (pp. 250, 251), mental health care staff working conditions make filling empty codes a challenge. A direct impact on patient care results. Mental health care is so slow that some patients must wait 2 months for an updated assessment and updated psychotropic prescriptions. Most psychotropic medications are meant to be withdrawn slowly to avoid serious secondary side effects. Abrupt psychotropic medication change makes it harder for the patient to adequately manage his or her behavior and increases stress on surrounding inmates and staff alike. It increases the cost of the stay as overstressed patients break rules and are moved to higher security housing. Statistically these patients will stay for a longer period than non-patients incarcerated for like charges. (Treatment Advocacy Center , May 22, 2010)

The JOP supports the MGT Report recommendations regarding mental health care plant resources. “The mental health care staff office areas are extremely cramped with three staff occupying a space sized for one. The doctor’s office is a former small storage closet. Additional storage space is needed. A proper office should be provided for the doctor, and work cubicles should be provided for staff.” (MGT of America, Dec 2014)

Physical plant improvements offer only a part of the options to improve inmate mental health care. CHS, like the DOC, is slowed by time-consuming, inadequate information systems that do not efficiently link with the primary county health information system. This need is also raised in the MGT Report.

- **Classification** is a regular source of calls from inmates and parents of young adult suspects. The classification system is cited in the MRG Report as needing validation because it is dependent on a dated, overly complex system that allows too much subjectivity to creep into classification decisions. Of concern is placement of very young adult first-time suspects (18 – 22 years of age) in MJS with older jail-savvy inmates. Families report seeing this accelerate the institutionalization and criminalization of first time offenders.

Conclusion

Aggregation of the JOP calls, tours and inmate visits in 2014 direct attention to:

1. The ongoing educational, facility and unique programming needs of women inmates, which the DOC began to address when it coded a lieutenant specifically to Elmwood Women’s unit,
2. Mental health care delays create risks within the jail system and increase incarceration costs. They can be ameliorated by ensuring full staffing, improving or replacing the CHS information system and establishing more mental health care housing, supported by best practice behavior management resources for patient inmates. The MGT Report recommendations on staff workspace may improve hiring success.
3. Main Jail South has been an increasingly difficult management problem for the DOC for some years, based on earlier efforts to replace or rehabilitate it. The current effort to replace it is good news. But replacement is a multi-year process; meanwhile inmates of varying security levels continue to be housed in its deteriorating facilities.

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Attachments:

- A Memorandum of Understanding between the DOC, OHR and HRC signed May 30, 2014
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