

**2009 - 2010**  
**Madera County Grand Jury**  
**Final Report**  
**Valley State Prison for Women**

**Introduction:**

On March 4, 2010, in accordance with California Penal Code 919 (b) which states “. . . the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county . . .” the Madera County Grand Jury (Jury) visited Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW). The Jury met with the Warden and Administrative Assistant and was given a tour of the facility.

**Findings:**

VSPW is located near the city of Chowchilla and is adjacent to the Central California Women’s Facility (CCWF). The prison became active in May of 1995. The grounds are comprised of 640 acres and were originally designed to house 1,980 inmates. Current population is 3,605 inmates. At times, VSPW has housed up to 4,200 inmates. This facility predominately incarcerates the inmates from California’s central and northern counties. The average incarceration period is 18 months with the primary offenses having been drugs and property crimes. Rate of recidivism is approximately 72%.

In November 2007, the Warden was appointed to her position after serving 18 months as “Acting Warden”. The Administrative Assistant has worked at VSPW since 2002.

The Security Housing Unit (SHU) is the jail within the prison and houses inmates that display more serious discipline issues. In addition, mental health and disciplinary problem inmates are housed within the Administrative Segregation Unit (Ad Seg). The Ad Seg unit can accommodate a total of 62 inmates. Inmates within Ad Seg and the SHU are allowed a minimum of ten hours per week in one of two exercise yards. These yards are consistently monitored by staff. There are a maximum of two inmates per cell. Five mental health workers interact and counsel these inmates daily.

The Administrative Assistant showed the Jury the kitchen facilities during the visit. Meals are prepared two to three days in advance and are “flash chilled” for later consumption. Preparation of the meals is done five days per week by inmates. Pastries, rolls and desserts are prepared in the on-site bakery by the inmates.

The reception center has processed approximately 5,075 inmates over the past 12 months. This includes physical examinations as well as mental health and dental screening, within a 14 day period from the date of arrival.

Facility B houses the pregnant inmates. All inmates, during the receiving process into both VSPW and CCWF are given a pregnancy test. Inmates that are pregnant from CCWF are transferred to the VSPW facility during their pregnancy. The average pregnant population is 35 women. Women who are in labor are transported to Madera Medical Community Hospital to give birth. Food service staff, in coordination with the health care OB/GYN RN, provides a nutrition supplement program for pregnant inmate-patients consisting of two extra cartons of milk and two extra servings of fresh fruits and vegetables daily.

The Division of Correctional Health Care Services at VSPW consists of three departments including the medical, mental and dental departments. VSPW provides a range of treatment and rehabilitative services to assist women with emergent issues, alcohol and drug recovery, chronic care issues, obstetrical/gynecological needs, preventive services, patient education, health care support, mental services, and dental services. VSPW's 39 registered nurses and 26 licensed vocational nurses handle 800 to 900 medical appointments per day. Recent budget cuts have made a significant difference in the ability to recruit and maintain an excellent nursing staff due to the significant work load required of them.

VSPW has a 20 bed outpatient housing unit with an additional ten respiratory isolation rooms. These rooms have an average census of nine medical patients and two mental health patients per day.

VSPW has 11 staff dentists. The dental department has seen over 13,000 patients over the last 12 months. Approximately 2,000 oral surgery procedures, 400 restorative procedures, and 500 denture procedures were performed this past year. The majority of the procedures performed are oral surgery.

Eyewear is manufactured for Medi-Cal recipients by 108 inmates along with 16 staff. Approximately 24,000 eye glasses are manufactured monthly at VSPW. Inmates are compensated thirty-five to ninety-five cents per hour for their skilled labor.

Facility D is the third of VSPW's three general population yards. Jury members noted that the yards did not have outdoor restroom facilities available to the women. Facility D also has the Lighthouse program which is a housing unit designed to promote a positive living environment that gives incentives for positive behavior. Inmates in the Lighthouse have been disciplinary free for two years minimum. The program was activated in July 2005. The following incentives are given to the residing inmates:

- First to evening meals, clothing and canteen items.
- Ability to choose where they live within the housing unit.
- Plants in the dayroom to create a more relaxed atmosphere.
- Ability to leave their assigned door open as long as one inmate remains in the room.

The program has approximately 256 inmates. The Lighthouse inmates have contributed to the institution by serving as role models for other inmates and as spokespersons for inmate self-help groups. The staff is motivated by the success of this program. Due to the success of the program, it is anticipated that the program will be extended to other housing units.

**Conclusions:**

The Madera County Grand Jury found the institution to be clean with a very efficient staff. Motivational programs are in effect and appear to be having a positive influence on inmate behavior. However, budget cuts have affected the number of staff which has restricted the availability of these effective programs. Medical personnel expressed concern about their workload and appeared to be understaffed.

**Recommendations:**

- Outdoor general population yards need restroom facilities for inmates. These yards are quite large and it is a considerable walk to use the indoor restrooms when necessary.
- Consider expanding the Lighthouse program for other inmates as a means to promote positive behavior.
- Consider re-allocation of budget funding for additional medical staff.

**Respondents: Written response required pursuant to PC933(c)**

Valley State Prison for Women  
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**Repondents: Response Optional**

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Valley State Prison for Women  
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