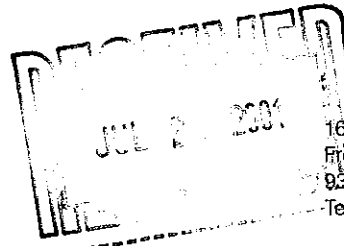


The Fresno Bee

Central California's Leading Newspaper



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Price Child Health and Welfare Journalism Award

Nominees: **Barbara Anderson, George Hostetter, Lesli Maxwell and Kurt Hegre**
Public Service Reporting: "Hall of Shame"
Publication date: Feb. 18, 2001

Juvenile offenders are not your typical sympathetic characters, particularly in this "high-crime" community of Fresno. But the popularity of a subject should never be the measuring stick by which public service journalism is undertaken. Perhaps, one might say, just the opposite is true.

Three Fresno Bee reporters embarked on this project late last year after hearing complaints from parents about conditions at the Fresno County juvenile hall. The 44-year-old facility had fallen into disrepair, posing a danger to the juveniles housed there and to staff. Boys were sleeping three or four to a cell originally designed for one. Bulldog gang members were locked behind closed doors with rival Crips, leading to fistfights and assaults on guards. Physical intimidation, sexual activity and incessant despair were as common as breakfast, lunch and dinner. The county's probation chief, who oversees the hall, conceded it was a "time bomb waiting to go off."

- We believe the reporting by Barbara Anderson, George Hostetter and Lesli Maxwell in this 16-page special section is exceptional because of its depth and the roadmap that it provides for correcting a terrible wrong in this community.

Interviews, public document searches, observations from spending countless hours at juvenile hall and the pure tenacity of individual reporters combined to produce this gritty report that pulled no punches. We also salute photographer Kurt Hegre for his efforts to illustrate this story. He had to try to capture the feeling of the facility while making sure that the faces of the young offenders were not shown.

After years of neglect, Fresno County's supervisors have finally initiated plans to replace the crumbling old hall. Until a new hall is built, Fresno County and neighboring Madera County are negotiating a deal to share cell space that will help alleviate Fresno's overcrowding problems.

Also, Assembly Member Dean Florez, D-Shafter, and state Sen. Chuck Poochigian, R-Fresno, have promised help on the state level, including legislation that may provide funding for a new, larger hall. In March on the heels of this special section, Florez held a legislative hearing in Fresno to discuss building a new juvenile hall.



Overcrowding at Fresno County's Juvenile Hall routinely forces as many as four boys to sleep on the floor of a lockdown cell built for one.

HALL of SHAME

Stories by Barbara Anderson, George Hostetter and Leslie A. Maxwell
Photographs by Kurt Hegre

**It's
unsafe,
decrepit,
'barbaric.'
A place
where
children
rot. Step
inside.**

Fresno County Juvenile Hall is an overcrowded maze of crumbling cells and dingy dorms where 300 or so boys and girls from ages 9 to 17 live in chaotic conditions that leave ample opportunity for the strong to prey on the weak.

It is a place where five youths stuffed into a cell built for one is not unheard of and three is common. Where a boy sitting on a toilet in a communal bathroom never knows when he'll be slugged by a rival. Where a boy sleeping in a dorm might be awakened by a penis poking against his cheek.

It is a place where youths facing criminal charges as varied as murder, rape, robbery and theft are locked in cells for as long as 23 hours a day. Where sexually active teen-age girls sleep next to fourth graders. Where guards often pull 16-hour days and sometimes receive little or no training before going out to watch over some of Fresno County's most violent youths.

The hall, says Deborah Vargas, staff analyst with the San Francisco-based Center for Criminal and Juvenile Justice, is "barbaric."

Fresno juvenile-justice watchdog

Nancy Richardson sees but one solution: "Bulldoze" it.

Neither would get an argument from inspectors with the state Board of Corrections, who wrote a scathing report after touring the hall twice in the past 15 months. Says Corrections field representative Ken Venture: "The conditions there are completely unacceptable."

There's a reason hundreds of boys and girls suffer this degradation daily. The hall, built in 1957, is designed to produce it.

Experts long ago established the connection between architecture and human behavior. Put people in cages not fit for zoo animals, and they're likely to act like animals, they say.

Immense strides have been made in this discipline over the past half-century. None is found in the hall in southeast Fresno.

Space is a big part of the problem. The hall's capacity is 265 youths, but the number often exceeds 300.

Fresno County's rapidly rising population is one explanation for the over-

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This project and supplemental information can be accessed at www.fresnobee.com

INSIDE FRESNO COUNTY

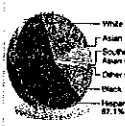
JUVENILE HALL

The original part of the hall was built in 1957, with additions in 1967 and 1970 and a remodeling project to add a dormitory in 1981. The hall can safely house 265 minors, but routinely more than 300 are locked up waiting for court appearances, sentencing to boot camp or the California Youth Authority or placement in a group home for treatment. Some juveniles serve their sentenced time in the hall.

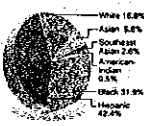
Ethnic breakdown

The breakdown is based on the hall's population on Nov. 27, 2000, which officials say provides an accurate snapshot of who is there every day. Officials say they do not track yearlong averages for ethnicity.

Juveniles inside the hall



Staff at Juvenile Hall



Source: Fresno County Juvenile Hall

A, B & C

THE LOCKDOWN UNITS

The hall has three areas where maximum-security inmates (those charged with such felonies as murder, attempted murder, rape and arson) are incarcerated. A, B and C units, also known as the "Big Boys Units," are in the oldest part of the hall, built in 1957. These lockdown units have 21, 6 and 13 cells, respectively.

Lockdown units are the most overcrowded in the hall. The cells were originally built for one boy, but on any given day, three or four boys now are in these cells.

8 Unit is used to segregate wards.

A teacher works with a segregated ward in this.

The day room is a holding area for wards, where they are searched. From here they are escorted to school or outside for recreation.

Guard station near the center of A Unit allows observation of activity in the day room. This design does not offer oversight of individual cells. Two cells in A Unit and one in B Unit have surveillance cameras.

Boys either eat in units in the dining room, or more often, eat on plastic trays inside cells.

Officials say each cell is 6 feet by 10 feet.

Boys in cells without toilets are escorted to the communal bathroom in the hall. (Cells on the north side have no toilets.)

Classroom holds up to 11 wards; school is taught in three shifts of four hours each.

Dining rooms also are used for indoor recreation and for parental visits.

Maximum security units

Dormitory units
First floor:
D and E units
Second floor:
F, G and H units

D, E, F, G, H & J

THE DORMITORY UNITS

The hall has five areas (D, E, F, G, H and J) where inmates who are considered medium-security risks are housed in dormitory-style settings. There is no "I" unit because it could be confused with the pronoun I.

D, E Units

These 32-bed dormitories house medium-security inmates, but these may include boys accused of serious crimes, such as robbery and assault. Boys sleep in military-style cots and share a communal bathroom. Each dorm has a handful of cells that are used to segregate boys who are disruptive.

F Unit

This 24-bed dormitory was opened in November as a substance abuse unit. It's divided in half to serve 12 boys and 12 girls, with a guard station to separate them.

G Unit

The 30-bed dormitory is for girls who range in age from 9 to 18, and who can be awaiting court on charges from petty theft to murder. The unit often has more girls than beds, and mattresses are placed on the floor in a hallway. Girls share a bathroom. Six cells are used to isolate girls who are disruptive or suicidal. The indoor area is for parental visiting. Girls go to school in classrooms across the hall.

Guards constantly walk through the dorms to monitor activity.

Guards have a limited view of the dorm from their station.

H Unit

This 32-bed dormitory is used to house boys no older than 14. Boys sleep in bunk beds and single cots, and share a bathroom. There are six cells to separate boys who are disruptive or too dangerous to mix with the general population. The open recreation area of the dorm is used as a classroom.

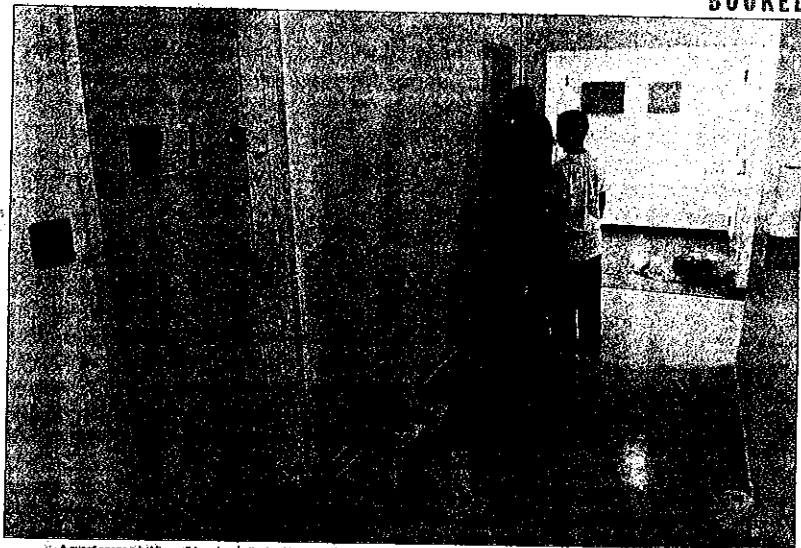
J Unit

This unit is split into two, 30-bed dormitories. The 60 beds are reserved for boys who are serving sentences in the hall. Many are serving 180-day terms. The boys sleep on cots and share bathrooms. The cafeteria serves multiple purposes as a classroom, television room and recreation area. The unit has a tiled exercise area.

TERESA DOPPING - THE FRESNO BEE

HALL of SHAME

BOOKED



A guard opens a holding cell for a boy in the booking area of Juvenile Hall. Once inside the cell, a boy or girl can spend hours in limbo, waiting for a booking interview, fingerprint, mug shot and shower. More than 5,000 youths a year pass through the hall's booking area.

JUVENILE

Continued from Page 1

crowding. So are the dramatically higher fees counties must pay to send nonviolent offenders to the California Youth Authority, fees which force cash-strapped Fresno County to keep more convicted youths at home.

Not building another wing is no solution.

The chief hall has too many dormitories. Gang rivals can't be easily separated. Guards can't see into each cell from their stations. Violence and illicit sexual activity are the inevitable results of these design flaws, experts say.

Now, picture the newest hall. They're built around pods with 10 to 18 one-person cells per pod. Most cells have toilets. Each pod has its own classroom and dining area. Guards have a clear view of everything.

Fresno County has gone this route with its new hall. So has the Bronx in New York City. The "podular" system isn't perfect, but it's far different from the one at Fresno County's hall.

See for yourself.

There's A Unit (actually divided into A and B, but regarded as one unit). The most dangerous boys are here.

G Unit, where the girls are housed, is severe but as appalling in its own way. Forty years ago, the typical girl sent to juvenile hall was a runaway. Not anymore. Juvenile crime has grown more complex, and so have the problems facing girls. G Unit hasn't kept pace.

C Unit is a lockdown area for boys showing improved behavior. D and E units are medium-security dorm areas. F Unit is the new treatment area for substance abusers. If Unit is where the youngsters, none older than 14, are housed. If Unit is for youths serving their sentences.

No one has a kind word for the place. In the hall, says a Fresno teen doing time at the county's Elkhorn boot camp, "you rot."

Riding the walls of hell

A busy mid-afternoon sun barely penetrates the dust on the paint-plastered windows. It's dark in this nearly empty 20-foot-by-20-foot day room, and dark in the place appears deserted to a newcomer.

Only the sudden jangling of jailhouse keys and a couple of ghoulish voices break the spell.

Then the eyes adjust, and a handful of inmates, called wards, emerge from the shadows. They're on their way to class but have guards at their elbows, not books in their hands. None is older than 17, yet some are charged with crimes as violent as any committed by the adult ones at Carceral or San Quentin state prisons. They're told to sit on a green bench.

So they sit. And hope no one attacks them. Unless, of course, one of them plans to do the attacking himself.

Dark, furtive, lonely, mind-numbingly boring most of the time, blood-curdling dangerous too much of the time, heart-breakingly tragic all the time. This is A Unit at Juvenile Hall. There's a day

room, classroom, dining room, guard station, latrine and two rows of cells. All of it is 44 years old and showing its age. Mom and dad might as well be on the far side of the moon.

The place is called lockdown.

In archaic and lingo, A Unit represents these popular "lines" style of jail construction, with lots of straight lines and right angles fanning out from a hub — the guard station. Popular when Eisenhower was president and Americans were awed by Sputnik, but popular no more.

The cells in A Unit are split into clusters on both sides of the day room, 11 on the north side, 10 on the south. The cells face each other. "Double loaded" is what the architects call it. Inefficient is another word since the guards can't see each cell from their station.

The average stay is 30 days for boys, 20 for girls. In theory, the hall is mainly for youths awaiting their day in court, who've been booked for a crime but not convicted. "Pre-disposition" is how the hall describes them.

In reality, an estimated 40% of the hall's daily population is "post-disposition." They are boys and girls convicted of a crime and either serving their time at the hall or awaiting placement in a group home or a spot to open in the California Youth Authority. Every unit usually has some "post-disposition" kids.

In A Unit, the concept of "cell" takes on a new meaning. Even people who have never been in a jail cell have some idea, from movies or a tour of Alcatraz, of what one looks like. Steel bunk, government-issue blanket, institutional gray walls, stainless toilet facing a wall of bars.

Nothing that civilized is found here. Only 10 of the 21 cells have toilets. The water is turned off in them until a boy begs on his door and yells, "Water! Water!" That's the only way he can flush. If the water was kept on, some wards might stuff their toilets with sheets and flood their cells.

Boys in the contact cells (the north side) hit a buzzer until a guard takes them to the two-person, six-toilet latrine. Toilet or no toilet, cells rack of urine, feces, sweat and dried food.

Nineteen cells have one or two built-in beds. Overcrowding forces boys — two or three at a time — to sleep on mattresses on the floor. There are no shelves or desks or pegs. Personal items, like a book, are lined up on the floor. The walls, showing the ravages of decades of boredom, are a crude mosaic of names, profanities, doodles, gouges and scratches.

Late at night, after lights go off at 11, the walls reverberate with the "barking" of Bulldog gang members.

It is not unusual for boys to spend 16 hours a day in these cells. Some boys say they've been locked up as many as 25 hours a day.

It's no exaggeration to suggest these cells are unlivable. In 1991, a group of parents in Seattle filed a class-action lawsuit against a county juvenile hall with similar conditions. A judge ordered a halt to the practice of putting three or more boys into one cell.

Too dangerous, the judge said. Probably

unconstitutional, too.

Next to the south block of A Unit cells is a separate cluster of six cells called B Unit, or segregation. One boy to a cell here because the wards are suicidal or particularly dangerous.

"It's like living in a cage," says a 15-year-old boy who spent three months there.

Boys with communicable diseases — tuberculosis, for example — are kept in segregation cells. The hall has no infirmary, let alone one with secure beds, and the first-floor clinic is so cramped the nurses do blood tests standing next to the boys' toilet.

Sometimes, I feel we're doing "bush" medicine," says head nurse Carol Farnley.

"Lockdown" mustn't be in one word the entire reason for A Unit's existence. Lock 'em up until ... until something else happens. Until they go home or are sent somewhere else in the hall or they're kicked out to the county's Elkhorn boot camp or up to the California Youth Authority in Stockton.

Looking ahead isn't A Unit's strong suit. Getting through the day is goal enough. There are 27 cells (21 in A, six in segregation), none with any more warmth than a lick in the groin, and 50-plus alleged criminals who must be shoe-horned into them. You do the math.

The official word is that each cell is at least 8 feet by 10 feet. Step it off in a typical cell, and the measurement is closer to 7 feet by 9.

The boredom is constant. Some boys catch cockroaches and tattle them with string from their clothes. The floors once had tiles. Boys ripped them up and used the jagged edges to etch gang symbols into the scuffed walls.

Hall officials finally removed all floor tiles from the cells. That's when they learned the adhesive contained asbestos. The boys who ripped them up never knew it.

Puck through a typical cell's narrow, dirty window, and you're likely to find two or three boys lying on mattresses, their backs to each other. That passes for privacy.

The entrance to A Unit is through a heavy steel door off the main hall. Visitors must be buzzed in, the norm since 1994 when electronic locks were installed. Getting through the door isn't the problem. Climbing it is. The door to A Unit tends to stick slightly ajar when closed with a normal pull.

A stuck door leading to the main hall, where cooks and secretaries and visitors may be walking by, is the kind of security threat that keeps hall administrators awake at night. Inertio director Ollie Dimery-Ratiff says she is no different.

With good reason, since the hall has had its share of escape attempts. In 1991, seven boys in the dorm-style D Unit — swinging pool table, broomsticks and a baseball bat — attacked their guards, then smashed their way out of the wire-reinforced windows.

Three guards were hospitalized. Since the mid-1990s, the guards who carry no weapons have armed themselves with pepper spray.

On Christmas Eve 1999, two girls



Hall cameras are limited, so guard Robert Winesbauer stands at a cell door to keep watch over a suicidal ward.

whose good behavior had earned them a week shift in the hall's kitchen, took off. One was caught on Christmas, the other 31 days later.

It doesn't happen just in Fresno County. In January, six boys tried to escape from a juvenile detention center in Santa Rosa. Dozens of sheriff's deputies responded to the ensuing riot, and one staff member was hospitalized after an attempted stabbing. This in a hall with only 80 youths.

"We're working on fixing that," Dimery-Ratiff says of the stuck door.

Fresno County Chief Probation Officer Larry Price is ultimately responsible for what happens at the hall. The place, he says, is "a time bomb waiting to go off." The stuck front door of A Unit is one spark that could set it off. The hall is full of them.

The school day in A Unit begins on that green bench in the day room, where the boys are sitting. Some are giggling and horsing around, but they're not showing off for a need. The only female around is the no-nonsense guard standing over them, arms crossed, a can of pepper spray within easy reach on her belt.

What is so significant about the seemingly simple act of getting a dozen or so boys from their cells to a classroom? In A Unit, the answer can be summed up in one word: movement.

Sixty or 65 of the most volatile, dangerous teen-age boys in Fresno County are constantly shuffling around the tiny confines of A Unit. Every step they take outside their cells is potential trouble — an opportunity to attack, a risk of being attacked.

More than half the kids in the hall belong to gangs. That's one reason why the ritual on the bench is so dangerous.

It's a vicious cycle: Bulldogs keep an eye out for the vulnerable Sornos to attack, Sornos look for a Northerns. Northerns look for a Bulldog. In A Unit, with only one classroom, there's no way to separate gang members and still get them to class.

Gang-related assaults are routine. "Snack and punch" is the favorite tactic. It used to be called a sucker punch, where one boy slugs an unsuspecting victim, looking the other way. In A Unit, the flat

Please see JUVENILE, Page 4

Getting through the day is goal enough. There are 27 cells (21 in A, six in segregation), none with any more warmth than a kick in the groin, and 60-plus alleged criminals who must be shoehorned into them. You do the math.

Only 10 of the 21 cells have toilets. The water is turned off in them until a boy bangs on his door and yells, "Water! Water!" That's the only way he can flush.

HALL of SHAME

PRIVILEGES

Last year, staff members were assaulted 72 times by the boys and girls they guarded. Four assaults were so serious the boys were booked with additional charges.



Like the kid on the street looks for a victim, the kid in here looks for a victim, too.

— a guard

JUVENILE

Continued from Page 3
to the back of the head is the favored way alpha males strut their territorial imperium.
Like the kid on the street looks for a victim, too, a guard says.
It takes only seconds. Like the day when a boy from a cell on the south side of A Unit was let out long enough to spot a rival in the bathroom on the north side. In lightning-quick fashion, he stormed into the bathroom and elbowed the victim twice. (See page 3.)
Guards, who could only shoot at the attacker as he shot past them, quickly wrestled the boy to the floor. Handcuffed, he was hustled back to his room. He didn't care. The boy told anyone who would listen that he got in two punches before they tackled him.
Using physical force to break up fights is unusual. Typically, guards prefer pepper spray.
They used pepper spray 107 times last year. Wards learn early that guards will use the spray in a pre-emptive strike. The boy or girl who is threatening a staff member and ignoring a command to cool it also can get a short, quick burst to the face.
Pregnant and asthmatic wards don't get sprayed. They're the only exceptions.

Finally, A Unit's version of the school bull fight for the wards sitting on the bench. The call to academics is the bark from a guard to assume "put-down" position — eyes to the wall, hands on the back of head.

Nobody thinks about the square root of pi until a full body search is done. Fast-draw is done after class, too, because it's easy for a boy to hide a pencil or staple inside his baggy shorts.

Guards tear apart the cells every day while the boys are in class, looking for potential weapons. They still shake their heads in grudging admiration of the boy in C Unit who smuggled a box of pencils into his cell.

The threat is real. Juvenile Hall usually houses at least one youth facing murder or attempted-murder charges. The most at one time was 18 in 1994. In an office near the public entrance, hall officials keep a sample of the home-made weapons they've confiscated from youths. There is a foot-long shard of plastic covering from a fluorescent light fixture, filed to a point. And what looks like a bedspring, straightened into a potentially lethal shishito. One juvenile didn't even need the wood caving from his pencil. He smuggled just the pencil lead into his cell, then wrapped a piece of cloth around it.

The most curious weapon is a beige ball slightly bigger than a marble. It is composed of cellulose chips of paint, patiently scraped from cell walls and solidified with some kind of ad-bibed glue. Whatever its engineering, the ball is rock hard. A handful could turn a pillowcase into a potentially lethal weapon.

On this day, the boys waiting for class are eleven. A guard unlocks the metal gate separating the dining area from the day room, and the boys scot to a modest classroom with rows of desks. State law requires each ward to spend four hours a day in class. Because A Unit is so crowded, that means three daily four-hour sessions, from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. This time, the boys leave the soccer position at home. Everyone gets to class without mishap.

All too often, they don't. At least four fights on average happen somewhere in



A boy who tried to commit suicide last year was revived and placed in a restraint chair. Handcuffs or the chair were used 193 times in 2000.



After a meal, juvenile hall guards Fernando Castro, left and Tracy Telford, pass out second helpings of bread slices and sausage links to some inmates. Food is a major trade among inmates.

the hall every week. Most don't result in charges, but 52 youths were booked for crimes committed inside the hall last year. Twenty-nine were for battery.

One of the most delicate relationships in any unit, but especially in a heated atmosphere like lockdown, is between youths and guards.

It can turn violent in an instant. Last year, staff members were assaulted 72 times by the boys and girls they guarded. Four assaults were so serious the boys were booked with additional charges.

Anything can be turned into a weapon. One guard was assaulted by a youth swinging a pillowcase stuffed with three Bibles.

But they need each other. The constant interaction between guards and youths can make a unit click. It helps guards get a sense of what's really happening, and the troubled youngsters get a much-needed human touch from authority figures.

Here, again, Fresno County's hall falls its measure of juvenile justice.

For one thing, guards are overworked. It's not unusual for Terry Thomas, a supervising guard in C Unit, to work 16 straight hours. And sometimes he'll pull three back-to-back shifts in one week.

He's not alone. Full-time guards worked 37,000 hours of overtime last year. The state Board of Corrections found that guards often are understaffed, but some get none before starting work. For them, it's on-the-job training.

Combine overworked and undertrained guards with youths who often are abusive, and the result, in any jail, can be guard-on-youth violence. Similar allegations have rocked the California Authority in recent years.

Prison, the county's chief probation officer, says he knows of no serious guard-on-ward attacks. Yet, the possibility is always there.

Like the night late last year when A Unit guard Leon Hernandez, making the rounds of segregation, hears a boy banging on the door. Hernandez opens it, and the boy thrusts out his arm, revealing a purple bruise near the temple.

The boy says a guard did it. Hernandez touches the arm but doesn't take sides. It'll be investigated, he tells the boy: "Just chill, man."

Hernandez closes the door, but hasn't forgotten the boy's bruise.

The work can change your personality if you're not careful, he says. "I see it with some of the staff. I'm trying to stay away from that."

State law requires one guard for every 10 youths in the hall during waking hours, which puts enormous pressure on administrators and guards. Part-time guards worked 62,000 hours last year.

Nor is it unusual for guards with just a few months' experience to find themselves in positions of considerable responsibility, where a seemingly simple mistake can have serious consequences.

Like the night this winter in another unit when a guard with six months' experience was put in charge of dinner. The normal routine, unfamiliar to the guard, is to hand each boy a spoon and his tray of food. Instead, she set up a row of spoons on a table to let each boy take one.

Some boys might not be content with just one. And in the wrong hands, a spoon can be turned into a lethal weapon. Supervisor Danny Pallares quickly set the rookie guard straight.

"These guys are so quick, they'll take two spoons without you seeing," he says.



Guard Leon Hernandez gives toothpaste to a ward. Such items are issued on an as-needed basis because toothbrushes can be made into weapons.

Actually, any movement of boys outside their locked cells is a tense moment for even the most experienced guards.

Almost any potential hygiene task, for example, is a dangerous, labor-intensive job for guards.

A night this winter is typical. Hernandez is in charge of getting 56 A Unit boys into showers without an incident. He brings 12 boys in the dining room for a pep talk: "Sleep up. Rinse off. Get out. The boys stare at Hernandez passively, but one raises his hand: "Are we going to have hot water?"

Hernandez shrugs his shoulders. He can't guarantee hot water in this hall. Hernandez takes the 12 boys back to their cells, then picks two to go first into the showers. Any more than two is too risky. All 66 boys finally get their showers, but it takes more than six hours.

Shaving is done one boy at a time in front of the unit's only glass mirror — over the sink in the guards' bathroom. Through it all, Hernandez is careful to watch his back, to watch his colleagues' backs, to be sure yet fair with the youths.

Lockdown, he adds, is a place where even veteran guards avoid yelling at youths facing the most serious charges: "You set them off, and they'll come at you."

No guard has ever killed a ward in juvenile hall, nor has a ward killed another ward, hall officials say. But youths often try to take their own lives.

In January 1991, a 17-year-old boy hanged himself with bedsheet, the hall's first suicide in more than 12 years.

Just last year, a 14-year-old boy in A Unit for stealing a gun almost joined him. Although there were six documented suicide attempts and 65 reports of self-inflicted injuries in 2000, the actual numbers probably are much higher.

"Every day, someone is trying to commit suicide," says a guard in lockdown. "If not, they're on a watch. I guarantee you're going to get one a week."

Standing a mere 5 feet tall and weighing only 100 pounds, the 14-year-old shattered the plastic light fixture in his cell's ceiling, grabbed a sharp, jagged piece and dug it into the skin of his left arm. He did this repeatedly, working his way down his arm and stopping only when he got close to his wrist.

Then he switched arms. Over the next few weeks, he mutilated himself again and again. Once with staples he'd hidden in his shoes. Another

time with a broken plastic food tray. He slashed his arms and chest that time. Then there was the time he talked a cellmate into helping. The cellmate dug a deep gash from the 14-year-old's elbow to his wrist. The boy had to be rushed to University Medical Center.

This boy is no angel. He threatened to "put like a fat" a public school classmate with a shard of glass. He told his school principal that he planned to shoot himself. Holding up an empty ammunition clip, he said, "I know where the gun is."

Within his first week in the hall, the boy tried to drown himself in a sink full of water. He has been seeing a psychologist since he was in third grade and long ago was diagnosed with a list of psychological disorders.

The boy was in A Unit not because it is well equipped to handle youths with serious mental problems, but because it's the most secure place in the hall.

The 14-year-old with a road map of scars on both arms isn't in A Unit these days. The Probation Department finally found a group home for him. The boy survived seven months in A Unit waiting for his deliverance.

Occasionally sucker punched when he stepped outside his cell, inside he spent his last self-destructive moments fashioning dolls out of toilet paper and shoving them in his socks.

Guards such as Audrey Ireland know all about suicidal boys. She walks the "double-loaded" cellblocks of A Unit and segregation every 15 minutes on her shift, looking for life through each door's Plexiglas window.

She'll take an extra minute at a door if a head is under the blanket. He doesn't move on until she sees the rhythmic rise and fall of the cover. That way, Ireland says, "you can tell he's breathing."

That's not always the case. Guards found a boy last year with a piece of torn mattress around his neck.

Hall officials revived the boy, then placed him in the "restraint" chair, where he was held at the ankles and wrists by leather straps. The boy stayed there until he was calm enough to head back to the same cell where he had just tried to kill himself.

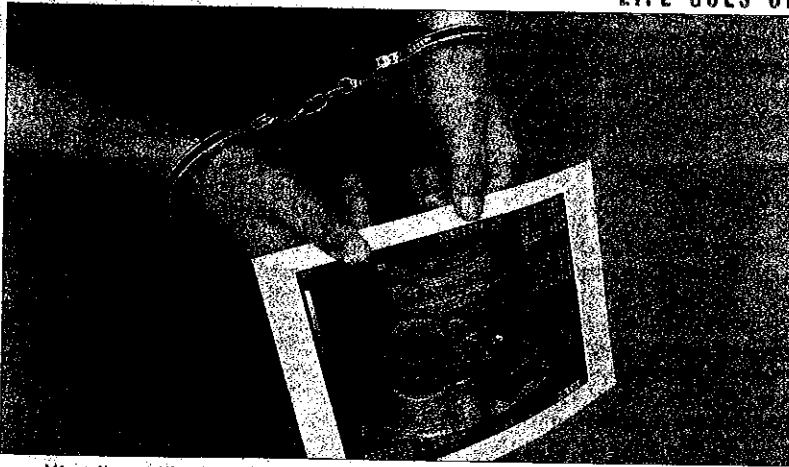
Guards used handcuffs or the restraint chair 193 times last year.

Often, a youth who attempts suicide is put into one of the hall's eight camera rooms. Each room has a camera high in

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HALL OF SHAME

LIFE GOES ON



A 14-year-old pregnant girl in Juvenile Hall holds a sonogram of her unborn baby after returning from a local hospital. Staff members say they have been seeing the girl, who was arrested on prostitution charges, since she was 11. The hall's G Unit population always includes a few expectant mothers.

JUVENILE

Continued from Page 4

the corner, which beams the youth's every action back to monitors in the guard station. Whether the guards actually get a good view is another question. You'll see a guard throw food or even feces against the lens. And if there's a fight in the unit's day room, for example, the guards must respond, leaving the monitors unattended.

That's why the hall takes a different approach to boys who come close to killing themselves.

They are usually stripped. Not even underwear, which could be turned into a noose, is left. They're given only a suicide gown — part wool blanket, part dressing gown with Velcro straps — and watched 24 hours a day by rotating guards who peer through a cell door's window.

One day last October is typical of the watch. A boy is huddled in the corner of his cell, knees under his chin, gray gown around his body. He has tried to hang himself.

He pulls his toes inside the gown, his pale cheek a stark contrast to the cloth. If the boy looks up, he'll see the impassive face of a guard staring through the window. The boy doesn't look. His gaze is down. Always down.

America's juvenile-justice system tries to balance hope with punishment. That is why the youths are called wards and the guards are called counselors. The system wants the youths to believe they have a future.

None of that hopeful message gets to the boys of A Unit. The result is a vicious as toxic as anything on earth.

"In the hall, you hear the people fighting all the time over who they are and where they're from," says a 17-year-old former Melrose High student who did time in A Unit and now is about to graduate from the Elkhorn boot camp.

He means much of the trouble in A Unit is racism or gang motivated. Like the trouble boiling inside a 17-year-old Hispanic in lockdown this winter. He's a member of the Bulldogs, the hall's

dominant gang.

This boy always sleeps alone in a segregation cell. Orders from the judge. The boy likes to boast to guards when a rival gangbanger walks by: "I want to eat him for breakfast." Already in the hall seven months for firearm possession, he dreams of getting out and starting his own tattoo parlor.

But not until he takes care of the African-American boy, leader of the rival Crips, in a nearby cell. That, the tattoo artist told one guard, is who he really wants to kill.

Boys who have endured A Unit say life there only increased their anger. "You sit in your room, you sleep, get up, maybe go to school, an hour on the yard and that's about it," says a boot camp cadet who did time in the hall. "It drove me nuts. I couldn't stand it."

Not many can. A 15-year-old who spent three months in A Unit last summer for strong-armed robbery said he would tie a knot in a bedsheet and swing it at the overhead light fixture until he broke it. He said he couldn't sleep. Mostly, he was just angry.

Yet, in a perverse way, the rage in A Unit has one redeeming quality: It gives the boys a common bond, one that often expresses itself in "who-riding." That is the boys' slang for beating the concrete walls and steel doors of cells with their fists.

It usually occurs after lights-out at 11 p.m. One boy at first, he's long. Long. None of the other boys knows who is "riding" the wall of his cell with his fists. Hence the term — who-riding.

But the answer doesn't matter. A second boy joins in, long bang, long bang, long bang. Pretty soon, everyone in lockdown is "riding" their cell walls and doors.

"The hall doesn't teach you nothing," says a Kerman teen at Elkhorn boot camp. "When your temper gets going and you get mad, you need somebody to explain to you. 'OK, this is why you're doing it, this is why you got mad.' At the hall, they don't do that. They say, 'You want to get mad? OK, we'll throw you in a room.'"

"What does that teach you? It teaches you to get mad and take it out on the

room. There's nothing there but the walls. So, you hit the walls."

Handcuffs and a sonogram

or 55.

There's something else different — the atmosphere. At first glance, it seems almost pleasant.

The high-pitched din is the first thing a new hearer at night. Chattering teenagers, just back from a long school day, stand in clusters beside a row of narrow, metal bunk beds.

A few sit cross-legged on thin mattresses and talk quietly. One lies on her stomach, legs kicked up and her head resting on a pillow.

Small metal shelves hang from peach-colored concrete walls next to the beds. They hold the girls' belongings: Bibles, magazines, paper for writing letters home, a teen-age romance paperback here and there.

Frees of the hall's standard-issue uniform — khaki shorts, navy T-shirts, gray sweat shirts — dangle from pegs. Shampoo and hair conditioner line the shelves.

Don't be fooled. G Unit is an ominous place.

"You always watch your back in there," says a 15-year-old runaway. "You can never really let your guard down. It doesn't feel any safer in there than it did on the streets."

What some of these girls have done on the outside is chilling. Like the 15-year-old brought in for cocaine possession who snatched \$1,000 — six \$100 dollar bills, two \$50s and 15 \$20s — in her vagina. Or the pair of 15-year-olds who admitted they helped a boy slay a police. The boy was later accused of stabbing an old man to death. Or the 13-year-old who tried to strangle her mother.

But the most important difference in G isn't easily seen or heard. Simply put, girls' mental and physical needs are different from boys'.

Girls get pregnant. Girls shoulder the abortion decision. Girls are more likely to be primary caregivers of young children. More likely to be sexually abused at home. More likely to run away from home to escape such abuse. More likely to be physically abused in close relationships. And that's just scratching the surface, says Deborah Vargas, staff analyst with the San Francisco-based Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice.

These girls need single-person cells. Vargas says, not dorms. They need a place where 9- and 10-year-olds aren't sleeping near sexually active teens, where accused murderers aren't sleeping next to runaways, where rival gang members aren't sleeping side by side. They need a bit of privacy and a chance to bond with each other in safety. They need special counseling for their unique needs and small, private rooms where they can get it.

G Unit falls them.

A lot of these girls have been abused their whole lives," Vargas says. "And the juvenile-justice system is abusing them again."

There's a strict system of cause and effect in this unit. Good behavior and "doing the program" earn privileges such as hair ties and name-brand shampoo



Video cameras help guards keep their eyes on hallways. Doors into units are opened electronically.

and conditioner. These well-behaved girls are called "stage girls." Everyone else gets generic-brand hair products.

All too often, the sexually experienced and aggressive girls prey on those who aren't.

It all adds up to a sticky mix for the girls who stay here and the guards who work here. Parolekeeping is a perpetual challenge. So is safety.

"I try to promote a family atmosphere in here, but it's hard," says senior counselor Rodney Walker. "There's a lot of negative stuff they bring in here with them. I tell them over and over to leave what happens on the outside to the outside."

The girls with experience in G Unit say there are just two ways to protect yourself on the inside.

"You've got to claim a gang or be bisexual," says a 15-year-old girl, who has been in and out of the hall since she was 9. "Juvenile Hall isn't Chowchilla Prison's prison, but it ain't no joke, either."

The swing shift crew clocks in at 3 p.m. Senior counselor Kate McKinney, leaving for the day, tells his replacement: "You're blessed. The pop [population] is way down. They've been good."

Thirty-six girls is manageable, says Walker, who's in charge until 11 p.m. On this night, for a change, no one will sleep on the floor. Not like last month, when girls had to sleep in the hallway with only a thin mattress between them and the concrete.

There's a pecking order when all the bunks and cells fill up yet new girls keep coming through the front door. Hookies sleep on the floor, veterans in the beds. Unless a girl is pregnant or sick. Then a veteran will give up her bunk.

A 13-year-old, who now lives in a group home, says she slept nine nights on the floor during her three-month stay in G Unit.

"I never did sleep well there," she says.

There's a lot of movement during the swing shift. Between 3 and 11 p.m., the girls exercise, shower, take part in group therapy and eat dinner. Every activity is highly choreographed.

Two guards, Desiree Escovedo and Mary Helen Mendez, start organizing

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“Every day, someone is trying to commit suicide. If not, they're on a watch. I guarantee you're going to get one a week.”



— a guard in lockdown

Don't be fooled. G Unit is an ominous place. "You always watch your back in there," says a 16-year-old runaway. "You can never really let your guard down. It doesn't feel any safer in there than it did on the streets."



Eleven A Unit cells do not have toilets, so the boys in those cells hit a buzzer until a guard takes them to the latrine, which has two urinals and six toilets. Even there the boys are watched closely.

HALL of SHAME

NO PRIVACY

JUVENILE

Continued from Page 5
shampoo, soap and toothbrushes for the hygiene ritual. Another guard arranges chairs in the day room for a presentation from Barrios Unidos, an anti-gang program.

The girls hang out on their beds and wait.

The volume in the dorm rises.

Som. Then a wall of pain. The guards scramble to get the dorm.

A 14-year-old clutches her fist, the one she used to punch the concrete wall. Escovedo whisks her into the laundry room and shuts the door. A minute passes, and Escovedo emerges with the girl. Her right hand is red and her cheeks are wet.

"She played me off," the girl says to Escovedo and Walker, talking about a dormmate. "I wanted to hit her, but I don't."

No matter, Walker replies. Punching the wall was a bad choice. He sends her down to the first-floor medical clinic. The clinic is so small that should the girl need X-rays, they'll be taken in the hallway.

She soon returns with a bandaged hand and a smile. She flashes a wrapped wrist, her badge of honor, to the other girls.

Walker shakes his head. It's just 20 minutes into his shift.

There's a vulnerability to many of these girls that's as unsettling as their street-tough veneer.

A 16-year-old cries because she wants to send her mother a letter but doesn't know the address. There's a 15-year-old chronic runaway who prefers living in the hall to being at her home or in a group home. And a 17-year-old who wants to slash her wrist.

A pregnant 15-year-old asks if the chips and soda she sees in the guard's station are for her birthday party. When the guard shakes her head, the girl turns back.

"I thought I was going to get a party," she says.

The chapter is incessant in this locked dorm where these girls spend as little as one night or as long as six months. They lie on their beds and flip through magazines. They brush and braid each other's hair. They write letters to boyfriends and family members.

Moments when they are just girls.

Walker bustles the girls from their bunks. They line up across the dorm and, at his command, begin their jumping jacks. Soyuz are next.

It's all part of the routine in G Unit, but four girls stay on their beds. They're pregnant. The unit always has expectant mothers, some as young as 13.

Most get better prenatal care while they're locked up than they would outside, Mendosa says. Like the 14-year-old who is in the hall for prostitution.

Down at the first-floor booking area, the hall's entrance/exit for youths, probation officers meet the 14-year-old in handcuffs to a waiting car. The hall-issued T-shirt and pants hang off her small frame. She returns an hour later, still handcuffed, gripping a sonogram of her fetus.

"We've known her since she was 11," a probation officer says.

The girls file out of the dorm into the day room. Some are in their Juvenile Hall uniforms. Without a trace of makeup on their faces, they all look so young.

Guard Louie Resto tells the girls where to sit. They munch on Cornuts.

An ex-con and former gangbanger sits down with them. He tells them how hard it was "to leave the life." How it took years of being roped up in concrete and steel prison cells for him to change. It's in his 40s and just now holding down a steady job.

Decently moved, they listen in silence. It's the first time they've been quiet in more than an hour.

The ex-con finishes his half-confection half-warning. A girl fires questions at him. "How'd you stay clean? How'd you take care of your kids?"

Before he answers, she tells him about the girl eating her up. Her baby daughter is living with her mother while she's locked up. She breaks down, and the girl next to her puts a hand on her back.

The room's silence is broken only by the girl's crying.

A few girls don't come out of the dorm for the Barrios Unidos presentation.

They're locked alone in cells for behavioral problems or suicide threats.

Escovedo uses the Barrios Unidos hall to let each cell girl out to shower. They aren't allowed to mix with the rest of the dorm.

A girl who tried to hang herself has been on constant watch for hours. She's the first to shower.

Walker calls the mental health counselor who has been keeping tabs on the girl, asking whether it's safe to give her clothes. She's been wearing the "suicide gown," with only Velcro-closing tabs. The mental health counselor says the girl can have underwear after her shower. But she has to wear the rest of the clothing back, one piece for every hour she shows progress.



Female wards spill over from the full dorm onto the hallway floor. A pecking order calls for veteran wards to sleep in bunks and new girls on the floor, unless a new girl is pregnant or sick. Veterans give up beds to them.

The suicidal girls trouble Walker most.

"The hardest thing is dealing with the ones who want to hurt themselves," he says. "They can't really do anything because we're constantly monitoring them. But the idea that they want to kill themselves really gets to me. And if I make one wrong move in those situations, it could mean life or death."

Sometimes it's the little things that push the girls to the edge. Liable to someone on the outside, but not to those behind locked doors.

It's too early for dinner, so the girls continue to groom themselves.

A girl who's in charge of gathering dirty laundry strides back and forth in the row of bunks, stuffing T-shirts, shorts and underwear into a bag.

It's a chore she earned for good behavior, a measure of freedom in a place without much.

All the laundry is mixed together, washed and passed out. No one gets the same clothes again. Even underwear isn't exclusive.

There's a set for girls on their period, and a set for those who aren't, standard policy in correction.

What isn't standard is who passes out the underwear. In G Unit, the power resides with the best-behaved girls. This only raises the unit's tensions because some girls say they're singled out to get the least-desirable items.

"It grosses me out," says a 16-year-old girl, now living in a group home. "We always fought over who got the underwear without stains."

The last girl in shower alone is 17 years old. She has been locked in a cell after she got caught in bed with another girl.

Escovedo complains to Walker that the girl was "being nasty" during her shower. Disturbing and cursing, Walker tells Escovedo to get the girl dressed and send her out to talk with him.

The 12-year-old emerges from the dorm, hair still wet. She sits down at a table with Walker and complains that guards target her because she's gay.

Walker asks what happened the night before. She tells him she got into bed with her girlfriend.

"We weren't doing anything but kissing," she says. "If they're going to trip about that, I should have just f---ed her."

She tells Walker, "If you're going to keep all the gay people apart, then you'll



Peach-colored walls and high-pitched voices help set G Unit — the girls' section — apart from the others. But it can be just as dangerous. "You always watch your back in there," says a 16-year-old runaway.

have to separate half the dorm."

Walker reminds her that any kind of sex won't be tolerated in the hall.

There is a sexually charged atmosphere in G, perhaps inevitable when so many teen girls are housed in an open dorm.

In the middle of the night, say those who have been through G, it's easy for girls to crawl into bed with each other. Or they'll sneak around the dorm on foot, stealing a kiss or touching a breast. They master the timing of the walk-through, when guards patrol the dorm in 15-minute intervals doing bed checks. The girls jump back into their own beds.

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A lot of these girls have been abused their whole lives. And the [juvenile-justice] system is abusing them again.

— Deborah Vargas, staff analyst with the San Francisco-based Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice



All the laundry is mixed together, washed and passed out. No one gets the same clothes again. Even underwear isn't exclusive.



HALL OF SHAME

THE VICTIM

Ready or not, they'll be back

Never forget the most important people in any discussion of juvenile justice, says Carolyn Golden, Fresno County Juvenile Hall assistant director.

"The victims," says Golden, former project coordinator of the county's victim witness program. "Those are the ones who need the help. But for the grace of God, it could be you and I next week. That's why juvenile crime is a community issue."

She raises the question at the heart of Fresno County's overcrowded Juvenile Hall: Why should society care about what happens to youths charged with crimes?

"The reality is that one day they will be back in society," says Valerie Frazier, a supervisor at the California Youth Authority's W.A. Chedoke Youth Correctional Facility in Stockton. "Do you want him angry? Or do you want him whole?"

She was talking about the hardened criminals she deals with, but her concept applies to any youth who runs afoul of the law.

Making young offenders "whole" means holding them responsible, the experts say. "I go back to being a parent; accountability, accountability, accountability," Golden says.

Punishment, though, is only half the answer.

JUVENILE

Continued from Page 6

A 15-year-old remembers waking one night to bright lights and shouts—usually a sign of a suspected sexual encounter in the bunks. That's when a guard made everyone hop out of bed and stand until someone admitted guilt.

Some girls are gay, says another 12-year-old girl. Others say the homosexual activity is a waste—a way to show they're mature.

They may do that while they're in, but they're straight on the outside, the 12-year-old says.

Guards keep the younger, more vulnerable girls in beds in front of their station. Walker says. They interrupt any conversation among the girls that turn to sex. And they never put more than one girl in a cell.

It doesn't always work. "They can be very convincing," Walker says.

The girls in isolation are locked back inside their cells. The rest return from the room to the dorm to start their showers.

Escorted stands watch over six girls at a time. She can't take her eyes off them for a second. Someone could get trapped. But sometimes a guard's gaze is diverted, and the result is quick, furious sex. A 17-year-old says she later group showers because there's always one girl who shares.

Mendoza stays in the dorm with the girls waiting their turn. The first few emerge from the showers, their heads wrapped in towels.

More girls come out of the shower room and line up in front of Mendoza. They raise their hands over their heads while she gives a shot of "pinks from 13" Street into their armpits. No one applies her own deodorant.

Mendoza passes out combs. The girls stand in small groups as they comb through tangles. One conversation turns to sex.

A girl with long, brown locks teases another with short, blondish spikes. "Are you gay or not?"

The girl with spikes answers: "I ain't either. I'm not that way. I don't know why everyone thinks I'm that way."

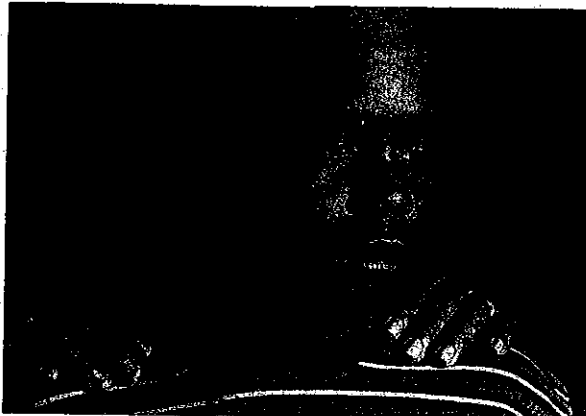
Mendoza interrupts them. Walker shakes his head.

"That talk is constant," he says. "And it can get heated, especially when there are girls who are militantly straight and preach that God will condemn them for that lifestyle."

Hall officials aren't ignorant of the connection between environment and the youths' behavior.

This is clear on the maximum-security C Unit, with its eight-bed dormitory and 12 cells.

As many as 50 boys are housed here, and hall officials use any psychological trick they can to keep the peace. Each



James McKenzie, 11, became the victim of juvenile crime when another boy poured hot water onto his face.

"Children have to have some kind of hope," says Susan Bechara, founder of Fresno's nonprofit House of Hope, which serves with runaway and gang members.

Over time, Golden says, many victims come to see the humanity in the people who hurt them.

Compassion may be the wrong word to describe the attitude of Carmen Wilson of Fresno, toward the boy who, she says, threw scalding water on the face of her

son James McKenzie, in July. But weapons isn't the right word, either. James, 10 years old at the time, had gone to the boy's house for a sleep-over, but the two argued. The other boy, 9 at the time, heated a container of water in a microwave oven, then poured it on James' face.

James McKenzie, 11, became the victim of juvenile crime when another boy poured hot water onto his face. James McKenzie, 11, became the victim of juvenile crime when another boy poured hot water onto his face. James McKenzie, 11, became the victim of juvenile crime when another boy poured hot water onto his face.

ster face? Wilson pictures an anguished look on her face. "I would say mandated counseling," she says. "I would say probation to where he has to wear one of those ankle monitors. There should be some type of punishment."

But lock him up and throw away the key? No, Wilson says, that's not right. Says Golden: "I'm always surprised by the compassion of victims."

boy can have a deck of cards, three family pictures (including a baby picture for boys who are fathers), one incoming letter and a magazine or paperback book.

The cells are numbered 1 through 12, but there's no 13 or 14 because "thirteens" and "fourteens" are gang symbols.

"Cool," says juvenile hall architect Patrick Sullivan of Claremont. "No 'No. 1' when it comes to keeping peace in any jail and girls. Feed them a lot and feed them the same amount, he says.

The wards hate it when some get seconds and others don't. Like on a November night in C Unit.

The food isn't bad, even if an occasional box of orange juice is past its expiration date or a boy sometimes finds its way into the meal. The first-floor kitchen makes about 1,000 meals a day, feeding not only the hall but also Elkhorn boot camp. Mistakes happen.

The menu on this night: Italian roast beef, sautéed potatoes, salad, squash, wheat bread, sweet butter cookies. It's fairly typical of dinner in the hall.

The big question is who gets leftovers after the food cart has made its rounds. On this night in C Unit, there were extra potatoes, green salad, and a loaf and a half of Wonder bread.

Just enough for half the unit. The boys, locked behind steel doors, didn't know if they were blessed or cursed and the guard made his decision. The boys learned their fate when they heard the creak of the food cart growing faint.

Then the rumble began among the doors. First raised voices, then a few scattered metallic clinks. A tiny symphony of protest soon filled C Unit as the doors pounded spoons against their cell doors.

Only when the last slice of Wonder bread was gone and the food cart was wheeled back to the dining room did the protest stop and C Unit fall quiet.

D and E units are near-mirror images of each other, a pair of 12-bed dormitories for medium-security inmates.

In some ways, the units are the hall's version of luxury suites. There are cotenets of bunk beds. The walls at both ends of E Unit are decorated with a mural of trees.

Boys who stick to the game plan can land a spot in the Senior section, a room with just four beds. D and E units send a clear message: Play by our rules and reap the blessings.

Many boys grab the offer. Some don't. Like the two boys in E Unit playing a card game called "Giller." They're meaning about the hall's daily routine, as do many of the youths. For one thing, their tennis shoes don't fit.

"We get dicker peeing when our heels hang out of our shoes," one boy says. "But I'm a size 8, and they gave me a 6 1/2."

That's not their real beef. They don't like E Unit's size. They don't like waking

up early, they don't like the daily jangling jacks, they don't like making their beds before breakfast. So, they're thinking about screwing up so they'll get sent back to lock-down.

Says one boy: "It's better over there 'cause you get to sleep."

They're all 10 to 14 years old in H Unit, an almost-constant buzz of graffiti next door. It's nicknamed the "little boys' unit."

This is a dangerous age range. The 10-year-olds are preadolescents, more interested in sports.

Not surprisingly, some of the 14-year-olds are sexually active. And some boys taller than grown men sleep together in a room with 22 bunks and one door.

One of the 10-year-olds on this December day is all of 4 feet and 90 pounds. He's also accused of participating in a robbery and murder. That's not the norm in H Unit. Most of the boys are in for stealing or bringing a knife or gun to school or fighting. They've stolen their share of cars, too.

But the boy perhaps looking into the room charge has no trouble fitting into the room. He hangs his head over the edge of bunk 28 to whisper to the boy below in bunk 30. Hangin' out in H Unit.

Guards keep keys here as they do in every unit. A hundred points means you're obeying the rules. Points are deducted for misbehavior. Rewards disappear, too.

A boy on bunk 12 is passing gas to the delight of his dormmates. He's kicking his blanket up in the air and pulling it over his head. He's bad-mouthing a new arrival about getting in trouble on only his second day.

Suddenly, the guards have had enough of the boy on bunk 12, and he's got into one of the six isolation cells at the end of the dorm. That will cool him point, and he knows it.

The dorm down rattles and pounds on his door. He yells at the female guard: "Hey, skinny-ass b---er!"

A reward here is doing such chores as the daily ritual of setting up and dismantling a makeshift classroom. It's a common task since so many classrooms have been turned into cells and dorms.

Boys' pranks make up most of the trouble in H Unit. A poster war: "Remember, if you want to keep using the hair grease, keep it in your hair, not on the walls, cameras, beds, etc. or you will lose the privilege."

But pranks aren't all the trouble. Sex is a constant threat here, too, especially in the showers and at night. Some boys demand oral sex from others. A penis on the cheek in the dark is one way it begins.

The sexual activity seldom rises to the level of assault, hall officials say. Usually, they say reassuringly, it's consensual.

Into the abyss: Your juvenile hall, says architect Sullivan, sends a message to the kids about what you



Guard Leon Hernandez keeps a close watch on male juvenile inmates as they shower in Unit A. He takes only two words to the showers at a time to minimize risks.

think of them. Many Fresno County youths will get that message the hard way. Like the 14-year-old boy brought to the hall this winter for a probation violation.

He's thin, arms and legs like sticks, and has walked the 100 or so yards from looking to A Unit. Most boys start out in lock-down until hall officials get a feel for who's trouble and who's malleable.

The door to A Unit opens, and loud, angry voices hit him in the gut. Two guards are behind him, but he keeps moving forward without being told. Fast the dining room where a handful of boys stop playing dominoes long enough to check him out. No one smiles.

The procession stops at the guard station. A guard grabs his wrist and looks at the yellow tag to get his name and ward number. He neither resists nor looks at her face.

"If you see someone you don't like, you're not going to go out of your way to cause problems," she says. "I don't want to hear no cussing, no barking. I don't want to see no handshakes, you know what I mean?"

She gives him a half-hearted demonstration of the gang handshake he'd better avoid.

The guard flicks her finger against the boy's arm to get his attention. "And don't be so nervous. It's not that bad in here," she says.

Debding and hall-based tennis shoes in hand, the boy is taken to his cell by another guard, a man. The cell door opens, and the boy waits as the guard yells, "Room-mate."

The door starts to close, but the guard suddenly strikes his head back inside.

"You been in here before?" he asks. The boy shakes his head no. "Well," the guard tells his roommate, "help him out with the restroom."

It's impossible to know whether the female guard's final words are still ringing in the boy's head. "It's not that bad in here." But one thing is likely—he has no idea what it's like to sleep three or four to a tiny cell for weeks or months, to fear being sucker punched when he goes to the bathroom, to wonder if a stranger's hand might slide up his bare leg late at night as the "barking" of gang members echoes through a darkened concrete cavern.

He's about to find out. a

Here in H Unit, the truly little boys and some boys taller than grown men sleep together in a dorm with 32 bunks and cots. One of the 10-year-olds on this December day is all of 4 feet and 90 pounds.

If you see someone you don't like, you're not going to go out of your way to cause problems. I don't want to hear no cussing, no barking. I don't want to see no handshakes, you know what I mean?

—female guard checking a youth into A Unit

The tyranny of numbers

This is clear on the maximum-security C Unit, with its eight-bed dormitory and 12 cells. As many as 50 boys are housed here, and hall officials use any psychological trick they can to keep the peace. Each

ALL OF SHAME

"DUNGEON-LIKE"

The big complaint of the state with Fresno's Juvenile Hall is chronic overcrowding. The hall, licensed for 265, routinely has 300-plus minors, with as many as four boys in single cells in lockdown.



Duty, damaged cells drew the attention of the Fresno County Juvenile Justice Commission, which issued a report after inspecting the hall last year. Commission members also cited a lack of regular preventive maintenance to address the needs of the decades-old building.



Presiding Juvenile Court Judge R.L. "Chip" Putnam wrote in a Dec. 15 letter to the corrections board, "though sometimes the population drops below the cap, more often it is above the cap, outstripping space and staff availability."

Falling under state scrutiny

A judge describes it as dreary and "almost dungeon-like," the former chairwoman of the Fresno County Juvenile Justice Commission says it's outdated for sophisticated young criminals; the state says it's tantamount to being unfit. Three separate assessments of Juvenile Hall find it an aged, cramped, unsafe place for youth.

The findings of the inspections are no surprise. They simply detail problems that have been glaring for years, such as kids sleeping on floors and attending school in dining areas. Overcrowding, the lurch of the 44-year-old hall's problems, hasn't been addressed since the last major remodel in 1981, when \$12 million was spent to add 64 beds on the second floor.

And although the inspectors are critical, they mainly focus on the nuts and bolts of maintaining an old hall and don't look beyond mattresses on the floor to detail the experiences of the youth inside.

What is new is the attention the hall is getting from the state. After the county failed to fix all the deficiencies in December 1999, the Board of Corrections inspected Juvenile Hall again in 2000. The state found the hall in noncompliance with minimum state standards. The next step is to determine if the hall is "unsuitable" — a euphemistic term for an unfit and unsafe place for juveniles.

The county must submit a plan how it will correct problems found in the inspection report. State correction officials met with county officials Feb. 1 to discuss the hall's suitability.

An unsuitable label by the board, however, doesn't mean the doors will be shut. The only threat such a ruling has is the threat of a lawsuit by the public.

"We would assume that interested public parties would challenge their right to keep children in a hall that was deemed unsuitable for housing minors to the Board of Corrections," says Thom McConnell, executive director of the board.

If Fresno was to receive this dire appraisal, it would be a rarity. The board has been inspecting juvenile halls in California since 1960 and hasn't had a county hall declared unfit, yet. Before 1993, juvenile hall inspections were the responsibility of the California Youth Authority.

Under the Board of Corrections, the county will be given a chance to correct problems before the board takes action, McConnell says. "The Board of Corrections has not had routine fail to put a suitability plan together that didn't meet conditions."

One such plan, by San Bernardino County, includes the housing of juveniles in its large, military-style tents. The Board of Corrections gave its stamp of approval to the unorthodox plan at its January meeting in Sacramento.

"The DOC wants to help counties keep halls open — not close them," says Ken

Ventura, a Board of Corrections field representative who inspected the Fresno hall. "The board's position is we want to bring these facilities into compliance and work with them to make a suitable place. We're not sanctions driven. We're compliance driven."

The board isn't the only agency that looks at the hall. By law, it must be inspected yearly by a judge of the juvenile court, the county Juvenile Justice Commission, the health department and fire department.

These entities also inspect with an eye for correcting defects. The state fire marshal, for example, notes the hall doesn't have fire sprinklers, including in maximum-security lockdown, where youths are behind doors that have to be opened one at a time with a key. But, the lack of sprinklers isn't a violation — the age of the hall exempts it from the newer fire-safety requirement.

And the health department, which inspects the hall's kitchen and medical clinic and checks the cleanliness of the hall, gave the institution an overall clean bill of health in 2000.

Health inspectors found no major problems, despite reports from juveniles and guards that the building is infested with cockroaches.

"It's a big complaint of the state with Fresno's Juvenile Hall is chronic overcrowding. The hall, licensed for 265, routinely has 300-plus minors, with as many as four boys in single cells in lockdown."

The state says that if the county can't keep the census down, it has to find ways to compensate for overcrowding by hiring more staff members, offering more programming and recreational activities or increasing bed space.

In their initial inspection report last year, Board of Corrections inspectors found 24 areas of major concern. Among them:

- Boys sleeping on floors, which is not allowed.
- Boys attending school in day rooms and dining rooms because of a lack of classroom space.
- No rooms or spaces to conduct confidential interviews in booking or between lawyers and juveniles.
- Inoperable fixtures, missing tiles and mildew in bathrooms.
- Too many part-time guards, working full-time hours, who are not trained to work with juveniles.

The follow-up inspection found many of the same complaints, but also cited:



In contrast to Fresno County's juvenile hall, cells at Tulare County's new hall have a toilet. Guards also have a clear view of all hall areas.

- An inconsistent grievance procedure for juveniles and no grievance forms in languages other than English.
- Animals in the hall, including three minors are kept in crowded single rooms at a time.
- The unsanitary practice of feeding juveniles on mattresses on the floor in rooms.
- Lockdowns where only untrained staff members are assigned to a unit.

County officials aren't quibbling with the state inspection reports. But fixing problems to the state's satisfaction is another story.

So far, the county has started construction on four private modules in booking and is sending part-time guards in training classes.

Putting three and four boys out of single-security cells in lockdown is the big problem. Chief Probation Officer Larry Price says he's tinkering with two potential solutions — moving the least-dangerous boys in lockdown into medium-security dormitories and installing tents at the hall or on the grounds of the boot camp in Caruthers. But neither is really an acceptable alternative and no more than a very short-term answer.

Without a new fall, there's not much he can do — long term — about overcrowding, says Price.

"We've told them we don't have any more classrooms and we're running classrooms every night to 9 or 10 o'clock," Price says.

Another inspection the Board of Corrections conducted in a report from the Juvenile Court. In its 2000 inspection, the court found the hall meets minimum state standards, "so long as the population stays near the rated capacity of 265, and staffing in all areas complies with state standards."

But Presiding Juvenile Court Judge R.L. "Chip" Putnam wrote in a Dec. 15 letter to the corrections board, "though sometimes the population drops below the

cap, more often it is above the cap, outstripping space and staff availability."

In a walk-through inspection requested by Putnam, Superior Court Judge M. Bruce Smith described the maximum-security units in the hall as being "somewhat dark, dreary and depressing in atmosphere (almost dungeon-like)."

Putnam reiterates Smith's concern in his cover letter to the inspection report. The main section of the Juvenile Hall building, housing the A and C units is overused, outdated, and not up to the needs of the juvenile justice system in Fresno County.

Having more than two boys per room in the units is unacceptable, Putnam says, yet as many as four are housed in them. Overcrowding "raises concerns about the impact on services and programming in the hall, as well as the safety of the community," the judge says. More than 1,000 juveniles were sent home last year instead of being incarcerated because the building was full.

Another hall inspection, by the Fresno County Juvenile Justice Commission, lists several issues in its 2000 inspection report. The report is based on walk-through tours of the hall by commission members.

Last year's Juvenile Justice Commission report was written by former Commission Chair Denis Waugh, a Fresno homeowner.

A lot of the problems are directly linked to the age of the hall and what it was designed for, Waugh says. "It's not for the sophisticated criminal."

The commission's findings include:

- Girls not separated by age and younger girls "exposed to the problems and sophistication" of older girls.
- A lack of space for privacy in the medical clinic.
- Duty and damaged cells in lockdown units.
- A lack of ongoing and preventive maintenance to keep up with the needs in the building.

The age of the buildings makes it almost impossible to stay abreast of maintenance requests, says Carroll Colbert, the supervising stock clerk who has been responsible for repairs at the hall for the past 15 years.

Plumbing is the No. 1 headache, he says. "We're constantly running into hot water problems." Boys say they either walk into cold showers or get scalded by water that blisters the skin.

A waste-water line in the annex part of the hall disintegrated last year and had to be cut out of the floor before sewage could back up. "It was so old," Colbert says, "it rusted and collapsed."

E.K. Wainwright School, built in 1967 and now used for a dormitory, is never cool enough in the summer nor warm in the winter. Ceiling drip with condensation from the cooling system. "It looks like it's raining sometimes," Colbert says. "We've actually had to put buckets under the leaks."

Until this year, repairs to the hall went into a pile of maintenance requests for buildings throughout the county, he says. An electrician, plumber and painter dedicated to the Juvenile Hall are speeding things up. For example, tiles with asbestos adhesive backing were removed from floors in lockdown, where boys were using them to scratch on walls. And new security lights that are less easily broken are in cells.

But, Colbert says, the repairs are Band-Aids. Something else will break tomorrow. "This place, it's just seen its time," he says. "That's all there is to it."

HALL of SHAME

TO BOOK OR NOT

Writing the book on overcrowding



A youth enters Fresno Juvenile Hall's booking area, but he may not stay long. Overcrowding means that staffers often release those accused of crimes such as vehicle theft and drunken driving to ensure there's space for murder, rape and arson suspects.

Mark Cutshall peers out the tiny window in the locked door leading to Fresno Juvenile Hall's booking area. Two Fresno patrol cars are idling in the hall's parking lot, the officers waiting to unload the boys in the back. Behind Cutshall, booking officers are interviewing two boys who may end up in the only empty holding cell available. Until a berth in another holding cell opens up, no one else is getting inside the door.

Cutshall's job is to direct traffic into and out of the hall. He makes the call when to let a juvenile go home and when to assign out a bed.

On this fall afternoon, Cutshall, a senior group counselor, is under pressure to ease the logjam, but a larger problem also looms. The hall, as usual, is overcrowded. Booking often is busiest on afternoons when school is in session and on weekend nights.

"Wherever comes in, first gets to be booked first, unless we need more space, and then it's, 'Who can I process through and out the fastest?'"

Space has to be made for those accused of murder, rape or arson. That means those accused of drug possession, vehicle theft, burglary, possession of stolen property, fighting and drunken driving are rarely booked up. They are sent home or released with electronic bracelets on their ankles.

If a car thief comes in, Cutshall's first thought is, "We're going to release this kid."

One of his biggest fears is he'll opt to release a kid who will then commit a violent crime while out on house arrest. But he can't dwell on that possibility today. Getting children out of booking is his first priority. "I don't get too stressed out about it when I make the right call, because I know it's right. We can't keep everybody — it's impossible."

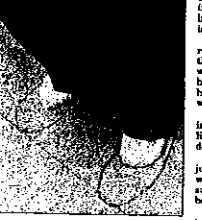
Group counselor Charlotte Thompson is tapping away on a keyboard, asking a 14-year-old a string of questions.

"Have you ever had any emotional problems for which you received counseling or treatment?"

"Have you ever been hospitalized for a mental or emotional problem?"

The boy shakes his head "no" to each question, barely looking up.

He's momentarily at a loss when



A young juvenile posing for his mug shot in the booking area finds evidence of a man's shoes too big to fill.

Thompson asks the color of his underwear. "Go ahead," she says. "You ain't look."

He peels inside his pants "Tan." Cutshall decides to release the boy and his friend, both brought in on accusations of sexual battery. They will be sent home to await their juvenile court hearing. They've never been in trouble before, and Cutshall sees the case as horseplay that got out of hand. He trusts these boys aren't serious threats. He orders booking officers to call their parents to come get them.

Two spots in booking just opened up.

As many as 80 times a day, children show up outside the beige building at 10th Street and Ventura Avenue. On busy days and nights, they may wait three to four hours, sitting in the back of a patrol car, until the scuffed door opens and someone from juvenile booking motions an officer to bring them inside. More than 5,000 juveniles pass through the entrance to booking every year.

Once inside, they can expect hours in limbo inside a holding cell, waiting for a booking interview, fingerprints, mug shot and shower.

The entire booking area — including the holding cells and a mildewed, grimy bathroom — is no bigger than an elementary school classroom. There is barely room for a couple of chairs and the fingerprint table along the back wall. Booking officers have to turn sideways to squeeze by boys getting their pictures taken at the end of a narrow hallway. Boys stand with their feet inside an outline of shoes for a mug shot that is electronically stored in a computer. Black line drawn from a man's footprint dwarf the boys' feet.

Signs over the exit door and the fingerprint table warn: "Peace officers are authorized to use FORCE, including PEPPER SPRAY, for purposes of defense and control, wherever necessary. Fresno County Probation Department."

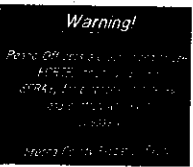
A poster above a doorway signals what could well be a booking officer's daily inspiration: "The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible."

When Cutshall begins his shift, he routinely logs onto a computer to check the hall population. "There isn't a time when we aren't running overpopulation," he says of the three years he's been at the hall. "It's a matter of how overpopulated we are at the time."

He needs to know how crowded the hall is — and which units are pushing their limits — to decide where the juveniles he does keep will be assigned.

Typically, Cutshall says, a male juvenile goes to high-security lockdown, where guards evaluate him for his suitability to be in a dorm, when a space becomes available.

Cutshall can have more than 10 juveniles inside the five holding cells that line a hallway in the back of the booking office. Each juvenile is carefully screened for gang loyalty. About half the juveniles who come through booking claim a gang affiliation. Putting a Building gang



A sign in the booking area makes it very clear to the newcomer that trouble is not permitted.

member in a cell with a Surenco is asking for trouble, because the rivals wait for opportunities to jump each other.

Officers can determine whether a youth belongs to a gang. Tell-tale signs are the style of dress and tattoos. But behavior is the real tip-off.

"When we go to put them in a cell with someone, we look at the reaction," Cutshall says. "And we ask, 'You guys get along?' You can tell if there's a recognition. You can tell by the facial expressions — their first expression if they don't like someone. You can tell by the way their eyes flare down or if their head lolls back."

It's had only one fight in booking. But he doesn't take chances. He doesn't take rival gang members out of cells at the same time.

Gang connections, however, aren't the only criteria for separating kids. Ratty boys can't be inside cells with small ones. A 17-year-old can't be with a 13-year-old.

Carlos Navarro takes over for Cutshall. On swing shift and watches as the dad of one of the boys accused of sexual battery picks up his son. The father's jaw is set. The boy says a few words, but dad turns his back. The boy follows him.

"A lot of times, parents believe it to their cars," Navarro says. "They don't want to talk."



An 11-year-old boy is booked by staffers, from left, Lejon Howard, Richard Street and Kevin White. Once officers decide to detain a youth, they must take into account gang affiliations and the child's size and age when doing cell placements.

A 13-year-old boy is the tenth to come inside and wait to be booked within the past three hours. He's accused of committing several thefts at his school. Two more youths wait outside in patrol cars.

Navarro leans out of the officers' waiting outside has a 16-year-old girl in custody. It means moving two boys out of a cell. He calls a female booking officer from another part of the hall to put her down.

It isn't the girl's first time in booking. "Remember the last time I was here?" she asks. There is no response.

Custodial care officer Lejon Howard isn't interviewing anyone, and he draws the short straw — he must check her duffel bag and two plastic bags. The plastic bags contain unwashed clothes. He pulls a black negligee from the duffel bag, holding it between the tips of latex-gloved fingers. He pulls out a bra and underwear and tosses them back inside.

From inside a ripped pocket, he pulls out a condom and a small photo album, flipping through the pictures before returning it. He checks pockets on jeans and shakes out folded socks. He paws quickly through the clothes in one of the plastic bags. There's \$1.01 in change. He puts it in a Ziploc bag. He grabs a can of Lysol, spraying the phone where some clothes landed.

Going through the girl's belongings has taken time.

Navarro checks the parking lot. When he let the girl inside, there was a Fresno police officer waiting with a boy in the back seat.

The police officer, tired of listening to radio traffic in his parked patrol car, drove away with the juvenile. More than likely, the officer will cite the boy — basically giving him a ticket to appear in court — and take him home. Juvenile Hall booking officers will never know the reason the boy was in custody or the seriousness of the charges.

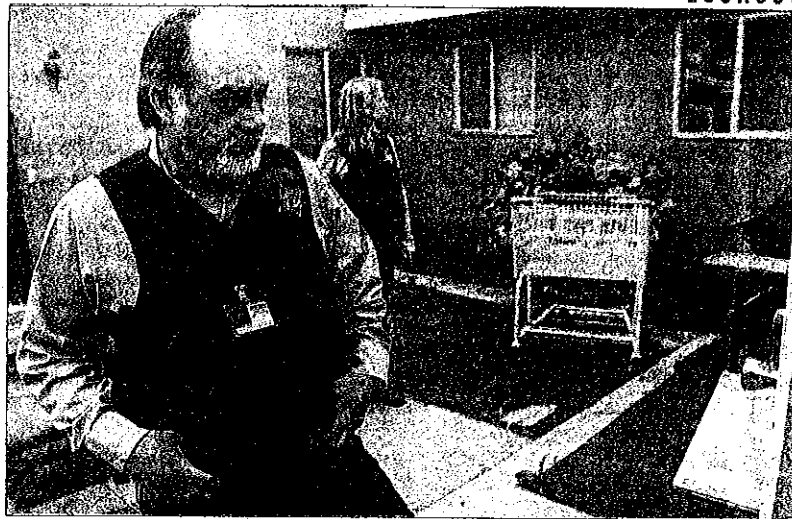
For the first time tonight, the parking lot is empty.

As many as 20 times a day, children show up ... On busy days and nights, they may wait three to four hours, sitting in the back of a patrol car, until the scuffed door opens and someone from juvenile booking motions an officer to bring them inside.

HALL of SHAME

LOOKOUT

Last year, 1,227 youths were released on pre-disposition home detention; all but 163 were boys. More than 1,000 of them had been charged with felonies.



Fresno County deputy probation officers Roger Luna and Sara Lewis search for a juvenile on supervised home detention at the youth's apartment. If the youngster isn't at home or school or with a parent or guardian, he is violating terms of his contract.

Hall pass back to the streets

It's called supervised home detention, SHD in bureaucratic shorthand. And it's pitched to an unsuspecting public as the most-efficient and least-dangerous remedy to persistent overcrowding at Fresno County Juvenile Hall.

Too many bodies in that crumbling monstrosity in southeast Fresno? Get the supposedly privatized youngsters, the alleged car thieves and burglars and dope peddlers, to sign a contract promising to be good boys and girls, then send them home until their court date.

But, however, think home detention is a joke.

Turns out it's hard to argue with them. And paying the piper are law-abiding citizens living in the county's poorest neighborhoods, who often are re-arrested by juveniles who, arrested for allegedly doing bad things, are freed by the very system designed to protect society.

Not that the young offenders give a damn.

"It was just like you never did nothing wrong," says a 15-year-old Fresno boy given home detention after being picked up for disturbing the peace. "It doesn't work. I just went out, did what I wanted, stayed out late."

A 16-year-old Fresno boy put on home detention after a probation violation says he was never home. "I went out and got drunk."

Home detention can turn into a money-maker for some of these kids, albeit an illegal one. A buddy stole a car while on supervised home detention, the 16-year-old adds.

At 18-year-old from rural Fresno County says he spent his time on home detention in a more lucrative endeavor: "I sold meth."

So much for safe, efficient remedies to an overcrowded Juvenile Hall. This isn't to suggest pre-disposition (before the court hearing) supervised home detention and its cousin, electronic monitoring, are total failures. Probation officials say most kids play it straight.

And those three teens who spoke so contemptuously of home detention did so while sitting in the hall's Unit. They got caught — for things like playing hooky from school and their community service assignments, not for selling drugs or stealing cars.

Q Till it's clear the popularity of home

detention and the utter disregard so many alleged offenders have for its rules are testament to the current Juvenile Hall's failure.

It's one thing to catch young offenders and pack them into an isolated hall. It's quite another thing to catch them, then send them right back out, all too often, to prey among innocent citizens.

Officials at Juvenile Hall said in

shamed silence when asked whether youths on home detention go back to the streets and commit more crimes. They admit they don't know how many crimes. How could they unless the kids are caught in the act? They just know it happens.

But, in a sense, the officials add, it doesn't matter. Their hands are tied by the hall's lack of space.

"To be honest with you, if it was up to me, we'd hold close to 1,000 of them," says Fresno County Probation Services Manager Brian Johnson, who oversees the pre-disposition home-detention and electronic-monitoring programs. "That we have to release these kids at all is a sign that we have an inadequate Juvenile Hall."

There are a lot of these "signs" walking around Fresno County's streets. Last year, 1,227 youths were released on pre-disposition home detention, all but 163 were boys. More than 1,000 of them had been charged with felonies.

Fresno County Chief Probation Officer Larry Price says his Department's No. 1 job is public safety, something Juvenile Hall officials also say keep in mind when releasing kids on home detention. Public protection "overrides everything else," he says.

Yet, in a certain degree, an act of self-defense is at the heart of home detention. Johnson doesn't try to hide it: "If we felt completely good about letting them out, we wouldn't be putting them on supervised home detention."

When he started in juvenile probation some 30 years ago, Johnson says, a kid brought to Juvenile Hall by a cop knew he'd be there for as long as it took justice to be served. His pals on the streets knew it, too.

Not anymore, not with Juvenile Hall packed to capacity nearly every day.

Says Johnson: "The power Juvenile Hall holds over kids suffers because they know there's no way in hell we're going to hold them. And the credibility of juvenile probation also suffers."

Can there be any more damning indictment of a dysfunctional Juvenile Hall than that?

Try this: Fresno police Sgt. Tony Benink of the Help Eliminate Auto Theft (HEAT) multi-agency task force recalls the night three months ago when he and several colleagues on stakeout busted some kids trying to steal a car.

One of the kids had a black eye. "I asked him, 'How'd you get that shiner?'" Benink says. "What happened was, he and some friends stole a car the night before and crashed it. He got

pinned in the car."

The boy was taken to Juvenile Hall, then released on home detention. Twenty-two hours later, he was stealing again.

Benink had no choice but to take the kid back to the same overcrowded hall that had just released him.

"That's the kind of thing that frustrates us no end," Benink says.

But at least it was a nonviolent crime, right? No, it turned out properly crimes aren't always so nonviolent.

"When you just look at car theft, there are a hundred things that can go on," Benink says. "Arson where they burn the car, drugs, hit-and-run accidents, drive-by. Stolen cars are involved in a lot of it."

Experts are quick to stress that home detention has a legitimate place in juvenile justice.

"No one wants to lock up kids if they don't have to," says Steve DeRose, deputy chief probation officer with Sacramento County.

But home detention, once called house arrest, is undergoing stresses no one anticipated 20 or 30 years ago, partly because of rising gang activity and the increasingly serious nature of juvenile crime.

It works like this: A youth is arrested and taken to Juvenile Hall. If it's a low-level offense, the booking supervisor can release him in his parents with no restrictions. That means everyone is pretty sure the youth will show up for his day in court without piling into more trouble.

If the offense is more serious and the hall is full, then the booking supervisor makes a tough on-the-spot decision. Get rid of the youth through home detention or find somebody already in the hall and put him on the program.

Murders and rapists? They stay. Youths charged with multiple felonies or violent assault don't go anywhere. Nor do those caught with a handgun or facing parole and immigration violations.

But many crimes fall under the home-detention umbrella. They include auto theft, burglary, a failed drug test while on probation and misdemeanor possession of a weapon such as a knife on school grounds. Youths charged with violent misdemeanors — "where a kid is assaulted at school, that kind of thing" — are eligible for supervised home detention, Johnson adds.

Let's say a teen boy is arrested for stealing your car, but Juvenile Hall on this night is overflowing. The booking officer decides to put him on home detention. What hope does the boy have to jump through?

First, he must be released to his parent or guardian. The definition of guardian can be loose if the booking supervisor is desperate. A 17-year-old boy accused of selling rock cocaine was released to his older sister in December after hall employees tracked her down at her job.

The boy and his parent/guardian must sign a Home Supervision Contract. The key points include:

■ "I agree to stay in my home at all times, unless I am in school or with my parent or legal guardian."

■ "I agree to obey all laws."

■ "I agree not to use or possess alcohol, illegal drugs, firearms or dangerous weapons."

Then off he goes.

Over the last three months of 2000,

Johnson says, Fresno County averaged 68 youths per day on pre-disposition home detention (there also are post-disposition home-detention and electronic-monitoring programs). There is rapid turnover because the kids, despite living at home, legally are in the county's custody and constitutionally entitled to a speedy trial or court date.

The pre-disposition electronic-monitoring program averaged 67 youths per day during the last three months of 2000. These guys are more dangerous than their home-detention colleagues. For example, several out on pre-disposition electronic monitoring in late December had been charged with robbery. That's a crime where "force or fear" is used to take something from a victim, Johnson says.

Electronic monitoring requires a court order. The youth wears an ankle bracelet with a radio transmitter. A receiver is connected to a telephone line in his home. Every time he leaves home, his ankle transmitter sends a message via the telephone line to a computer at General Security Services Corp. in Minneapolis, Minn., the company that oversees electronic monitoring for Fresno County.

A computer printout displaying each youth's comings and goings is sent daily to a probation officer.

It's not foolproof, Johnson says about five youths per month are rearrested for serious violations of their electronic-monitoring contract and sent back to Juvenile Hall.

And the kids find ways to skirt the rules. The 16-year-old Fresno boy who got drunk on home detention said he also did time on electronic monitoring. He would carve out a couple of unsupervised hours by telling his probation officer he had to switch buses three or four times just to get to school.

"I lied," he says. No one else knew it except his buddies.

But potential abuse is most common with an honor system like home detention. Just how spectacularly wrong it can go was apparent seven years ago when Nicholas Garcia helped some friends rob a shoe store in southeast Fresno. Garcia did his part by sticking a handgun in an employee's face.

Garcia, 14 years old at the time, was no angel before the armed robbery. But with only a few petty thefts and a stolen car on his record, he wasn't someone who raised red flags when brought into a crowded Juvenile Hall on another minor charge.

"I was supposed to stay home," Garcia says. "But I didn't like the rules."

The armed robbery soon followed. Garcia was caught several weeks later and has been a ward for inmates of the California Youth Authority since the last two years at the high security Y.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility at Stockton.

Another common weakness with home detention is the youths' parents. Or parent, since many youths come from broken homes.

Most parents want the best for their children and deserve a big share of the credit when home detention works, Johnson says. But the program is doomed when youths are sent back to homes where the authority figures have no respect for the law.

"We have parents who are gang members," Johnson says.

Please see DETENTION, Page 11

To be honest with you, if it was up to me, we'd hold close to 100% of them. That we have to release these kids at all is a sign that we have an inadequate Juvenile Hall.

— Fresno County Probation Services Manager Brian Johnson, who oversees the pre-disposition home-detention and electronic-monitoring programs

HALL of SHAME

DETENTION

Continued from Page 10
 bers themselves and are recruiting young people into gangs," Johnson says. "Unfortunately, that's not going to work out very good with supervised home detention, and we don't always have the ability to tell who that is."

The custody of Nicholas Garcia is proof that the justice system can be compromised in a potentially lethal manner because of an overcrowded juvenile hall. The labor of Roger Luna is proof that the justice system can be reduced to force by the same overcrowded hall.

Luna, 37, is one of three Fresno County deputy probation officers charged with keeping an eye on kids selected for pre-disposition home detention and electronic monitoring. The latter requires Luna to read a computer printout; the former requires numerous phone calls and weekly (at a minimum) home visits, some scheduled, others unscheduled.

Harding cats appear easier than riding herd on these youths.

Two boys sitting on top of a filing cabinet in his southeast Fresno office hold the records of his 50 to 60 "clients." On a late Wednesday afternoon in early January, Luna poked out three files and made unscheduled visits to the boys' homes.

School was out. Each was supposed to be home. None was.

"Some of these kids don't care any more about rules than they do about the man in the moon," Luna says.

Now keep in mind that home detention is supposed to be a largely routine way to handle juvenile hall overcrowding. The kids are screened to keep the potentially most-violent offenders behind locked doors.

So why is Luna wearing a Glock 22mm semiautomatic handgun on his right hip around in the car and the 18 rounds in the gun's clip if he's just checking up on "safe" kids?

"This is like being a police officer," he says. "It can be the most boring job in the world. Then, in seconds, your life can be on the line."

While driving to a public housing tract near the county fairgrounds, Luna recalls the day he and Fresno police officers arrested a boy at his home for selling drugs while on parole. After the boy was handcuffed, Luna ran his hand under the waistband where the boy had been sitting. He found a loaded Glock like his.

Luna concludes his story as he pulls into what he calls "the projects," a maze of nearly identical apartments where small children push themselves along the sidewalks. His first client is a 17-year-old boy charged with "PROBATION" stenciled on the back in big white letters, draws plenty of stares.

One of the youngsters opens the screen door at the boy's home. "What do you want?" a woman inside asks suspiciously. Luna looks no offense and says he is here to see an on-call, explaining that the boy is signed a contract requiring him to be at home except when in school.

"I don't know nothing about that," the woman says. "I don't pay any attention to what he does. He's my stepson. I've got to do my own thing."

She says the boy probably is with his father, maybe at the hospital since the boy became a father himself a few days earlier. The boy has broken no rules if he is with his dad; if not, he could get sent back to the hall, though probation officers have some discretion whether to give a break to their clients.

Luna can't hide his skepticism, but there's nothing he can do except ask the dispatcher to have the boy call him.

"The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing," he says of the courts. He makes a note to check back with the boy.

The next day, the father tells Luna that he and his son were talking together for the mother of the boy's child. Within the week, Luna learns the boy has gone to court and is no longer on home detention. He isn't told whether the boy was innocent or guilty.

from another probation officer. Phone calls went unanswered. Luna wasn't sure the boy ever lived at the address, an apartment near Maple and Shields avenues.

Now often do the youths and their parents still the system by giving a wrong address?

"It happens," he says.

This visit was quick. Knock, knock. Wait. Knock, knock. Two minutes later, Luna is walking back to his county car. A judge probably will issue a bench warrant on the guy, Luna says. The warrant will come back to haunt the boy next time he gets picked up by the law, he says. Until then, the boy is free. Luna appears to be 0 for 2. Yet, maybe the first time the boy was up with two companions.

"School," says the clean-cut boy. He's holding a bright red binder.

The two companions wait. The boy bangs on the door, and a disheveled man with wild hair opens the door. Two probation officers, then, mumble something about putting a bed together. He is Luna's new boy. Neon isn't his friend.

The living room carpet is badly stained and two dirty mattresses lie against the front window. Luna and Lewis search the boy's bedroom with a flashlight—there are no working light bulbs in the lamp and socket.

The boy is Lewis' client. He has a transmitter and a receiver tied to a home phone line. When he leaves home, his transmitter sends a message out by phone.

In electronic monitoring, the youth wears a transmitter, and a receiver is tied to a home phone line. When he leaves home, his transmitter sends a message out by phone.

The boy's mother's response? "He asked me, 'I smoke pot sometimes. Is that OK?'" Lewis says as she and Luna drive away. She tells the boyfriend to knock off the dope smoking around the boy.

Luna clearly likes the boy. "He was very respectful." Yet, considering his circumstances, what chance does this 14-year-old really have, not just with home detention but life itself?

"It's possible," Lewis says. "It's his choice."

Luna shakes his head.

The client lives near Cedar and California avenues, in southeast Fresno. He's a 16-year-old charged with stealing a car, then running when caught by police.

The youths visited by the Probation Department on these two days live in rough neighborhoods far north of Shaw Avenue. No surprise these areas experts long ago established a connection between poverty and destructive behavior.

Be careful of stereotypes, Luna warns. In his quarter-century in the probation business, he has seen everything, finger-dipping, dope-smoking young punks bring in some of the most expensive homes in the Fresno-Clovis area.

Like the girl on home detention living in a mansion in Clovis. Both parents are doctors, but she couldn't get off drugs, Luna says. Or the boy living in a multimillion-dollar home near Woodward Park. He was one of the Dedication, a gang of teens "dedicated" to getting high and beating people with brass knuckles and baseball bats. This boy drove a new BMW and had his own credit card.

The biggest difference between the rich kids and the poor kids? "A high-powered lawyer," Luna says.

Client No. 2 on this day, the 16-year-old, isn't home, either. He lives in a house with a spiked iron fence around the front yard.

"It's at school," dad says. Luna and Lewis go with dad to check out the boy's bedroom. They return in a few minutes, and Luna is holding two drawings, one of a building, the other displaying a printed word impossible to decipher. Both look like the graffiti that scarred so many

fences and buildings in Fresno only a few years ago.

Dad says his son really likes the Fresno State Bulldogs. The boy suddenly appears on foot.

"Where were you?" Luna asks.

"At the store, playing a game," he says. The probation officers start to remind dad about his home-detention responsibilities, but the boy interrupts when he spots Luna holding the drawings. The boy protests, but Luna pays no attention. Probation officers can confiscate a client's gang paraphernalia, just as if he were in juvenile hall. Sometimes, bedroom walls are covered with gang graffiti. Luna orders dad to remove it (painting the walls, if necessary) or face returning to the hall.

The boy ignores the officers' lecture, constantly looking over his left and right shoulders. He's worried one of his friends down the street is watching. The officers and dad tell him to pay attention. "I am paying attention," the boy shouts back.

Dad is doing damage control as he walks with Luna and Lewis to the county car, saying he didn't know his son broke the home-detention contract when he took off by himself to the store. Doesn't work.

"It'll be on the (electronic) monitor tomorrow," Lewis says of the boy as she and Luna drive away. "An enabler," Luna says of dad.

There are things a Probation Department can do to break home detention. DeRose, Sacramento County's deputy chief probation officer, says his department tries to do daily random home inspections. Probation officers then check back to make sure the kids don't duck out.

Sacramento County also has a computerized phone program that calls youths when they're supposed to be home. The youth must answer a series of questions, and the computer recognizes whether it's really his voice.

Not in juvenile justice alone in having problems with a large criminal justice system. Have you looked at the bail system for adults? DeRose asks.

Yet, the two programs—kids on pre-disposition home detention, adults on bail—aren't exactly the same thing. For one, juvenile crime isn't on the radar screen the way adult crime is. That's why Fresno County has a relatively new jail annex and an Expansion-era Juvenile Hall.

Prior, Fresno County's probation chief, says there's a simple answer (short of building a new juvenile hall) to the shortcomings of home detention and electronic monitoring. Just hire 20 additional probation officers to do the job on the streets until midnight seven days a week randomly checking up on the kids.

The only hang-up? Finding the money. That's a big hang-up in a county with tight budgets.

Others who deal with troubled kids say Probation has the right idea if the county wants to cut its face with pre-disposition home detention instead of building a bigger hall. The program works only when somebody keeps a tight, constant rein on the youths. If the county can do it and outperformances often drop the ball, who steps in?

Nonprofit organizations like House of Hope for Youth are one answer. House of Hope founder Susan Bechara knows all about home detention's failures. She sees them every day at her agency's three Fresno sites.

"It's a joke," she says of home detention. "There's no supervision at home. If the parents were supervising their kids at home, they wouldn't be in trouble in the first place."

Bechara then points to a 15-year-old Fresno boy doing homework at the conference table in her central Fresno office. There is your answer, she says. That boy is how you make home detention work, if it's going to work at all.

It's an unrealistic home detention and doing as he is promised.

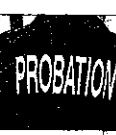
"I don't want to break any rules," he says.

Of course he doesn't. Bechara shouts, his voice filling the room. That's because somebody at House of Hope is on his butt almost every waking moment, she says. "These kids don't want to talk trouble with us. Because if they do, we nail them."

PROBATION

We have parents who are gang members themselves and are recruiting young people into gangs. Unfortunately, that's not going to work out very good with supervised home detention, and we don't always have the ability to tell who that is.

— Brian Johnson, probation services manager



But be careful of stereotypes, probation officer Roger Luna warns. In his quarter-century in the probation business, he has seen snot-nosed, finger-flipping, dope-smorting young punks living in some of the most expensive homes in the Fresno-Clovis area.

Juvenile Hall building timeline

Overcrowding of the 25-bed home are overcrowding, inadequate ability to separate older youth from younger offenders and proximity to Roosevelt High School.

January 1951: The juvenile ward of the Fresno County Jail is deemed not a proper or suitable place for the care and detention of minors. Older boys and girls are housed at the Fresno County Juvenile Hall at Huntington Boulevard and Cedar Avenue, which has an average daily population of 17.2 children.

February 1957: New \$400,000, 10,000-square-foot Juvenile Hall at 1001 Street and Victoria Avenue is completed for 65 boys and girls. The hall has a craft room, instruction room and three dining rooms. Girls and boys have individual rooms.

September 1967: A 50-bed youth center for boys opens as a "home treatment" unit, with school, psychological counseling and other rehabilitative programs. The unit, which is renamed the C.K. Watstead School in 1973, is adjacent to the hall.

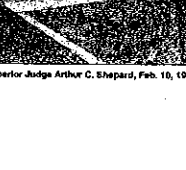
November 1968: The Board of Supervisors approves a \$566,000 contract for a two-story addition to the Juvenile Hall.

July 1970: Two-story \$1,035,650 Juvenile Hall addition is dedicated. The addition includes 65 beds in a dormitory atmosphere and several individual rooms, five classrooms, two sewing kitchens, dining and study areas and a courtroom. The second floor is vacant.

September 1981: New \$1.2 million remodeling of the second floor of the Juvenile Hall opens. The second floor has four new classrooms, a dormitory with 64 beds, a dining-multipurpose room and a new book room.

January 1987: An eight-bed dormitory in Unit opens where a storeroom and office were located. The remodeling cost about \$20,000.

Superior Judge Arthur C. Shepard, Feb. 10, 1957.



addition to the Juvenile Hall.

July 1968: The Board of Supervisors approves \$566,000 to repair, add five rooms to the two-story addition at Juvenile Hall and install a closed-circuit surveillance system and intercom/teletext system.

May 1970: Two-story \$1,035,650 Juvenile Hall addition is dedicated. The addition includes 65 beds in a dormitory atmosphere and several individual rooms, five classrooms, two sewing kitchens, dining and study areas and a courtroom. The second floor is vacant.

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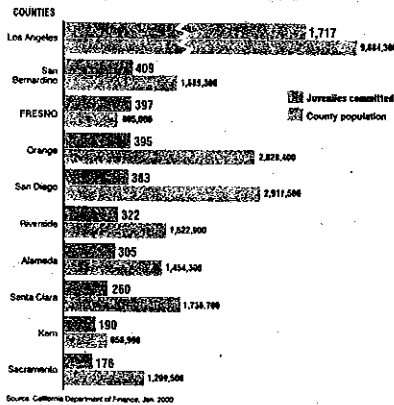
January 1987: An eight-bed dormitory in Unit opens where a storeroom and office were located. The remodeling cost about \$20,000.

HALL OF SHAME

THE NUMBERS

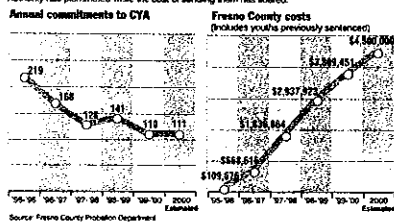
California Youth Authority

The biggest users of the California Youth Authority tend to be the most populous counties. But a county's population is not always an indicator of how frequently juveniles are committed to the Youth Authority. For example, Fresno County as of June 30, 2000, was the third-largest source of wards to the Youth Authority. In contrast, San Francisco County has about the same size population, but only had 85 wards in the CYA as of the same date.



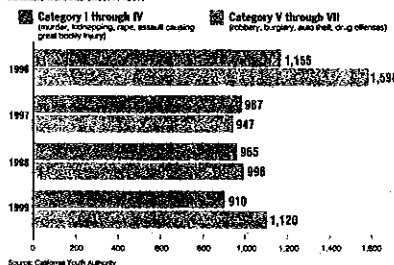
Commitments vs. costs

State legislation that went into effect on Jan. 1, 1997, has delivered a double blow to Fresno County's juvenile justice system. The number of serious offenders sent to the California Youth Authority has plummeted while the cost of sending them has soared.



Statewide breakdown by crime

The number of youths sent to the California Youth Authority dropped when the new payment schedule went into effect in 1997.



In 1996, more than 10,000 wards were locked up in Youth Authority institutions built to house about 6,700. In the first year of higher fees, the number of nonviolent offenders dropped by 40%. By early February, the Youth Authority was housing about 7,200 wards.

The Elkhorn boot camp near Caruthers, opened in late 1997, took some pressure off Fresno County. Still, the county spent \$1.8 million between July 1997 and June 1998 for the 125 juveniles sent to the Youth Authority.

But if SB 681 has worked from the state's perspective, then what's the cost to counties? Their probation chiefs complain the Youth Authority is keeping nonviolent wards longer because the kids are a profit center. They say offenders who repeatedly wash out of local programs need to go to the Youth Authority but are kept home because of the high fees. They say counties deserve some influence in how long wards stay with the Youth Authority.

None of this angry talk has produced results. That has created an "us vs. them" attitude among many probation chiefs who see the state as, at best, an indifferent teammate.

"It's a lack of — I don't know if you

want to call it lack of leadership — but it's lack of partnership between the state and the counties," says David Lehman, Humboldt County's chief probation officer. "There seems to be a feeling that counties deal with custody issues at a local level and the state deals with prison and the Youth Authority and that line should never be crossed."

"To me, it should be a statewide system, and if the kids need the Youth Authority, then that's where they should go."

The state hasn't been a complete miser, the probation chiefs acknowledge. For example, it set aside \$123 million last year for such things as county-run ranches and prevention programs. Fresno County got \$2.8 million of it for a program that works with 10- to 14-year-olds considered "at risk" of getting into trouble.

It's never enough, the probation chiefs complain.

In the end, they say, the effects of SB 681 are here to stay. Says Riverside County Chief Probation Officer Marie Whittington of the politicians who keep SB 681 on the books: "It's highly unusual for them to admit they made a mistake."

Paying price for juvenile justice

A 4-year-old state budget bill with the innocent-sounding name "local government assistance" has instead caused nothing but financial grief for many California counties trying to put a check on their most troublesome young criminals.

On Jan. 1, 1997, Senate Bill 681 went into effect creating a sliding fee schedule that counties must pay to send young offenders, called wards, to the California Youth Authority, the final step in the state's juvenile justice system.

Until that day, counties could ship any ward to the Youth Authority for a few hundred dollars a year. After the bill's passage, they had to pay as much as \$3,120 annually for the least-violent youths.

Juvenile justice from Humboldt County in the north to San Bernardino County in the south has never been the same. Counties now find themselves sending fewer wards to Youth Authority but paying drastically higher bills.

In the 1995-96 fiscal year, Fresno County sent 219 new commitments to the Youth Authority. The county's cost, including wards sentenced in previous years, was \$109,616. In 1999-2000, it sent 110 new commitments but at a cost, including previously sentenced wards, of \$3.8 million.

A similar trend is found in counties throughout the state. From 1995 to 1999, Sacramento County officials say, their new Youth Authority commitments dropped more than 40% while the bill for them jumped from an estimated \$77,200 to an estimated \$578,600. Kern County saw the number of new commitments drop by 65% from 1996 to 1998 while its bill almost doubled.

Spending more for less service is a sure way to rile up the counties, and that's what SB 681 did. But that's not the end of their mad problems. Because they're sending fewer kids to the Youth Authority, counties suddenly find themselves searching, often unsuccessfully, for more room at home in what often are already overcrowded juvenile halls and boot camps.

And because they're sending more money to the Youth Authority, counties have less money to spend on the bigger juvenile halls and boot camps needed to solve the overcrowding caused by SB 681.

There's only one way out of this problem, say many county chief probation officers.

"Give us the money back," pleads Helen Harberts, chief probation officer for Butte County.

No local probation department official suggests the higher fees are hurting public safety.

"The type of kids we send to the Youth Authority deserve to go to the Youth Authority, and the cost is not an issue," says Bob Lyons, Sacramento County's assistant chief probation officer.

Yet, the question remains: In the current fee schedule a boon or a burden for the two stakeholders who normally meet in this fight — troubled kids and taxpayers?

Without a doubt, the old deal was a great-looking one-sided bet. For about 30 years, counties were given a green light to send juvenile lawbreakers to full-time incarceration in the Youth Authority for \$25 a month. By the mid-1980s, counties were paying about a penny on the dollar of the Youth Authority's cost per ward. On Jan. 1, 1997, the old deal went good when SB 681 went into effect.

Here's how the current deal is structured. Juvenile offenders are rated by the state Youthful Offender Panel Board according to the seriousness of their crimes. Category I is murder; Category VII is sex offender and drug purveyor. The other crimes fall somewhere in between.

The new deal requires counties to pay \$150 a month, or \$1,800 a year, to send wards in the first four categories to the Youth Authority. But the counties pulped when they saw what they must pay for the last three categories: 50% of the ward's annual cost in Category V, 75% in VI and 100% in VII.

The least annual cost of housing a youth, according to the Youth Authority, is \$41,700. Because of legislation designed by Sen. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, the fee for Category VII youths is capped at \$31,200.

Still, counties saw their annual Youth Authority bills skyrocket to a statewide total of \$4.9 billion in 1999-2000. The counties admit some were making out the band by "dumping" expensive wards on the Youth Authority. SB 681 was an old-fashioned, capitalistic incentive. Counties could keep their old ways and break the budget or develop local alternatives (boot camps, prevention programs) to deal with less-threatening offenders closer to home.

And there's the rub, probation chiefs say. On one hand, counties have no doubt outside of a recommendation at sentencing on which youthful offenders get sent to the Youth Authority. That decision lies with juvenile court judges. Now they have any say in how long the wards stay with the Youth Authority or what category they're placed in. Those decisions belong to the Youthful Offender Panel Board. The counties just pay the bills handed down by the state.

On the other hand, the counties say that they have been slow to receive money back from the state to pay for the local programs that were the very goal of SB 681. What county programs are in place then get overwhelmed in part because money that could help expand them is sent sent to the Youth Authority to pay for category V, VI and VII wards.

The big, urban counties, with more local programs already in place, weren't hurt as badly, but smaller counties weren't so lucky, say the county probation officers.

Youth Authority Director Jerry Harper, on the job only 11 months, declined to address the wisdom of the sliding fee schedule.

Plenty of counties, though, have double-knives County Chief P. Sharon Officer John Farley calls the big fee for categories V, VI and VII a "rip-off."

State Sen. Chuck Pochigian, R-Fresno, says the state Legislature understands the counties' plight and the impact of juvenile crime on law-abiding citizens: "It's a never-ending war that we're all involved in."

But if everyone is on the same team, how did California get in this fix? Four or five decades ago, the Youth Authority had room for so-called "status offenders," kids who had run away from home or were too hard for mom and dad to handle.

That changed in the 1990s. Gangs grew more violent and so did young offenders. Pressure grew to reserve the Youth Authority for the toughest wards. Then, in 1994, the Legislative Analyst's Office discovered 20 counties — including Fresno County — were shipping mostly non-violent offenders to the Youth Authority.

Sacramento's answer was SB 681. "Initially, there was a lot of panic," says Chris Hope, deputy chief probation officer in San Joaquin County. "We didn't have many alternatives, and suddenly we were looking at spending \$1.5 million a year that we had never had to budget for before."

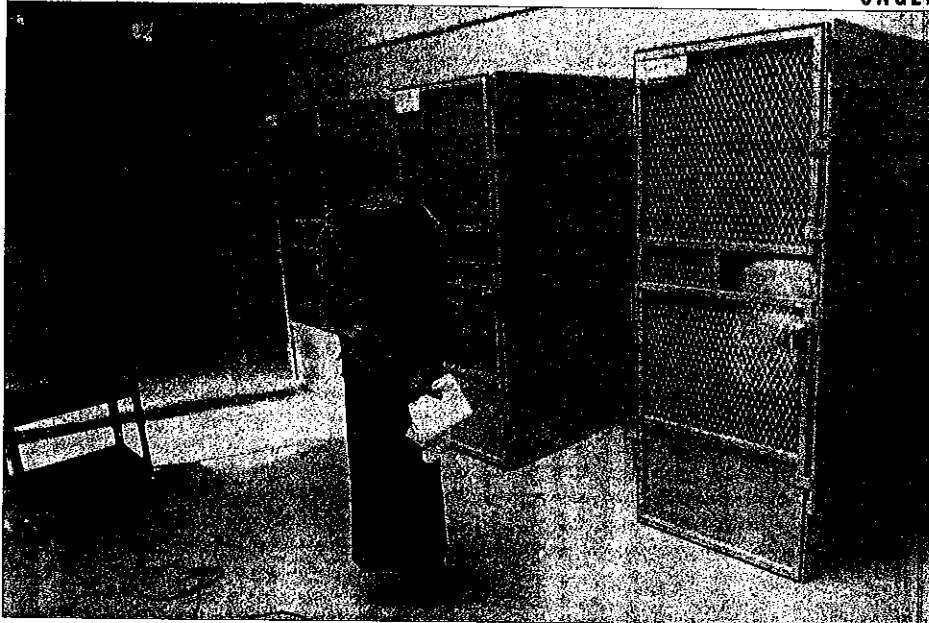
Says San Bernardino County Chief Probation Officer Ray Winger: "I didn't understand it at all. We don't get charged for sending adults to state prison." Probation chiefs reluctantly backed off from a pitched fight when the state promised to distribute more than \$31 million to help pay for county-run alternatives.

SB 681 has worked its intended magic.



John Morgan, a teacher at CYA, teaches a ward through a slit in a door. In 1997, counties started sharing more of the Youth Authority's cost, some of which involves education.

THERESA DOWLING - THE FRESNO BEE



In a maximum-security unit at the California Youth Authority's N.A. Chaderjian School in Stockton, violent wards are placed in metal cages while attending school. Teachers wear flak jackets to prevent being stabbed with pencils and other objects, and slide schoolwork through slots in the door.

A world of rage locked in a cage

STOCKTON — It is here, amid the eerie silence of Unit II at N.A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility, that the immense challenges facing the California Youth Authority are perhaps most evident.

Unit II is one of six seven-story, 100-cell buildings on the spacious grounds of this so-called medium-security jail for youthful offenders, or wards. That's how the Youth Authority folks describe this place, nicknamed Chad.

Any visitor with common sense, though, quickly realizes Chad is actually a prison where criminals live in two-story cellblocks under pretty much the same level of maximum security that can be found at, say, Corcoran State Prison.

Unit II is unique even at Chad. This is where the wards with mental problems are housed. Murderers, rapists, arsonists and child molesters wait the concrete floor of this building's common area.

Some are on mood-altering psychotropic drugs in an effort to control behavior that could, without warning, turn violent.

To walk onto the common area of Unit II is to come face-to-face with the very essence of the juvenile justice system's dilemma: What is the right way to deal with the worst of the worst in juvenile crime?

Punishment and incarceration? Or rehabilitation and freedom?

There's no simple answer, as becomes obvious from a tour of Chad's other units. Some wards greet visitors with the politeness of choropleths. Some have rap sheets that could sicken a hardened cop.

But it's also equally clear that a majority of Chad's staff — the counselors and teachers and supervisors and administrators — passionately believe in rehabilitation for at least a majority of the wards.

Even in Unit II.

When they come in here, we never know if this (mouth) is the one who is going to make it," says Unit II Supervisor Valma Prazier. "I have cases who have made it. These are the stories that let me have a little more patience."

The question now rolling the waters in Sacramento is whether the Youth Authority — which oversees about 7,200 wards in 11 institutions, four camps and two residential drug programs — is up to the job. State Inspector General Steve White, on orders from Gov. Davis, is conducting an exhaustive investigation into the agency, looking into allegations ranging from guard-on-ward violence and

end of the line of juvenile justice in California, then Chad is the Pelican Bay State Prison. It's the place where the other jails send the hard-core wards they can't handle.

Chad is named after N.A. "Chad" Chaderjian, a Fresnoan who became head of California's prison system under Gov. George Deukmejian and died in 1988. Don't let the neat, spacious grounds fool you. This is a maximum-security prison in every sense of the word, from the double ring of barbed-wire topped fences

surrounding the grounds to the 12 halls (i.e. cellblocks, two per building), each housing two tiers of drab "rooms" where wards are locked for most of the time when they're not in school or exercising.

Chad may well be ground zero for the Youth Authority problems outlined by agency Director Harper and Inspector General White. This isn't to suggest that Chad has been a hotbed for failure. But since some 80% of Chad's wards were sent there from other Youth Authority jails and camps because of discipline problems, it is fair to suggest that a successful strategy toward juvenile punishment/rehabilitation at Chad may well be duplicated throughout the system.

If, then it figures to be a strategy of tough love, with an emphasis on the first word. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the first of Chad's six housing units.

Each of Chad's six cellblock buildings is divided into two separate living areas, or halls. Each hall is named after a California river and is home to a unique set of wards. American is the gang-free hall. Tusahoma is the substance-abuse hall.

Unit I, home to Sacramento and Kern halls, is the lockdown (or Special Management) unit. Home to the "baba" or change and "resistant/denial" programs. To walk into Unit I is to walk into a human inferno of rage.

What immediately strikes a first-time visitor to Kern Hall is the noise. Most of its 33 wards on a mid-December day are locked behind thick steel doors, one boy to a cell. That does nothing to stop them from banging and yelling at the sight of a stranger in their midst.

A placard on each cell explains why the ward is in lockdown. "Fresno Bee! Check this out," yells a tall ward behind a cell door. His placard reads "highly assertive."

Standing next to the cell's window is an equally tall teacher, calmly giving instruction on fractions to the agitated ward. If school papers need to be exchanged, it is done through a food slot in the door.

Dressed in tasteful slacks and shirt, the clean-cut teacher looks like a perfect fit for an upscale suburban high school, but for one detail. He is wearing a flak jacket.

All teachers in Kern wear flak jackets just in case a ward lashes out through the food slot with a sharp weapon. Each teacher knows which is the ward's strongest hand, right or left, then stands far to the side of that hand. That lessens the impact of any thrust by a ward

lunging with his strong hand through the food slot.

The teacher leans toward the cell's narrow, rectangular window, trying to get his hand to focus on fractions. The ward paces back and forth in his cell, Chad suddenly thrusts his face toward the window. He speaks in a voice loud enough to be heard only by the teacher, then suddenly resumes pacing. This process is repeated again and again. The teacher never loses patience, never raises his voice, never stops extolling the virtues of fractions.

"They're still legally entitled to an education. It is a civil right," says Dr. Manuel R. Roman Jr., principal of Chad's high school.

Most of Chad's students attend high school in a more traditional setting. Granted, it is a high school where the students are frisked twice daily and never go to a football game or on a field trip. But at least it has a flagpole and classrooms with real desks and teachers writing on blackboards. The high school experience in Kern Hall is meant to be no less educational, even if the teachers have to bob and weave in front of food slots to avoid getting "gassed" by wards.

"Gassing" is prison slang for the hurling of feces and urine at someone.

In the next cell, a shorter, slightly built ward stares with wide eyes and wide grin through his narrow, rectangular cell window. Slowly, he raises his middle finger and pulls a stream of curses. His placard says he is under a suicide watch.

Roman says visitors should look at some wards, such as this one, out of the corners of their eyes rather than straight on. A direct gaze will only further anger them, he says.

Every visitor to Chad is required to wear a belt with two remote-control alarms. When activated with the push of a button or pull of a wire, each alarm immediately informs armed guards that someone is in physical danger and the problem's location. A tour of Kern Hall makes plain the reality behind this policy.

"Some of them are going to be very difficult to turn around," says Roman, a Vietnam veteran. "If we can turn them around at all."

But to get a true idea of just how hard life is in Kern, a visitor merely needs to walk across the concrete floor in the other side of the open area. Along one wall sits a row of heavy steel boxes standing about 3 feet wide and 6 feet high and painted light blue. These are the Special Program Area, or SPAs. In the shorthand at Chad, they are called, simply, the cages.

And that, literally, is what they are. Human cages. Each with a metal desk and a toilet seat where a ward sits behind a heavy-wire screen door and does his schoolwork while a teacher, wearing his flak jacket securely fastened and standing to one side, delivers typical high school lessons in a calm, soothing voice.

Two of the teachers on this day are Please see CHAD, Page 14

All teachers in Kern wear flak jackets just in case a ward lashes out through the food slot with a sharp weapon. Each teacher knows which is the ward's strongest hand, right or left, then stands far to the side of that hand.



HALL OF SHAME

Miles away at Elkhorn boot camp

Marching in the fog. Scrubbing toilets. Wearing olive-drab uniforms. Addressing every adult as "sir" or "ma'am." Hitting the books morning, noon and night.

Hardly sounds like a life to cheer: the heart of your typical teen-ager. Yet, to a 17-year-old Fresno boy during this winter at the Elkhorn Correctional Facility, this kind of daily routine is nothing less than a blessing.

In part, it's because he feels Elkhorn's no-nonsense program is showing him the path to a bright future. But the boy also appreciates Fresno County's 3-year-old boot camp near Caruthers for what it's not.

It's not Juvenile Hall. "In the hall, it's the same old thing every day," says the boy, who is at Elkhorn for petty theft. "It's in your room, sleep, get up, go to school. That's about it. I drove me nuts."

But the county sent him to Elkhorn. It made all the difference. If he had stayed at the hall, the boy says, "things wouldn't matter as much as they do here. Here, you set a lot of goals. Here, you like yourself more."

Elkhorn is Fresno County's most ambitious juvenile justice experiment of the past decade, maybe since the current hall in southeast Fresno opened 44 years ago. It is a locally administered program for youths who already have had their day in court, one combining equal parts discipline, education and rehabilitation. Which is precisely what state legisla-

ture had in mind four years ago when they jacked up the fees paid by counties sending criminals to the California Youth Authority. Keep your young law-breakers close to home if you can, the Youth Authority told the counties.

Located in a rural area near Caruthers, the residential camp uses a military-style program to reform nonviolent youth offenders. Its capacity has grown to 200 boys since it opened Dec. 5, 1987. The camp was created partly in response to a sharp rise in juvenile crime during the early and mid-1980s.

The daily routine would be familiar to any military veteran. The boys sleep in open barracks, clean their own latrines and store their gear in wall lockers. They're up before dawn for P.T. (physical training), then head to chow (breakfast). School is central to the rehabilitative process. At night, the cadets attend room classes, among them victim-awareness lessons.

Boys rise in rank with their successes: recruit, Cadet I, II and III. It's a place where the stuffing gets knocked (figuratively speaking, of course) out of arrogant newcomers. Gang members must buy a paper cup on their heads whenever they go. The reason: Nobody struts with a hat cup up there.

The boys spend up to seven months at Elkhorn, less if they get their act together sooner. Nearly 60% complete the program. If there is a common theme to the stories of many Elkhorn cadets, it's their contempt for the county's Juvenile Hall. Granted, to a certain extent they're comparing apples to oranges.

Most of Juvenile Hall is for youths awaiting their turn in the legal system. Boot camp is where they might be sentenced if found guilty.

Yet, these boys' comments carry the weight of experience. They spent weeks, sometimes months, in both places. They say the hall makes hard teens even harder. "In the hall, people get into big fights," says the 17-year-old boy, a Cadet III who once attended McLane High. Some fights, he added, are racially motivated.

On this cold December morning, a 16-year-old Cadet I who went to Sunny-side High is reading a book in his barracks. He is at boot camp for assault. Boot

camp "is like living in a big living room," compared to the crowded hall, he says.

An 18-year-old Cadet III from Kernan, the camp's first sergeant, is the most eloquent witness to the stark contrast between Elkhorn and Juvenile Hall. He describes two different juvenile justice systems. One, he says, came about through fear. The other barely acknowledges their humanity.

They make us eat in our room (in Juvenile Hall). Sometimes, they don't even give us forks," says the cadet, who is at Elkhorn for tagging the walls of a business. "They make us cut our cups in

half and use that as a fork to eat. It's not a nice place."

In the end, it is the lack of discipline and order at Juvenile Hall, the absence of any sense of mission by staff members and the youths they guard, that most angers the first sergeant. He makes his point by gesturing toward the Elkhorn obstacle course. Every wall and pit was built by the cadets.

The course, he says, "teaches us teamwork. In the hall, they don't teach us that. Here, we're doing stuff. We're not just sitting on our butts maringuard like in there."

A guard teaches a new youngster at boot camp how to march after the youth was unable to keep up with the other members of his unit.

Gang members must balance a paper cup on their heads wherever they go. The reason: Nobody struts with a Dixie cup up there.



Schooling is central to rehabilitation at the boot camp.

Once a ward shows signs of following the rules, he moves up to cages with wire mesh sides so he can see to his right or left. If he continues to be good, he'll move up into a semicircle of cages where he can see other wards and the teacher.

CHAD

Continued from Page 13

"You're in a cage because the student is a molester, a snitch or a discipline problem," Principal Roman says. In other words, somebody would like to harm the person in the cage, or the person in the cage is likely to harm someone else.

The wards are housed over their schoolwork while seated in cages that, with a few modifications, could have housed zoo animals. A few suitably look on.

Roman describes the wards in Kern Hall as "the worst of the worst." Yet, getting into a cage is actually a good sign for the ward. That means he is at least entertaining the notion there is more to life than crime. A very preliminary notion, to be sure. The sides and backs of these particular cages are solid plates of metal. That's because these wards can't be trusted to gaze on the wards next to them without making threats.

Once a ward shows signs of following the rules, he moves up to cages with wire mesh sides so he can see to his right or left. If he continues to be good, he'll move up into a semicircle of cages where he can see other wards and the teacher. Chad officials proudly note that the cages are welded and painted by other wards in one of the vocational training programs.

The cages may look like medieval torture chambers, but Roman says they are appreciated by some kids who sit in them: "A ward once told me, 'In the SPA, no one can attack me, no one can smack up on me. I can concentrate on my book.'"

Unit II. Merced and McCloy halls, in the opposite of Unit I in terms of noise. This soundproof quiet place is where wards with mental problems are housed — youths who can't control their violent or sexual impulses or need special protection from other wards. This unit has its own psychologist, its own suicide ward and two special rooms to handle a "crisis." Some wards are on psychiatric drugs to control their behavior. On this December day, one ward's hands and feet are shackled as he is taken to the shower.

In a nearby room, wards receiving counseling while seated around a table can be seen through an unsecured window.

Unit II officials admit some wards have committed heartbreakingly repugnant crimes. But, with enough counseling and time, some may improve enough to make it on the outside.

A ward named Anthony may be one of them. A thin young man of modest height with a hint of facial hair, he gives few clues about his past.

"I was someone who always wanted to join in," Anthony says. "If there was something going on, anything, I wanted my name in there."

At Chad, Anthony has joined in again, but as a member of the Unit II Cadet Corps. This ward, a follower on the outside, in the Corps' second in command. He is a leader, the kind of cadet who helps. He likes the feeling.

"When I get out, I plan on going into the service," he says. If he does, it'll be another of the success stories cherished by Frasier, a supervisor in Unit II. She has no idea how many Unit II wards make something of themselves on the outside. She just knows that when wards come to Unit II, her job isn't to judge — the courts already have done that. Her job is to help.

"What I want to focus on is the ward's ability to change," Frasier says. "Because the reality is one day they will be back in society."

The dramatic scenes in Units I and II underscore what officials see as one of Chad's strengths, which is the Youth Authority's unwavering commitment to education. Even the murderers and rapists and child molesters who may not see freedom for years will get an education at Chad, they say.

It's a tall order, considering the dangers and challenges posed by Chad's diverse population. In mid-December, Chad had 777 wards, all male. The two youngest were 17 years old. The vast majority were 18 to 20.

Nearly half belonged to a gang: Crips, Bloods, Norteños, Sureños, Bulldogs. More than 100 are sex offenders; more than 200 are suicide risks. Nearly three in four are deemed "sexually."

The maximum age for wards at a Youth Authority jail is 21 or 25, depending on the nature of their crimes. The most violent are kept until they're 25. Youth Authority officials say.

Once the wards have served their time, Chad officials say, "they're out." The only wards sent on to a state prison after their Youth Authority sentence are those convicted of a crime committed inside a Youth Authority jail or camp.

In education, Youth Authority officials say, it is the key to getting most of these wards back into society as productive citizens. And judging by the stories of two wards from Fresno County, it may be. Enrique Mendoza, 21 and a former

Parlier High School student, has been in state custody since early 1987 when he was convicted of assault with a deadly weapon. A gang member or wannabe since he was 11, Mendoza had pulled a knife on a rival gangbanger in Parlier and tried to stab him. He didn't hurt the other guy, Mendoza said, but the attempt got him sent to the Youth Authority.

Slipping into the lawlessness of street life was almost too easy for him.

"I was young, living the fast life," Mendoza says. Now, he is a ward in a substance-abuse unit. Wards here go to school in the morning and afternoon. When they enter and leave school, they're patrolled down to make sure they're not carrying any potential weapons, such as a pencil.

They're patrolled down again when they return to their unit.

Mendoza started getting into trouble as a youth in Parlier. By seventh grade, well-meaning adults sent him through the Sacred Straight program. It didn't work.

"At that time, I didn't care," he admits. Drugs soon became central to his life. "I mostly did it all," he says.

Street violence was part of the scene, as well. "I seen people die," as all hell say.

Today, Mendoza says, he is older and wiser, and has left gangs. Drugs, too, thanks to the intensive counseling he gets at Chad. He hopes to go home to Parlier on parole in May with a high school diploma in hand and a clear career path in mind.

"I've seen everything. That's what I'd like to do, to help out kids, help them understand gangs and what they lead to," Mendoza says in a clear, firm voice.

He is a good-looking young man. Confident and self-poised, if this interview weren't taking place in a maximum-security Youth Authority facility, it would be hard to believe.

Enrique Mendoza ever had run seriously afraid in the law.

He is most proud of the placard on his room door. These placards reveal a ward's gang affiliation.

"Now I have 'independent' on my door," Mendoza says.

One building over, in the gang-free hall, is another Fresno County ward, Nicholas Garcia, 21. He never set foot inside a public high school as a full-time student. He never got that far, not after he stuck a gun in the face of a shoe-store employee on Kings Canyon Road in southeast Fresno seven years ago. He and a couple of buddies took boxes of shoes and a little money, then got busted a few weeks later at an accomplice's apartment.

TEAMWORK

A guard teaches a new youngster at boot camp how to march after the youth was unable to keep up with the other members of his unit.

half and use that as a fork to eat. It's not a nice place."

In the end, it is the lack of discipline and order at Juvenile Hall, the absence of any sense of mission by staff members and the youths they guard, that most angers the first sergeant. He makes his point by gesturing toward the Elkhorn obstacle course. Every wall and pit was built by the cadets.

The course, he says, "teaches us teamwork. In the hall, they don't teach us that. Here, we're doing stuff. We're not just sitting on our butts maringuard like in there."

"I went to Youth Authority when I was 14, so I don't know what high school I would've gone to," Garcia says. "Probably Hoover."

That's what a rap sheet with armed robbery, vehicle theft and possession of a firearm will do to a teen's future.

Garcia, by his own admission, was big trouble just waiting to explode. His mother, he says, couldn't control him. "I didn't like rules," he says.

A string of petty thefts had put him on the county Probation Department's radar screen. Community service was supposed to straighten him up, but afterwards about chopping weeds at county dumps didn't do the trick. He was put on house arrest, but that, too, was a joke. When his father left the house, so did Garcia.

His only progression was through the various units at Fresno County Juvenile Hall. He started off in Unit one — "for the little kids" — and ended up in Unit six, Lockdown. Through it all, Garcia says, no one really showed much concern about his future. There were no programs to wean him from the path of crime he clearly showed an interest in.

Finally, one day at Juvenile Hall, "they just let me out. . . They just basically slapped me on the wrist. I started to get a little contempt for the system. It wasn't doing anything for me."

The stickup at the shoe store soon followed. His sentence: seven years and four months in Youth Authority. The last two have been at Chad.

The entire experience, Garcia says, has been a tough lesson in growing up, one he wishes he'd gotten at home or through a Probation Department program.

"It's been seven years, and I'm a completely different person," he says. "I don't gangbang anymore. I was a very ignorant person back then. Very angry. I didn't want to listen to anyone. I wanted to live by my own rules."

Garcia hopes to get out on parole early this year. He has earned his GED and plans to attend college. He points to a portrait of an American Indian woman he recently drew in pencil. By any measure, it is impressive.

"If a person wants to change, it's up to them," he says.

The same can be said of a troubled agency as large and complex as the California Youth Authority. That's what Herman, the director, and White, the inspector general, are preaching.

Their sermon's text is clear: The agency, like a young criminal hardened by circumstances not entirely under his control, needs to let go of excuses and self-pity if it hopes to straighten itself out.



PARENTAL RIGHTS



Helen Carlock, left, and her daughter Gayle McCracken, right, in December took part in a vigil at Juvenile Hall with the group Justice for Children.



Accusations against staff members are impossible to verify with no witnesses and no documentation, says Charles Smith, recently retired hall director.

Keeping a light on for children

The candle Sylvia Martinez holds in a crumpled piece of aluminum foil is almost burned to the wick, but she isn't ready to leave her spot on the dark sidewalk outside the Fresno County Juvenile Hall.

She's not a parent at this candlelight vigil on a chilly December night who wants to tell her about his son in the hall. She listens and hands him a Justice for Children card. He can join the cause, she tells him.

Martinez explains that the grass-roots organization, which she started with a handful of parents in February 1995, is working to change the way children who are incarcerated — and their parents — are treated by juvenile justice officials. More than 5,000 kids pass through the county's juvenile hall each year, and for many of their parents it's an eye-opening introduction to the juvenile justice system. Their first surprise: Kids don't have the same rights as adults who are appearing in Superior Court on Van Ness Avenue; juveniles don't have the right to a jury trial, and bail is not part of the picture.

Parents say they leave court feeling disoriented in their role as their child's guardian, and the loss of control confounds them when their child is locked up in the hall. Parental rights is among the reasons Justice for Children is making noise, Martinez says.

Parents feel crippled to help their children once they enter the hall, Martinez says, and are overcome by feelings of helplessness.

There are parents I've met, and they just bring tears to my eyes, because they're barely walking through those doors [at the hall], she says. "I tell them to just stay strong. You need to stay strong for you and your family and your child. Use your strength that's going to keep them all together."

In the beginning, a parent group marching outside the hall was "thought of

as a joke," Martinez says. But no one is laughing at the organization today. In its two years, Justice for Children has had success.

■ Visiting days at the hall are now divided alphabetically by a parent's last name. Parents are in two visiting groups. They visit either on Wednesday and Saturday or on Thursday and Sunday. Before October, there had been only two days a week for parent visits. The added days eliminate long lines of parents waiting to go inside for 20-minute visits.

■ A new juvenile grievance form, numbered and in triplicate, is being developed for complaints about staff and conditions in the hall. The juvenile receives one copy, a staff member gets another and a third is sent to hall administration. Under the old system, there was no way to track the outcome of a grievance, which was written on an undocumented, one-page sheet that the juvenile gave to a staff member.

Martinez, of Fresno, says she didn't set out to change things when her son was arrested for accessory to assault with a deadly weapon two years ago. She thought he would be released from custody in a few days. But he spent almost a year and a half in the hall. Now 17, he's serving nine years at the California Youth Authority for violating probation and resisting arrest.

It was while visiting her son that she began chatting with mothers and fathers, waiting in line on visiting nights. Martinez says, "We heard so many stories from parents who were just devastated about what they were going through. Patterns began to emerge, she says, from the conversations with parents. Some of their complaints:

- Kids sleeping on thin mattresses on the floor.
- Juveniles committing sexual abuse.
- Staff members being rude to parents.

■ Roaches crawling on food. Laura Talkington of Fresno, one of the mothers to join Justice for Children, says there are more problems, but parents keep quiet because they're fearful their children will be the subject of retaliation. "They don't know they can say anything. A lot of them are afraid."

Citizen complaint forms are available, but the hall receives only about a dozen a year. In 2000, 17 complaints were filed. Of the 17 documented complaints, five cited unprofessional or rude behavior by juvenile hall counselors, the job title given to guards. Two complaints alleged threatening or abusive behavior by staff to a minor. None of the complaints was substantiated.

Accusations against staff members are impossible to verify with no witnesses and no documentation, says Charles Smith, recently retired hall director. "But that doesn't mean we don't do some remediations with that staff person while we're talking to them," he says.

Martinez says, "It seems to be the same ones over and over that people complain about. It's not like it's everybody. It's a limited little group there that seems to be the spoiled apples making it hard for everybody."

Many of the parents are too poor to hire lawyers to complain for them, Martinez says. She questions whether the hall would be in such bad shape if the majority of children were from northeast Fresno.

Statistics from the hall show 57% of the youth are Hispanic, 22% white, less than 1% African American and less than 1% Asian and southeast Asian.

Chief Probation Officer Larry Price says white, middle-class families "wouldn't tolerate the overcrowded and shabby conditions if their children were inside. There would be a hose and cry to build a new hall."

An example: The boot camp in Caruthers now is a site for teens to take the SAT college-entrance exam since members of the Deductors, a Clovis gang of mostly upper-middle-class teen-agers, were incarcerated last year and wanted to take the test.

"It has to do with where you're from," Martinez says. "Your class status. Your color. These are all factors."



Sylvia Martinez formed Justice for Children in 1995 after her son was arrested and taken to Juvenile Hall.

Many parents, waiting to visit their children on a windy night in November, refuse to give their names, but want to talk about conditions in the hall.

One mother says her son is doing OK in H Unit, the dormitory for boys younger than 14. Her son is 13 and has been in the hall since September. He took a knife to school.

"The only thing I don't like is when [guards] cuss at him," she says. "They're in here because they made a mistake. They don't deserve that abuse."

A grandfather says his grandson writes letters home about fights in lockdown. "We got a letter today where he talked about a couple of fights."

Another mother says it's her 12-year-old son's first time in the hall. His offense: stealing a bicycle and a motorcycle. She says he wears shoes too small and he cries all the time.

When you're a mother and have no control over what happens to your child, it's hard to sit back, Talkington says. Her son, who is 16, spent a total of seven months in the hall over the course of a couple of years. He is now at the California Youth Authority.

"They're never going to rehab these kids," she says. "All they're doing is making them angry."

Degrading children isn't going to change their behavior for the better, Martinez says. "There has been change," she says of the response by hall officials. "But I think we need a lot more. I think we need to clean house."

Many of the parents are too poor to hire lawyers to complain for them, Sylvia Martinez says. She questions whether the hall would be in such bad shape if the majority of children were from northeast Fresno.

Q&A

Chief Probation Officer Larry Price



Q. Why hasn't the county considered building a new juvenile hall until now?

A. I think the squeaking wheel gets the grease and probation hasn't been the squeaking wheel. You don't move anything in government until you educate the public about the need, get the public constituency behind the need and be willing to pay for it.

I think the Board of Supervisors has acted upon the demands of the public, and there have been very few demands from the public to build a hall.

A. I don't think the public complained?

A. I don't think we've done a good job educating this community about the environment of the hall. I've tried to be as big a mouth as I can about this. I've been here five years, and I've never equated about the need for a new juvenile hall and how bad it is.

Q. Who's responsible for the hall being ignored?

A. I think it's a partnership. You can't put the blame on any one body. I think it goes deeper. It goes to the California state Legislature, it goes to the governing bodies of the county and it goes to the leadership in the criminal justice system.

Q. Is there the political will to build a new hall today?

A. I think we've come full circle in the last five years in the county. Hardly anybody does not admit that we need to build a new state-of-the-art juvenile hall for many reasons — safety for inmates, safety for a humane environment... someplace we could really facilitate programs to work with these kids.

Q. What about the money?

A. Fresno County is going to have to

accept the ultimate responsibility to build a new juvenile hall. Hopefully, funding will come forward from state and federal agencies. But if not, we still have to accept the responsibility to build it.

Recent developments include a new bill introduced by Senator Chuck Poochigian, (R-Fresno), for \$400 million next year for juvenile hall and jail construction (statewide). And newly elected Supervisor Susan Anderson has had some promising conversations with Congressman George Radanovich, (R-Mariposa), and Congressman (Cal) Dooley, (D-Hanford), about the possibility of federal funding.

The means of financing may ultimately have to be a bond by the county Board of Supervisors. And, if I may take license (no comment) on the latently fat, the need was great for additional jail beds and we did have to find a way to finance \$25 million from the county general fund to get that job done.

HALL OF SHAME

A COLUMN OF NAMES OF CONTRIBUTORS TO THE FRESNO BEE

CALL TO ACTION

Along way to 'safe,' 'humane'

Fresno County has outgrown its 44-year-old Juvenile Hall, say county officials. But they don't know how they'll pay to replace it.

There's consensus that the existing lockup, squeezed on 12 acres in a residential neighborhood on Tenth Street, can't be redressed by adding a wing or by remodeling an existing floor.

We've reached the point in Fresno County where we're not talking pie in the sky. It's something we have to do, and we all recognize that," says Chief Probation Officer Larry Price.

Says first-term Fresno County Supervisor Bob Waterston, "When inmates at the SPCA are nicer than our juvenile Hall, it's time that we did something. And it needs to be immediate. No more drag-drag."

Except for an afternoon and office converted into an eight-bed dormitory in 1997, no new beds have been added to the 265-bed hall since 1981. Most days, more than 300 children are housed there. Within 10 years, juvenile-justice experts say, the county will need more than twice the number of existing beds for a population of 135,911 youths between the ages of 12 and 18.

Supervisors admit they don't have money for what officials estimate will be a \$60-million to \$100-million project.

Their plan: Aggressively go after state and federal funds. And, in a departure from past boards, most of the supervisors say they won't rule out going into debt to build a juvenile-justice center.

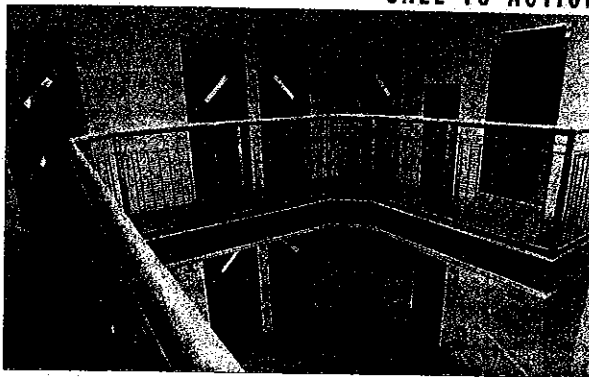
"If we do need to go after money after exhausting all other alternatives, I would certainly support having the county look for a way to finance the service itself," Supervisors Dean Arambula says.

But the supervisors' first choice is to find the money — not borrow it. Says newly elected Supervisor Susan B. Anderson, "There's no going to be a gift coming to us. We've got to go out and find the money. We can't just expect to pay cash for something like this."

It's too late for the county to apply for \$140 million in juvenile justice construction grants available statewide this year. The county would need a cost estimate and a building design by Tuesday. To date, the supervisors have only contracted with a Realtor to rent the county for 40 acres for a new juvenile hall.

And the county hasn't been lucky with state grants so far this year. Fresno County took a gamble in January and lost about \$10 million to add 200 beds at the 3-year-old military-style Elkhorn boot camp in Caruthers. Supervisors agreed to spend \$4.5 million to pay the county's share.

The Elkhorn Correctional Facility was championed by the board and Price, when it opened in December 1997, to be a solution to the hall's overcrowding problem and to the high price of sending



While Fresno County supervisors debated the merits of a boot camp and many other ideas in 1996 and 1998, Tulare County supervisors supported a sales tax approved by voters for a new juvenile hall, shown here.

juveniles to the California Youth Authority.

Supervisors supported the 200-bed Elkhorn expansion until late last year, when the price tag increased from \$15.5 million to \$22.7 million. Former county Administrative Officer Janice I. Daniel suggested in August the county scale back plans and use the savings toward a new hall. Daniel proposed asking the state for \$6.5 million for 100 beds for girls, young boys and youths with substance abuse problems.

The Board of Corrections denied the revised application Jan. 18, saying it was money because it didn't want to contribute a larger share of its own. And the state said the county failed to provide a needs assessment, a document proving the need for the beds. Price said he assumed a comprehensive needs assessment done 2½ years ago was sufficient.

Price says he's spent a \$400 million criminal justice bill by Sen. Chuck Roachman, R-Fresno, as the next step of money for a new hall. "That's the one I will want the county to target to build the entire new complex."

But the county could find it too late to get help from the state. Raising on any substantial money from California could be a high-stakes gamble. Legislators, paying for electricity to the lights burning statewide, are watching a surplus shrink every time a switch is turned on.

"The longer it takes for us to get control of this electricity crisis, the more likely there will be significant harm to California's economy," Roachman says. "If jobs are lost, then there will be a direct effect on the state budget because of reduced income tax collections."

Anderson, who was a deputy district attorney in Juvenile Court before becoming a supervisor, says she's sending up flags to local congressional leaders that Fresno County needs their help. She's talked with a staff member in the office of U.S. Rep. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, and with Rep. Gal Dooley, D-Hanford.

"It's a big project, and it's going to take a lot of people helping," Anderson says. Daniel, who resigned as county administrator earlier this month, says there's no question the county will have to reach into its own pocket to build a hall. Even with state and federal grants, Fresno County is spending about \$25 million to replace the adult jail and is getting only \$4 million from the state.

It's conceivable this board could choose to go into debt to build the hall, he says. "I believe some debt financing of some of the major capital needs that the county has would be a reasonable approach. And this is the kind of project that would be a good candidate for that."

Newly elected Supervisor Waterston says he doesn't have a problem with that.

Says Waterston, whose brother was murdered by two teen-agers five years ago when interfering in a car theft in

down town Fresno: "I'm conservative, but I know that this is too important, and no business can avoid borrowing money. We have to be prudent, but we have to do something."

The new supervisor's opinion isn't supported by veteran Supervisor Dennis Koligian. A new hall may be the board's No. 1 priority, he says, but he shuns the idea of borrowing money. "If we borrow money for 20 years and don't have a revenue stream to pay down the debt, that means we'll have to reduce services to the people of Fresno County. And I'm not willing to do that."

Borrowing money would be a reversal of 10 years of political resistance to the idea of going into debt, Price says. Part of the reason it's never been done: Kids locked up in Juvenile Hall are disproportionately poor minorities, with parents who don't demand reforms from public officials.

The bid in the Fresno County Juvenile Hall or juvenile-justice system have no constituents," Price says.

Even during the juvenile crime wave of the mid-1990s, the Board of Supervisors didn't opt for a bond to pay for building a hall.

The county, which was struggling financially, didn't have money to build a juvenile justice center, says Dean Olsen, who stepped down from the board last year. "I was not willing — nor was a majority of the board willing — to jeopardize our discretionary money to pay off long-term indebtedness for new facilities."

Beginning in 1992, Fresno County lost millions of dollars when counties were forced to transfer property taxes to the state to pay for schools. "If they had left that money there, we would have had the money to build a juvenile hall," Olsen says.

County voters in 1990 turned down a half-cent sales tax that could have paid for a new hall, he says. Statewide, voters approved Proposition 13, which continued an existing half-cent sales tax for criminal justice, but that didn't make up for funds the county lost in property taxes.

Without borrowing money, the county took a piecemeal approach to solving its juvenile justice problems. Supervisors approved moving violent offenders into a 30-bed juvenile pod at the adult jail. The pod was closed when it failed to reduce overcrowding because few boys met the legal criteria for the jail. They increased electronic monitoring and relocated dependency court to open space in delinquency court.

They spent time in 1995 and 1996 debating the size and location of a boot camp, as well as taking time with such ideas from then-Supervisor Tom Perch as feeding youths testosterone "ball vitamins," having them pedal stationary bicycles to generate hot water and sleeping them in shifts. This was at the same time the Tulare County Board of Supervisors unanimously backed a successful sales tax to build a new juvenile hall.

Supervisors were divided over where to build a boot camp. Koligian, then chairman of the board, and then Supervisors Perch and Doug Vagin wanted a 60-bed camp on the grounds of the hall. Olsen and then-Supervisor Sharon Levy, said it was a "band-aid" solution. They wanted a boot camp for 200 beds at the county's old branch jail in Caruthers. Olsen and Levy got the vote they needed when Arambula ousted Vagin in 1997.

The board relied on Elkhorn to relieve the pressure of overcrowding at the hall. But it wasn't a panacea to the juvenile-justice crisis. The county promised neighbors of the boot camp in Caruthers that only nonviolent juveniles would be sent there. The result: Serious felons continued to clog the hall.

The county can't put off building a new hall any longer, Price says. "My recommendation, no matter what the funding base is — build it. There's an urgent need in Fresno County."

To address the problems of overcrowding while the county looks for land and money to build a juvenile-justice center, Price says he's considering several extreme, short-term fixes, including erecting military-size tents, either on the hall property or at Elkhorn. The state gave San Bernardino County permission in January to sleep boys in sex tent barracks over the next three years, while new permanent beds are being built.

"If push comes to shove, we may have to look at that as a place to put temporary structures," Price says of Elkhorn as a last site. Another idea that Price is pushing: Move boys accused of felonies, such as robbery, assault and rape, out of overcrowded maximum-security units and into dormitories.

But it's a temporary solution that could cause more problems than it solves. "That's our assaultive population," he says. "Instead of a fight between two or three boys in a single cell, in a dorm it's going to be a fight with 10 or 20. That's a major concern."

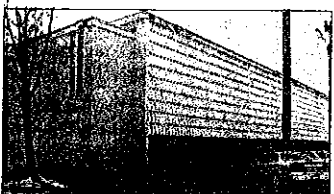
It's also an expensive plan. It will cost \$100,000 a year for additional guards to maintain order in dorms that are filled with the boys from lockdown. Other stopgap ways to relieve overcrowding:

- Asking the court for wider discretion to release juveniles early from the hall.
- Beefing up electronic monitoring so fewer juveniles are locked up.
- Creating a 30-bed replacement transition home for youths who are waiting placement in group homes.
- Bringing in portable buildings.

But Price stresses these are more Band-Aids that won't hold back the inevitable — the need for a new hall. "We have to hold our children accountable," Price says. "We have to provide for public protection, but while young people are in our custody, we have to treat them in a safe and humane environment."

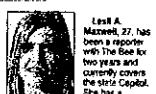
The kids in the Fresno County Juvenile Hall or juvenile-justice system have no constituents.

— Chief Probation Officer Larry Price



Fresno County's Juvenile Hall as seen from Venture Avenue and 10th Street.

Hall of Shame contributors



On the Web

Visit fresnobee.com for:

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- A list of local, state and federal officials and how to contact them
- The entire interview with Probation Chief Larry Price
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