

FOUTS SPRINGS: A MODEL APPROACH TO SERVING HIGH-RISK YOUTH



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Research Report

Introduction

Fouts Springs Youth Facility was a model juvenile camp located in Colusa County, which Solano County operated from 1959 until its closure in 2011. The facility accepted a cross-section of serious youth offenders from multiple jurisdictions and was designed as an alternative to the state's Division of Juvenile Facilities (DJF).¹ This report analyzes a five-year time period regarding youth committed to the program and its ability to serve those who would otherwise have been eligible for DJF commitment. The analysis reviews available data to conclude that Fouts Springs produced substantially better public safety results than DJF, in less time and at reduced cost.

Beginning in the mid-1990's, California's youth corrections system experienced a dramatic shift whereby the state's 58 counties increasingly serve their high-risk youth offenders locally. As of August 31, 2013, DJF houses approximately 719 youth at three youth correctional facilities and one conservation camp, down from a peak of 10,000 youth in 1996 (CDCR, 2013). These changes occurred as the state youth crime rate declined precipitously (CJCJ, 2012). Currently California's youth crime rate is at the lowest point ever reliably recorded and registers across categories, from felonies and misdemeanors to status offenses and homicides (CJCJ, 2012).

Despite this drop, California counties must still address a small, high-risk youth population with complex needs. The 58 counties are each unique, both in the nature of their youth population and the scope of available resources, personnel, and facilities. Given this variety, law enforcement and policymakers in some counties have resisted efforts to eliminate DJF, even with the provision of additional local funds.²

Yet several counties have shown the will and capacity to serve their jurisdictions' most high-risk youth locally. Solano County was one of several counties that deliberately reduced their DJF commitments, following allegations of abuse and inhumane conditions at the state facilities in the early-2000's (CJCJ, 2013).³ Fouts Springs serves as a longstanding example of a successful approach to serving

¹ In 2005, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) formed the Division of Juvenile Facilities (DJF). While DJF is frequently referenced as the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), this report uses DJF unless quoting.

² For example, Governor Brown proposed to eliminate DJF and divert \$242 million per year to the counties in his FY 2011-12 budget. The proposal was strongly opposed by the law enforcement lobby and was ultimately removed from the Realignment plan. See CSAC, 2012.

³ For example, San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously enacted a resolution placing a moratorium on DJF commitments (San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 2004). Alameda, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties also considered moratoriums and significantly reduced DJF commitments during this period. See Adachi, 2005; FDAP, 2004; Mercury News, 2004.

this population and reducing county dependency on the state system. It also demonstrates the need for sustainable funding to local facilities serving high-risk youth. The impact of Fouts Springs continues today as an example of how local policies and strong juvenile justice leadership can best address youth crime and incubate innovation.

Method

Solano County Probation Department retained data on youth committed to Fouts Springs Youth Facility, including intake and release information, demographic details, and commitment offense. Redacted admissions and release rosters were provided by special request for the period January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2011 (Solano County Probation Department, 2012). CJCJ merged these rosters by county, ethnicity, and date of intake to compile one complete data set. Inconsistencies were resolved through comparing the youths' initials in the corresponding roster entries.

Of the 520 entries, four duplicates and five incomplete entries were identified and removed from the data set. For the remaining 511 entries, an additional metric was added to identify offenses listed under Welfare and Institutions Code 707(b). CJCJ made a determination of a 707(b) offense based on the provided commitment offense description. Other metrics were also added to identify the most serious commitment offense, including if the word "weapon" or "gang" was used in the offense description. CJCJ calculated ages at intake and release by using date of birth, date of intake, and release metrics. Solano County Probation Department provided definitions for release method.

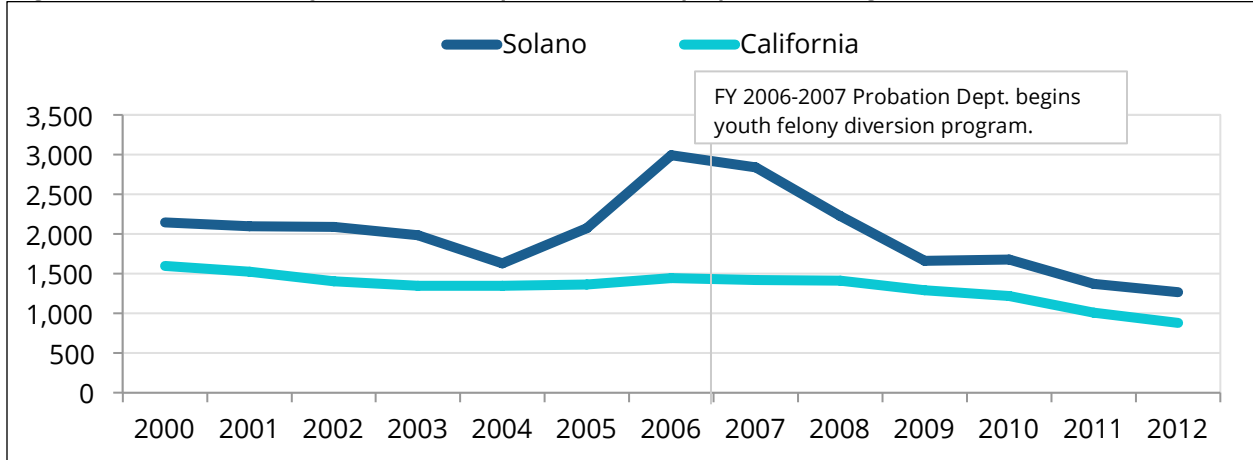
CJCJ would like to thank Solano County Probation Department, and in particular Chief Christopher Hansen, Ph.D., Richard Krygier, Richard Watson, and Earl Montilla, for providing the information necessary to complete this study.

County Youth Crime Trends

Solano County is located in Northern California, residing in near equidistance between Sacramento and San Francisco counties and has a historically higher than average youth felony arrest rate (California Sentencing Institute, 2013). However, the county has experienced a decline in youth felony arrests that mirrors the statewide trend, with a slight peak in the mid-2000's.

There is currently no clear explanation for the peak in Solano County youth felony arrests during the mid-2000's (see Figure 1). Data and anecdotal evidence indicate that an increase in law enforcement resources and an overcrowded juvenile hall could have contributed to the peak in youth felony arrests during 2004 to 2006 (BSCC, 2013; CJSC, 2013). A reprioritization of bed space in the juvenile hall including the reopening of an empty unit and implementation of a youth felony diversion program in fiscal year 2006-2007 by the Probation Department in collaboration with the District Attorney's Office could have contributed to the subsequent rapid decline (Richard Krygier, personal communication, October 25, 2013).

Figure 1. Youth felony arrest rate per 100,000 population age 10-17, 2000-2012



Source: CJSJ, 2012; Department of Finance, 2011.

Fouts Springs Youth Facility

County authorities established Fouts Springs Youth Facility in 1959 as a regional alternative to DJF (then, California Youth Authority or CYA). The program recognized that all youth eventually return to their communities and local programs can better prepare them for reentry (Richard Watson, personal communication, October 25, 2013). The facility was located in neighboring Colusa County, on leased federal property in the Mendocino National Forest, but was operated by Solano County Probation Department under a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA). The uniquely remote environment was a two and a half hour drive from the Solano County juvenile hall and nine miles from the nearest town, Stonyford. Fouts Springs maintained positive relationships with the local community and criminal justice stakeholders through continuous collaboration. The facility hosted open houses and tours for local residents, Board of Supervisors, and the judiciary. Many local residents were employed at Fouts Springs and were proud of its achievements,

“We drive up a pretty crummy road every day, but we do it because we really care about these kids... We’ve really made a difference in their lives.”

(Meeker, 2011)

Staff would also supervise youth as they participated in community service activities in the national forest and in the town on state and federal holidays.

Yolo County originally also participated in the JPA, but left in the 1980’s after constructing a local facility for managing serious youth offenders. San Bernardino held a contract agreement with the Fouts Springs Youth Facility, reserving up to 10 beds at a given time for their high-risk youth. DJF also contracted with Fouts Springs until 2002, to serve youth who violated parole following a DJF commitment. The facility maintained operations through July 2011, when the Solano County Board of Supervisors voted to cease its operations. By 2011, Fouts Springs had an annual budget of \$4.1 million and

had the staffing capability to serve 60 youth, with infrastructure capable of housing 162 youth (Solano County Grand Jury, 2010).

Fouts Springs served male youth between 14 and 18 years old, referred from any county probation department in California. Referrals required a recent disposition report and psychiatric evaluation. The facility employed eligibility criteria, assessing even the most high-risk youth on a case-by-case basis. Given the facility design and isolated location, youth were unsuitable for the program if they had a sustained arson charge, felony sex offense, were transferred to adult court, or exhibited extreme violent tendencies. Youth who required psychotropic medication or had an extensive history of running away were assessed on a case-by-case basis (Richard Krygier, Solano County Probation Department, personal communication, July 24, 2012).

Solano County Probation Department Eligibility Criteria

- At least two prior sustained felonies
- More serious/assaultive criminal behavior—criminalized/street savvy
- General age range is 16 to 18-years-old
- Other treatment has been tried and not been successful
- Minor's behavior presents as a significant safety risk to the community
- Reunification with the parents is not the focus—minors generally are reaching the age of majority
- Severely credit deficient in High School education
- No significant mental health or medical issues
- Scores in the Limit Setting (LS) Supervision Strategy or Environmental (ES) Supervision Strategy with a high LS profile
- The minor needs a longer term program of 9 to 12 months

Source: Agustina Diaz, Deputy Probation Officer, personal communication, 2009.

The average daily cost of housing youths in Fouts Springs was approximately \$191.94. In comparison, DJF's estimated annual cost per youth for FY 2013-14 is \$270,000, or \$739.72 per day (Tor Tarantola, Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), personal communication, September 26, 2013). However, unlike the significant subsidies counties received for DJF commitments,⁴ Solano and Colusa counties paid \$6,100 per month to house youth in Fouts Springs. Non-JPA counties were required to pay a modestly subsidized fee of \$4,200 per month for youth committed to Fouts Springs, a system that officials put in place to solicit greater non-JPA commitments (Solano County Grand Jury, 2010). Additionally, in 2005 Superintendent Watson developed a promotional video of Fouts Springs services, and provided tours of the facility to officials from other counties. A supplemental video was developed in 2010 by Facility Manager Richard Krygier, which was disseminated to all the county judiciaries.

Despite these efforts, use of the facility declined in the mid-2000's and the cost of operating the facility became unsustainable. This is due in part to the growing capacity of other counties to serve their high-risk youth locally and DJF's termination of its contract for parole violators. Solano County Board of Supervisors voted to close the facility, and all youth and custodial staff left the facility on July 16, 2011.

⁴ Prior to 1996, the state bore the entire cost of commitment to DJF. In 1996, a sliding scale fee was implemented to discourage commitments for low-level offenses. Fees for serious youth offenders were \$213 per month (see CJCJ, 2011). In 2012, the Governor implemented a flat \$24,000 annual per youth fee for DJF commitments.

The facility officially closed on July 31, 2011 (Richard Krygier, personal communication, July 24, 2012). The majority of Fouts Springs staff transferred to the juvenile hall as group counselors after its closure, thereby retaining their longstanding expertise within county juvenile justice facilities.

Program Model

When the facility was first established through the 1970's, Fouts Springs operated a home-like environment that engaged families in the treatment process. However, in the mid-1980's with the rise of a more punitive political approach to youth crime, Fouts Springs began to employ a boot camp program model focusing on strenuous physical activity and militaristic custodial supervision. By 2005, Solano County officials planned to close the facility due to low success rates, high instances of in-custody violence, and a year without a Superintendent to properly manage operations. Before final action could be taken on closure, Richard Watson was appointed Superintendent and requested a reprieve to implement evidence-based programming that modeled practices in Missouri.⁵ According to Superintendent Watson, the boot camp model did not address positive behavioral change because,

"We were always telling them what not to do, but we never told them what to do instead."

(personal communication, October 25, 2013)

Despite initial resistance to the change in 2005, Superintendent Watson provided over 40-hours of staff training annually to the change the overall program design (Richard Krygier, personal communication, July 24, 2012). Most of the original staff remained at the facility and adopted the new practices until it closed in 2011.

"Fouts Springs was successful because of the dedicated staff that committed themselves to the culture change. We also had strong leadership and support from the Board of Supervisors and the Chief of Probation. We became the examples. It's not do as I say, it's do as I do."

(Richard Watson, personal communication, October 25, 2013).

The new program model utilized a "best practices" cognitive behavioral learning framework. Trained Case Counselors developed individualized treatment plans when youth arrived. Weekly tracking ensured that youths adhered to their treatment plan and anticipated any challenges. Youth engaged in evening programs including anger management, substance abuse, victim awareness, young men's group, gang awareness, and parenting classes (Bruce T. Lillis, Solano County Probation Department, personal communication, April 4, 2008). All youth received cognitive behavioral therapy during the school day. The program was divided into four phases through which the youth had the opportunity to advance every 90 days. To do so, participants would have to bring a tracking document to staff members and receive the necessary approval. Youth graduated from the program at six, nine, or 12-month intervals dependent on completion of their treatment plan (Richard Krygier, personal communication, July 24, 2012). Facility manager Richard Krygier emphasized the importance of building trust between staff and youth,

⁵ For more information on the Missouri model see Mendel, 2010.

“Trust building is critical. We wanted the kids to get constant positive reinforcement combined with accountability for their behavior. Youth would do journaling every day and then review it with staff. They would do weekly progress updates with their case managers and monthly check-ins with all their schoolteachers and their supervisor. If someone wasn’t fitting into the point system, we would adapt the system to fit the kid. There was a lot of staff engagement.”

(personal communication, October 25, 2013)

Rigorous education and vocational training was a key feature of daily programming at Fouts Springs. The Colusa County Office of Education operated the on-site high school, which tested newly arrived youth to ascertain their grade level. Youth received mandatory education with the possibility of achieving their high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate (Solano County Grand Jury, 2010). The program focused on developing work skills. Vocational opportunities included computer repair and welding, as well as post-release placement guidance. Youth were assigned a variety of tasks designed to develop their work ethic and habits, which included facility and grounds maintenance, kitchen work, and upkeep of the on-site garden and green house. As part of the program, wards worked in environments outside the facility including Mendocino National Forest campgrounds and other nearby recreational areas (Solano County Probation Department, 2008). Finally, youth also underwent physical conditioning through daily exercises and recreational activities.

The facility emphasized mediation for disruptive youth, and did not automatically expel participants because of fighting. Staff did not segregate youth based upon gang affiliation, despite the dormitory setting and widespread gang involvement among the population. Superintendent Watson explained that this was a deliberate policy to avoid institutionalizing gangs into the program model. Instead youth were expected to coexist regardless of affiliation, and conflicts were resolved through immediate mediation by staff.

If youth needed to deescalate due to physical fights or threats of violence before mediation, staff would supervise the youth in a holding cell for up to 12-hours before an intervention. During that time, staff would conduct mandated safety cell checks and continue to engage youth in discussion. During any period of separation or intensive supervision, California Code of Regulations, Title 15 requirements were always maintained, including receiving adequate meals, education, and treatment services (Richard Krygier, personal communication, November 7, 2013).⁶ These interventions were extensively documented and only used as short-term crisis management when necessary. Periods of intensive group supervision lasted no longer than a day and involved constant staff engagement with all youth to deescalate tensions.

If youth behavior warranted a special incidence report or referral from school, the facility used disciplinary review boards to ensure appropriate due process and penalized youth through the points system. The review process featured counseling sessions between the supervisor, school representative, and youth to explain the consequences of disruptive behavior. Such sessions built the necessary trust and personal relationships to adequately mentor youth. Richard Krygier, former facility manager, stressed the importance of such an approach given the physical remoteness of the facility. Youth would face automatic

⁶ Fouts Springs Youth Facility was annually assessed for compliance with Title 15 by the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC, formerly CSA). See California Code of Regulations, Title 15 at http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Regulations/Adult_Operations/docs/Title15-2013.pdf.

expulsion from Fouts Springs if they attempted to escape or endangered the lives of youth and staff (Richard Krygier, personal communication, July 24, 2012).

Fouts Springs also emphasized family reunification when appropriate, despite the rigor of the program and isolation of the facility. Parents and legal guardians could visit youth for one hour on Sundays and have telephone contact each week for up to 30 minutes. Every month a senior counselor or caseload counselor would update the family on the youth’s progress in the program. Monthly progress reports were sent to the committing probation officer and an aftercare counselor developed a reentry plan for the youth upon release. The Solano County Probation Department employed a dedicated Probation Officer to serve as a reentry contact for youth returning from Fouts Springs. Youth returning to other counties received varying aftercare services, depending on the particular resources of that county.

Data Analysis

During the seven-year period studied, Fouts Springs served youth from 15 California counties. The majority of youth served resided in Solano or San Bernardino counties, which is expected given the JPA and contractual arrangements. The vast majority of youth, over 80 percent, were Hispanic or African American and 43 percent were 17-years-old at intake (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of youth confined in Fouts Springs Youth Facility, 2005-2011.

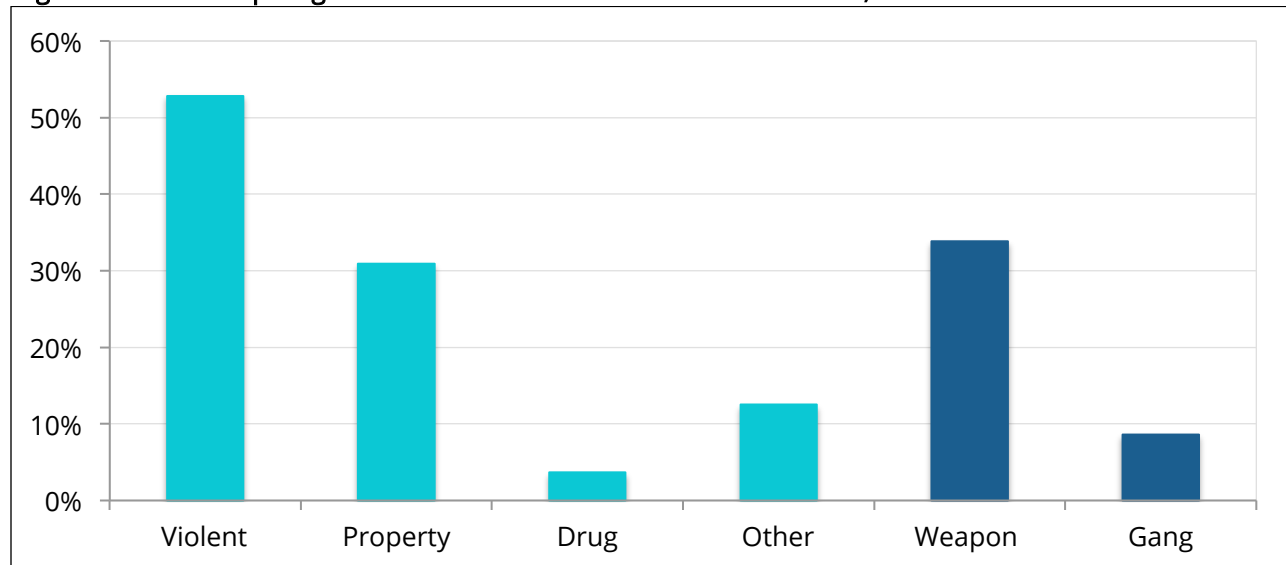
County of commitment	Number	Percent	Ethnicity	Number	Percent
San Bernardino	168	32.9	African American	209	40.9
Solano	162	31.7	Asian	4	0.8
Contra Costa	61	11.9	Hispanic	219	42.9
Yolo	23	4.5	Native American	4	0.8
Santa Cruz	21	4.1	Other	5	1.0
Napa	17	3.3	Pacific Islander	7	1.4
San Mateo	16	3.1	White	63	12.3
Placer	14	2.7	Age at Intake (years)	Number	Percent
Tehama	11	2.2	12	1	0.2
Shasta	6	1.2	13	0	0.0
Colusa	4	0.8	14	18	3.5
El Dorado	3	0.6	15	69	13.5
Amador	2	0.4	16	165	32.3
Tuolumne	2	0.4	17	222	43.4
Nevada	1	0.2	18	36	7.0
TOTAL	511	100.0	TOTAL	511	100.0

Source: Solano County Probation Department, 2012.

Many of the youth at Fouts Springs were comparable to the overall DJF population, both in terms of high criminal sophistication and needs. Moreover, the facility housed youth who violated parole status following the completion of their DJF commitment. Data show Fouts Springs served youth with convictions for attempted murder, using a deadly weapon in the commission of a felony, gang-related violent crimes, and the sale of narcotics among others. Approximately 54 percent of all admissions were

for serious or violent felony convictions as defined under Welfare and Institutions Code § 707(b). Of these serious 707(b) crimes, over 50 percent involved a weapon in the commission of the crime and at least 10 percent were identified as gang-related, although anecdotal evidence suggests this number is severely underrepresented in the data set.⁷

Figure 2. Fouts Springs most serious commitment offenses, 2005-2011.



Note: This graph shows the youth's most serious commitment offense. It should be noted that most youth had multiple commitment offenses listed. Weapon and gang-related offenses were identified separately. Source: Solano County Probation Department, 2012.

During the period studied, the average length of stay was 5.5 months, or 196 days. Of the 511 youth housed at Fouts Springs, 40 youth were reported runaways and 39 youth were removed from the program due to disciplinary issues. Over 61 percent of youth who attended Fouts Springs successfully completed the program and graduated. While CJCJ was unable to obtain data regarding the recidivism rates of the sample population, according to a Grand Jury report the recidivism rate for Fouts Springs was 35 percent (Solano County Grand Jury, 2007). In comparison, DJF has an average length of stay of 34.6 months and a recidivism rate between 56 and 81 percent (CDCR, 2010, 2013a).

Table 2. Estimated comparative costs, per youth

Averages	Fouts Springs	DJF
Length of stay (LOS), months	5.5	34.6
Recidivism (estimated)	35%	56-81%
Cost/youth (daily)	\$191.94	\$739.72
Cost/youth (for avg. LOS)	\$32,109	\$778,493
County fee (monthly)	\$4,200	\$213
County fee (for avg. LOS)	\$23,100	\$7,370
Taxpayer burden	\$9,009	\$771,123

Source: Solano County Probation Department, 2012; Solano County Grand Jury, 2007; CDCR, 2013a, 2010; CJCJ, 2011; LAO, personal communication, 2013.

Based on the available data, Fouts Springs produced significantly better outcomes than DJF in a shorter period of time and using fewer resources. Approximately 67.6 percent of the current DJF juvenile justice population was adjudicated for robbery and assault, offenses well within the bounds of eligibility for the Fouts Springs program. Yet the average length of stay in DJF is six times longer than the Fouts

⁷ Solano County Probation Department staff indicate the majority of youth served by Fouts Springs were gang-involved (Richard Krygier, personal communication, July 24, 2012).

Springs program and costs 24-times more to operate. The eventual closure of Fouts Springs appears to result from a fiscal disincentive rather than as a reflection of its outcomes. For example, a youth serving the average length of stay in Fouts Springs would have cost a county \$23,100, compared to an average length of stay in DJF costing the county \$7,360 under the pre-2012 sliding scale scheme.

Conclusion

Following the closure of Fouts Springs, Solano County experienced a rise in longer-term commitments to juvenile hall for serious youth offenders. As such the county is pursuing the creation of a separate programming unit that will serve these youth using many of the Fouts Springs lessons, including an emphasis on family reunification, education, vocational training, community visits, and dedicated staff who will work with the youths in-custody and upon release in the community. The Probation Department is also exploring the use of restorative justice in collaboration with the Public Defender's Office.

In fact, the majority of counties are now serving high-risk youth locally without additional funding, as California's youth crime rate continues to decline and the DJF institutions degrade. Fouts Springs Youth Facility presents a model of success for serving a majority of high-risk youth offenders. While Fouts Springs was not an appropriate option for certain youth such as those with severe mental health needs, the facility successfully provided a local and regional alternative to dependence on the state youth correctional system. Many of the core elements of the Fouts Springs program are replicable and can be modified to suit differing youth populations in a variety of environments.

With the \$24,000 flat rate fee for DJF commitments implemented by the Governor in 2012, counties have an increased fiscal incentive for retaining high-risk youth locally. There are also significant financial reasons for the state to invest in and support local custody options for serious youth offenders. In the short-term, the state would save money by subsidizing counties to operate the facilities rather than maintaining the high cost of three DJF facilities, and in the long-term available data suggest lower recidivism rates than the state institutional system.

The legacy of Fouts Springs is one of commitment to pursuing local solutions to youth crime, strong juvenile justice leadership, and creative implementation of innovative practices. Moreover, the model shared many of the characteristics found in other innovative juvenile justice programs across California. This includes James Ranch in Santa Clara County and Log Cabin Ranch in San Francisco County. As with these other programs, Fouts Springs worked effectively because of three central features. First, the staff at Fouts Springs underwent extensive training in individualized, strengths-based practices, which have demonstrated success with high-needs youth. Second, staff continuously engaged with youth throughout the program, strengthening relationships between youth and staff that were built on trust. Finally, overall community and law enforcement leadership strongly supported these reforms.

Despite the high and ultimately unsustainable fiscal cost to the county, Solano developed a regional model to serving serious and violent youth offenders that proved successful in reducing recidivism

The success of Fouts Springs could not have been possible without the vision and foresight of Superintendent Richard Watson. Richard transformed the culture of staff and the program from a boot camp model to one that focused on rehabilitation through positive behavior change. Additionally, through Richard's efforts working with the Colusa County Office of Education, youth were able to receive vocational training and a high school diploma or GED. The outstanding efforts of Richard Watson, Bruce Lillis, Richard Krygier, and Fouts staff positively changed the lives of the youths who participated in the program.

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through individualized treatment and community support. With the appropriate fiscal resources and capacity, California counties could utilize models like Fouts Springs to serve the majority of their high-risk youth locally, ultimately saving money and improving public safety.

Solano County Probation Department would like to thank the former Fouts Springs Youth Facility staff for their willingness to commit to the program model and their continued dedication to youth in their care.

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