

CIVIC SUCCESSES: EXCEPTIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

The 2014/2015 San Diego County Grand Jury conducted many investigations and site visits. Often the Grand Jury found agencies performing in an outstanding manner or providing noteworthy community services. Their actions deserve recognition. This report highlights six instances where exceptional public service has been found:

- County of San Diego for the County Water Park – A Welcome Beautification
- Voices for Children – Amazing Support for Children in Need
- County Water Authority for its Capital Improvement Program – Coping with Drought
- County District Attorney, Health & Human Services (HHS), and Aging and Independent Services (AIS) for the Elder Abuse Program – Aggressive Efforts Combat a Too-Pervasive Crime
- County of San Diego, Probation Department for Community Transition Center – A Bridge to Better Lives
- County of San Diego for San Pasqual Academy – A Foster Care First

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The Grand Jury ordinarily reports results of investigations together with recommendations to public entities or special districts. The Grand Jury also evaluates a complaint, and sometimes determines the public agency's actions were satisfactory or better. Such Grand Jury investigations are typically closed with no public announcement of the outcome. The Grand Jury found the agencies listed above performed in a manner that went well beyond community expectations and simple compliance with applicable policies and procedures.

The Grand Jury's goal in providing positive feedback is to foster an atmosphere of cooperation in a mutual effort to improve government services to the community.

PROCEDURES

In the course of its work, the Grand Jury conducted interviews with representatives of a wide variety of agencies. Other people with knowledge of the issues, actions, and circumstances involved were also interviewed. The Grand Jury collected documentary information relevant to the study and conducted site visits when appropriate. All facts, data, and information gathered were carefully assessed by the Grand Jury.

DISCUSSION

The Grand Jury recognizes the following agencies for their civic success in providing the exceptional public service listed.

County of San Diego
County Waterfront Park – A Welcome Beautification

“Today, with the opening of this park, we’re making history. The idea of a special gathering spot on our downtown bayfront has been dreamed about for decades. Now we have the good fortune to deliver on that dream. We have created a world class landmark that will be enjoyed by residents and visitors for generations,” said San Diego County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Dianne Jacob at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new County Waterfront Park held May 10, 2014.

The County Waterfront Park is part of the North Embarcadero Alliance Visionary Plan approved by the County Board of Supervisors in 1998. With the opening of this park, a major piece of that plan has become reality.

Surrounding the landmark County Administration Center building, the Park adds beauty and recreation opportunities. Waterfront Park’s appearance is a welcome relief to the former acres of asphalt parking lots. A modern, underground parking facility is available at the south end.

The County’s newest park features an expansive civic green, which can accommodate 3900 people on the north side and 2900 people on the south side of the San Diego County Administration Center. With a series of promenades, themed gardens, picnic areas, children’s play zones, open-space greens, and of course, water fountains, Waterfront Park welcomes both visitors and residents alike.

The park was designed with conservation in mind. Water for the pools and fountains is managed with underground storage tanks, which receive drained water, treat it and either return it to those water features or store it to reduce evaporation.

The park features drought tolerant plants and drip irrigation systems. The restroom/concession building was constructed to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver standards.

The County of San Diego is commended for its foresight in creating a major park that will benefit the community for generations to come.

Voices for Children
Amazing Support for Children in Need

There were over three-thousand children in San Diego County in out of home foster care as of September 2014. The majority of children are in foster care because their home was unsafe; the reasons range from abuse or neglect to abandonment.

An article entitled “Young woman’s empathy for foster children has deep roots” told the story of a former foster child in the March 2nd edition of the 2015 Union Tribune. The article chronicled

her odyssey in 23 different foster placements. Foster care children frequently experience multiple placements before they reach 18 years of age.

At a meeting attended by members of the Grand Jury, a former foster child commented on the importance of the one constant in her life; that was the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

Voices for Children is a non-profit organization that recruits, trains, and supervises Court Appointed Special Advocates. They are trained to gather extensive information and help the Court determine what is in the best interest of the child. Frequently, the CASA is the only point of continuity in the child's life. Consider:

- Court Judges carry an average case load of approximately 500 cases;
- An attorney for the child represents about 150 children;
- A social worker carries an average between 16 and 25 cases;
- A child spends an average of over three years in foster care;
- Many foster children experience multiple foster care families and at the same time may experience multiple social/case workers adding another layer of anxiety to an already psychologically fragile youth;
- That one anchor in a sea of uncertainty is the Court Appointed Special Advocate.

The Grand Jury recognizes Voices for Children for outstanding services it provides foster children, Child Welfare Services and Juvenile Court.

Note: The Grand Jury acknowledges that Voices for Children is a private, non-profit organization not within scope of the Grand Jury's jurisdiction.

County Water Authority Capital Improvement Program – Coping with Drought

In 1991 San Diego County was threatened with a 31% reduction in water supplies from the Metropolitan Water District (MET). At that time 95% of the water needed in San Diego County was provided by MET to the San Diego County Water Authority (CWA).

The CWA had the foresight to realize that the San Diego area would be dealing with drought conditions in the future. It recognized the need to take action and make long-range solutions to mitigate this problem. Accordingly, instead of responding to the immediate threat, the CWA developed a strategy of achieving reliability by diversification, so that the San Diego area was not so dependent on the MET. CWA launched a major capital improvement program to construct new infrastructure and diversify supplies. It has invested over 2 billion dollars since 2003 for the following projects:

- Raising the Olivenhain and San Vicente Dams to provide more storage capacity;
- Constructing a new water treatment plant to provide more flexibility for water distribution in the north county;
- Constructing pipelines to cross connect the distribution system for more reliability;

- Relining portions of the All American and Coachella canals so that the water saved can be used in San Diego.

In addition, the CWA has entered into an agreement to buy water from the Carlsbad desalination plant coming on line in the fall of 2015.

CWA has participated in local water agencies' efforts to recycle and conserve water.

All of these actions are expected to reduce the dependence on MET to the point that it will be providing only 30% of the supply to San Diego by 2020.

Cutbacks from MET will still occur, but its impact on San Diego County will be significantly less. In 1991 our total MET dependency was 95%. In 2014 that need was 49% and by 2020 projected dependency is 30%.

The CWA has made significant progress in lessening the effect of reduced water availability for San Diego. However, water availability will continue to be an issue.

The San Diego County Water Authority is commended for its numerous forward-looking projects that have increased reliability of water supplies for San Diego.

***County of San Diego
District Attorney's Office, Health and Human Services (HHS)/Aging and
Independent Services (AIS)***

Elder Abuse – Aggressive Efforts Combat a Too-Pervasive Crime

The Elder Abuse Unit is an integral part of the District Attorney's Family Protection Division. It is a valuable and essential resource to our most vulnerable population. The District Attorney's Office uses a hands-on approach when actively pursuing crimes against the elderly. Educating seniors is part of its mission. It provides specialized training to financial institutions to help seniors protect their assets. This includes training for law enforcement, fire protection personnel, and others to instruct them on how to find signs of abuse against the elderly.

The District Attorney's Victim Assistance Division has information on its website noting an increase in elderly citizens who are being targeted by criminals using the "Grandma Scam." Imposters contact the elderly in numerous ways (phone, email, mail) asking for cash for family members who are supposedly in some sort of trouble.

Other frauds that take cash from the elderly include but are not limited to sweepstakes and fake lotteries. Many of the victims are between 80 and 90 years old, some live alone and/or require some level of home or health care.

The District Attorney's Office works in conjunction with the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) / Aging and Independence Services (AIS). Together they designed SCAM kits, which are made available to the aging countywide. In addition, there are

televised public service announcements and roadshows to discuss various services they provide, including recognizing scams.

Located on the District Attorney's website are resources and cooperative notices from the various agencies/departments for the benefit of the County's growing aging population needing support systems and services.

To report scam activity, call 619-515-8654 and for victim assistance call 619-531-4041. Aging and Independence Services can be reached at 1-800-510-2020. There is also a new hotline number to report abuse at long-term care facilities: 619-531-3342.

The District Attorney and Health and Human Services Agency/Aging and Independent Services are commended for their outstanding efforts advocating on behalf of the county's elderly citizens.

***County of San Diego
Probation Department***

Community Transition Center – A Bridge to Better Lives

In compliance with the State of California Prison Realignment Act, the County Probation Department, in conjunction with a coalition of the county criminal justice and social services agencies, began the operations of the San Diego Community Transition Center (CTC) in January 2013. The 2014/2015 Grand Jury visited the CTC in September 2014.

According to Probation Department personnel, CTC is designed to be a "one stop shopping center" for newly released prison inmates who are being discharged into San Diego County. Co-located with The Lighthouse project, a sober-living residential treatment program in San Diego's Midway district, CTC provides basic living quarters at a converted two-story motel. Each sleeping room accommodates up to six persons. Regular counseling, therapy, daily exercises, life-skill sessions, interactive process groups, recovery sessions and relapse sessions all contribute to an environment of positive change.

The Probation Department received two awards associated with this program from the National Association of Counties (NACo) in 2014. One award recognized the operation of the entire CTC facility. NACo designated the CTC as the best program in its class, citing "*the only program of its kind in the state, and it helped 1,772 [released inmates] re-enter the community with increased chances of success in its first year of operation.*"

NACo granted a second award for creating a web-based Community Resource Directory, calling it an innovative government program. CTC staff use the Directory in linking residents to appropriate community-based intervention services geared to their assessed needs. The Directory is a catalog of countywide services to which CTC residents can refer for aid in their rehabilitation.

Recently, the County Board of Supervisors authorized an increase to the Probation Department's budget. This action will help insure the CTC program continues its high degree of performance.

Probation staff is commended for its enthusiasm, professionalism, and encouragement extended to the Community Transition Center. That work benefits not only the CTC residents, but provides wide-ranging support for the entire county.

***County of San Diego
Health and Human Services Agency/Child Welfare Services
San Diego County Office of Education***

San Pasqual Academy – A Foster Care First

San Pasqual Academy is the first residential educational program for foster children in the nation. It opened in 2001 to meet the needs of San Diego's foster children between the ages of 12 and 18. San Pasqual has the capacity to serve 184 youths. On the day the Grand Jury visited (September 24, 2014) it was operating at 56% capacity.

San Pasqual Academy has developed an environment where students are able to emerge into adulthood with a sense of well-being and with the necessary skills to "think, reason and question" for a lifetime.

In June, 2013 twenty-eight foster children (100% of the class) received high school diplomas. Fourteen of the twenty-eight students are attending four-year California State Universities; another thirteen students were accepted at two-year community colleges. One graduate joined the United States Navy.

This is an outstanding accomplishment consistent with San Pasqual's achievement over the years. On average 92% of students graduate each year and 80% of graduates enroll in college. Other foster care options are not as successful.

The County Board of Supervisors is commended for assembling a team which provides outstanding services to San Diego foster children at San Pasqual Academy:

- New Alternatives Inc. -- facility operator;
- San Diego County Office of Education -- school operator;
- Youth Empowerment Services (YES) and Access, Inc. -- vocational training providers funded by the San Diego Work Force Partnership;
- Child Welfare Services -- arranges placements and provides on-site social workers.

The Grand Jury recommends that enrollment at San Pasqual Academy be increased to its maximum capacity. More youth will benefit from what San Pasqual has to offer. In addition, increased enrollment could help ensure San Pasqual's future.