



Superior Court of California County of Mariposa

Wayne R. Parrish
Presiding Judge

F. Dana Walton
Assistant Presiding Judge

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Post Office Box 1262
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December 30, 2013

Ron Iudice
PO Box 1358
Mariposa, CA 95338

Dear Mr. Iudice:

I have read and reviewed the 2013-2014 Investigative Report and have approved the report.

At this time I wish to personally thank you and the other grand jurors for your work on this Investigative Report on behalf of the citizens of Mariposa County. Without dedication of those like you this vital part of our system would certainly fail.

Sincerely,



Honorable Wayne R. Parrish
Superior Court Judge



MARIPOSA COUNTY COURT HOUSE

Mariposa County Grand Jury

P.O. Box 789
Mariposa, California

December 16, 2013

Honorable Judge Parrish
Mariposa County Superior Court

Dear Judge Parrish:

Please find enclosed an investigative report of the 2013-14 Mariposa County Grand Jury. This collaborative effort spans the work of the former and present Grand Juries.

Due to the urgency of timing, we wish to submit this report at this time with the likely possibility of a continued, more extensive, investigation of the Mariposa County Human Services Department.

Our goal is to present this report to the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors as they conduct the hiring process of the new Human Services Director. We believe the facts findings and recommendations enclosed in this document will help the Supervisors with their hiring process.

I wish to commend the selfless efforts of this Grand Jury and the countless hours spent on this investigation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Iudice". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Ron Iudice, Foreman
2013-14 Mariposa County Grand Jury

Employee Satisfaction within the Mariposa County Human Services Department

*An Investigative Report by the
2013–2014 Mariposa County Grand Jury*

Introduction

For the last three years Mariposa County Grand Juries have been aware that the Human Services Department would be a likely subject of a review. Last year's Jury received two formal complaints against Human Services, initiated preliminary inquiries, and at the end of its term conducted a survey of Human Services employees in cooperation with the department's leadership. Though the results of that survey were provocative, it was not until this year's Grand Jury received a letter of concern and two additional formal complaints and heard of the Director's planned resignation that we decided to launch a thorough investigation, conducted under authority of California Penal Code § 925, which states in part "The grand jury shall investigate and report on the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, or functions of the county..."

Human Services is the County's largest agency, employing 108 people with an annual budget in excess of \$10 million. It is organized in two major service divisions: Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS) and Social Services (SS), each with a deputy director in charge. BHRS primarily works with clients with mental illness and alcohol and drug problems. SS deals mostly with adults, families and children in crisis. A third major department within Human Services is Fiscal Administration. There are 30 employees with BHRS, 42 in SS, 18 in Fiscal Administration and the remainder work in Office Support.

The complexities of the financial aspects of Human Services are considerable, and they have been recently examined and addressed by the County Auditor. This investigation concentrated on specific personnel issues within the agency with an eye toward their ultimate impact on the delivery of services.

Methods

All Human Services employees were invited by the Grand Jury to participate, anonymously, in an employee satisfaction survey. Employees were contacted via email and the survey was conducted using an Internet web-based system. To preserve anonymity of the respondents, we only asked that they identify the major Human Services division within which they worked and their general employee rank. Several respondents (11 out of 53) still chose to not indicate within which division they worked. Thus, the survey data does not allow us to know the specific units or program areas responses are coming from, but it does allow us to make comparative assessments between the major Human Services divisions and across employee ranks.

The survey inquired into nine different aspects of the Human Services work environment: training, communication, appraisals, organization, management, recognition, career advancement, satisfaction and aspects of their major division within Human Services. For each category four or more positive statements were made such as "Hard work is formally recognized at Human Services." Employees were asked to respond by indicating "strongly agree", "agree", "neutral", "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Employees were able to include a written response to each statement, and each of the nine categories included an open-response question asking for suggested changes or improvements. The survey concluded with three additional questions: "How would you rate your overall experience working for Human Services? (Excellent, Good, Average, Poor, Terrible)", "Would you refer others seeking employment to Human Services, and

if not, why?”, and “If you had an opportunity to make any single change at Human Services, what improvement would you make?”

We also interviewed the acting director, deputy directors, supervisors, line staff, and former employees. Here we concentrated our attention on those working in or supervising Child Welfare Services and the Emergency Response Unit (both within SS) and Adult Systems of Care (within BHRS). These interviews took place in the Grand Jury office and usually lasted for more than an hour.

Facts

Results from the Survey

1. About half of the recipients returned completed surveys, including 3 from senior management (75% return rate), 9 from supervisors (56% return rate), and 41 from line staff and lead workers (47% return rate).
2. When all the respondents were pooled together, the results showed a range of responses within each of the target areas with the greatest strengths being in the areas of training, appraisals and satisfaction with over 50% of respondents either agreeing or agreeing strongly with the positive statements. The greatest weakness appeared in the areas of organization and recognition, again with 50% or more of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the positive statements.
3. When the answers were converted to numbers (strongly disagree = -2; disagree = -1; neutral = 0; agree = 1; strongly agree = 2) and averages were computed for each response, a more specific picture of the department’s strengths and weaknesses appeared (Table 1). The most positive average ratings were for the following statements:
 - “My manager holds me accountable for the work I perform.” (average response = 1.2)
 - “I enjoy my work.” (1.1)
 - “I find my work challenging.” (1.1)
 - “I know what is expected of me in my job.” (.9)
 - “I am aware of promotion opportunities within the department.” (.8)
 - “I am aware of available training and development activities.” (.7)
 - “Customer satisfaction is a primary concern within my division.” (.6)

The most disagreement was recorded for the following statements:

- “Employees within the department are treated with respect regardless of their job.” (-.9)
- “Human Services has an image of a high quality government department.” (-.8)
- “My division has an adequate number of employees with the necessary skills to meet the demand for the services we are expected to provide.” (-.8)
- “The management at Human Services makes wise decisions.” (-.7)
- “Hard work is formally recognized at Human services.” (-.7)
- “The work policies are well developed and organized.” (-.7)
- “The relationship between management and employees is good.” (-.6)

- “Job promotions within the department are fair and reasonable.” (-.6)
 - “The morale within my division is generally high.” (-.5)
4. In response to the question “How would you rate your overall experience working for Human Services?”, about 50% said excellent or good, about 20% said average, and about 30% said poor or terrible.
 5. When the responses from senior management were analyzed separately (Figure 1), 75% or more of the responses were to “agree” or “strongly agree” with the positive statements in every category except Organization. Virtually no disagreement was registered within any category.
 6. The supervisors’ responses were highly positive within most categories—especially trainings, appraisals and satisfaction—receiving high levels of endorsement (Figure 1). Some disagreement did appear here in the areas of organization, management and recognition.
 7. Lead workers and line staff presented very similar patterns of results (Figure 1). In every category there were significant amounts of disagreement and strong disagreement with the positive statements. 50% or more of the responses were negative in the areas of communication, recognition, organization and career. For lead workers there were no positive responses in the area of recognition.
 8. In response to the question “Would you refer others seeking employment to Human Services, and if not, why?”, 18 respondents indicated “yes”, 14 said “no”, 6 were neutral, and 15 did not answer. Senior management was uniformly positive. Supervisors were mixed with some saying “yes” and others adding comments such as “not currently with the misappropriation of funds still hanging over our heads,” and “No, not as a place to start or continue a career.” The most negative comments came from line workers who said things like, “No, I am actually ashamed and embarrassed to mention where I work,” and “No there are colleges in the Valley that tell their students not to apply in Mariposa due to the negligent management.”
 9. In response to the question “If you had the opportunity to make one single change at Human Services, what improvement would you make?”, 20 respondents mentioned changes in management, 4 mentioned increases in pay, 16 had no response, and the remainder addressed unique matters.

Facts Derived from the Interviews

1. The previous director is seen by many current Human Services workers as having been a visionary in regard to new programs and possibilities. Implementation of those programs was viewed as increasingly problematic the farther down the organizational hierarchy one works.
2. The acting director painted a positive picture of Human Services. He suggested no major changes and a period of consolidation ahead.
3. Supervisors were very positive about their jobs. One cited interacting with staff as the favorite part of work. Another said that office politics and personnel issues were the main challenge.

4. Line staff reports of their relations to their supervisors ranged from ambivalent to very negative. We repeatedly heard statements such as “I feel like I’ve been beat to the ground” and “It seems to be us against them.”
5. Supervisors were uniformly appreciative of the numerous trainings they had received and believed their staffs were very well trained. Most training takes place off site and is conducted by outside agencies.
6. When asked about their initial training in Human Services, many line staff indicated that their supervisor had provided none and they were left to essentially learn the job on their own or with assistance from their peers. One reported how “terrifying” it was to have to learn the job “by trial and error.”
7. Supervisors reported good, regular contact with their deputy director and said they had regular, productive meetings with their staffs.
8. Staff reported that meetings were primarily to communicate management’s decisions and their opinion was seldom sought or respected.
9. While there are numerous federal and state laws and manuals guiding various aspects of social services work, repeated requests for local policies and procedures specific to the Mariposa County Human Services department and units within it produced only various, unorganized collections of documents. Supervisors’ responses to this ranged from an unwillingness to address the issue to an acknowledgment that more, clearly-written policies would be beneficial. Line workers expressed tremendous frustration with the reluctance of their supervisors to establish and follow agreed upon policies and procedures.
10. When asked “Do you believe Human Services is an honest, ethical place to work?”, supervisors were immediate and very positive in their response. Most staff responses ranged from a pause followed by a nuanced answer to a simple “no.”
11. One supervisor and one deputy director lack the appropriate college degrees in their field, and there is considerable resentment among staff about who has and has not been promoted. Staff also reported cases of official hiring procedures not being followed and pre-determined candidates being selected.
12. Staff believe that when they confront a supervisor or make a formal complaint against them, retaliation follows.
13. Informal groups of line workers have banded together around their discontent with management. This places other staff, especially new hires, in the position having to be “with them” or not.
14. A seemingly high number of staff positions have been vacated in the last three years. Management tends to cite ordinary factors such as a better job elsewhere, shorter commute, etc., while staff—including some who told us they would be leaving in the next few months—cite the poor working environment. Employees leaving the department are provided an opportunity to participate in an exit interview and complete an exit survey; however, repeated requests by the Grand Jury to the acting director for these interviews and surveys, or their summaries, have produced no documentation.

Findings

In this section we draw on the facts listed above to form more general statements. It should be remembered that our interviews concentrated on Child Welfare Services and the Emergency Response Unit (both within SS) and Adult Systems of Care (within BHRS). The survey data included responses from a broader sample of Human Services employees.

1. Management and staff have very different experiences within the Human Services department. While management like their jobs and stay with them over time, many staff report considerable dissatisfaction and turnover is high.
2. The department is highly stratified with areas of poor relationships between management and staff. Line workers report a lack of respect for management and the decisions they make and a sense of being disrespected themselves. Supervisors report frustration with some staff member's resistance to their direction and supervision.
3. Despite the obvious dedication of everyone involved, a culture has evolved and taken root in some areas of Human Services—within both the BHRS and SS divisions—that is low on cohesion, morale and happiness with the workplace. We also have some evidence from interviews and survey data that this poor working environment may extend into Fiscal Administration.

Explanatory Hypotheses

In this section we present a set of thoughts that are admittedly more speculative in nature. We offer them in the exact spirit of this investigation: as an effort to shed light on a difficult situation in the hope of stimulating improvement.

There is a major personnel problem within Human Services. The former director clearly acknowledged this when he initially invited the previous Grand Jury to conduct a survey that might help him begin to address it. We hypothesize that the current situation has multiple major roots:

1. The former director's focus on initiating new programs and establishing the new building and thus his administration's lack of attention to personnel issues.
2. Upper management's gradual drift away from contact with line staff, essentially insulating themselves from difficult personnel problems with a layer of personally selected, loyal supervisors.
3. The promotion of workers lacking background and seniority into supervisory roles where the likelihood of real problems of the sort that have appeared was very high (not to imply here that the most senior employee should always be chosen for a supervisory position or that bringing in an employee with a different background is necessarily a poor decision, but management's reasons for such choices may not be fully understood by subordinate staff, potentially leading to their frustration and resentment—management may not be cognizant of this and/or may not be addressing it effectively).
4. The absence of established conflict mediation or dispute resolution mechanisms within the agency.
5. The absence of any clear signal from top management about the kinds of behaviors that are and are not acceptable within Human Services.

6. Line workers' choice to resist new supervisors and new initiatives, in some cases banding together into clusters of resistance and ill will.
7. Failure to adequately meet the numerous challenges of moving into the new building, the design of which has actually been a source of real stress for many employees.

There may be numerous other factors contributing to the current impasse, but we believe this list contains many elements that need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Part way through this investigation we thought the reassignment or termination of some employees would be "the solution" to the problems. Now we believe that only systemic, cultural change will put the agency back on a course toward effective working relations. As that change takes place, some employees who cannot or do not contribute to the new direction may choose to leave or need to be reassigned or terminated. However, at this point, changing the overall tenor of relations within the department requires the major focus of effort.

We do reject the hypothesis that the situation at Human Services "comes with the territory." Some people believe that some of the people attracted to working in the social services profession are overly sensitive, complain a lot, and do not respond well to supervision. While this may be true in some cases, we interviewed numerous people who in our assessment do not fall into this category and the survey data indicated the experience of problems is too widespread within the department.

Recommendations

1. That the Human Services Department makes it a priority to address and resolve the considerable personnel problems that exist within certain areas of the organization. In all likelihood this will require bringing in outside help.
2. That policies and procedures for resolving personnel conflicts within the agency be immediately written and implemented, including the appointment of an ombudsperson to mediate conflict and to ensure that no retaliation is taken toward those who raise grievances.
3. That the Board of Supervisors hire a new Director for Human Services who has the capacity and determination to lead the effort to build a new, more respectful and cohesive culture within the organization.

Responses

Per California Penal Code § 933(c), which states in part "No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body", we require the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors to submit written responses to this report's Findings and Recommendations within 90 days of receipt of this report.

We also request the Human Services Department Director to submit written responses to this report's Findings and Recommendations within 90 days of receipt of this report.

Table 1. Statements and average responses from the employee satisfaction survey.

Statement	Average Response
Appraisals	
My manager holds me accountable for the work I perform.	1.125
My manager provides me with adequate feedback.	0.396
I have clear measures for each of my work objectives.	0.042
I know what is expected of me in my job.	0.911
Career	
I believe there are a variety of ways for me to develop my career at Human Services.	-0.438
Job promotions within the department are fair and reasonable.	-0.646
I am aware of promotion opportunities with the department.	0.787
I have the opportunity to progress within the department.	-0.313
Communication	
I generally feel informed about changes that affect me within Human Services.	-0.019
I usually know in plenty of time when important things happen.	-0.192
I can see the link between my work and the department's objectives.	0.500
Managers clearly communicate the department's objectives.	-0.154
Division	
Conditions within my division allow me to perform to a high standard.	0.087
Customer complaints are resolved quickly and ethically.	0.429
My division strives to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.	0.304
My division focuses on fixing problems rather than blaming others.	0.130
The morale within my division is generally high.	-0.468
I believe my division works well with other Human Services divisions to achieve the department's common goals.	0.630
When necessary, coordination and cooperation between divisions is easily achieved.	0.222
I feel that my division is effectively and efficiently serving the needs of Mariposa County citizens.	0.239
My division has an adequate number of employees with the necessary skills to meet the demand for the services we are expected to provide.	-0.809
Customer satisfaction is a primary concern in my division.	0.600

Statement	Average Response
Management	
My manager helps me perform my job.	0.298
The relationship between management and employees is good.	-0.583
The management at Human Services makes wise decisions.	-0.711
My manager cares about my ideas and opinions.	0.250
I (if in a managerial position) manage an appropriate number of employees.	0.467
Organization	
Human Services is innovative in developing new ways to serve the citizens of Mariposa County.	-0.130
Human Services has an image of a high quality government department.	-0.750
Human Services' business operations are efficient and perform to a high standard.	-0.545
The work policies are well developed and organized.	-0.674
Recognition	
Hard work is formally recognized at Human Services.	-0.688
I receive enough recognition for my work.	-0.298
Employees within the department are treated with respect, regardless of their job.	-0.851
Satisfaction	
I am satisfied working for Human Services.	0.100
I find my work challenging.	1.060
I enjoy my work.	1.120
Working conditions are good.	-0.020
I feel I am valued at work.	0.061
Training	
I receive sufficient training.	0.469
I am aware of available training and development activities.	0.714
I am given opportunities to improve my skills.	0.551
The training I receive meets my needs.	0.347

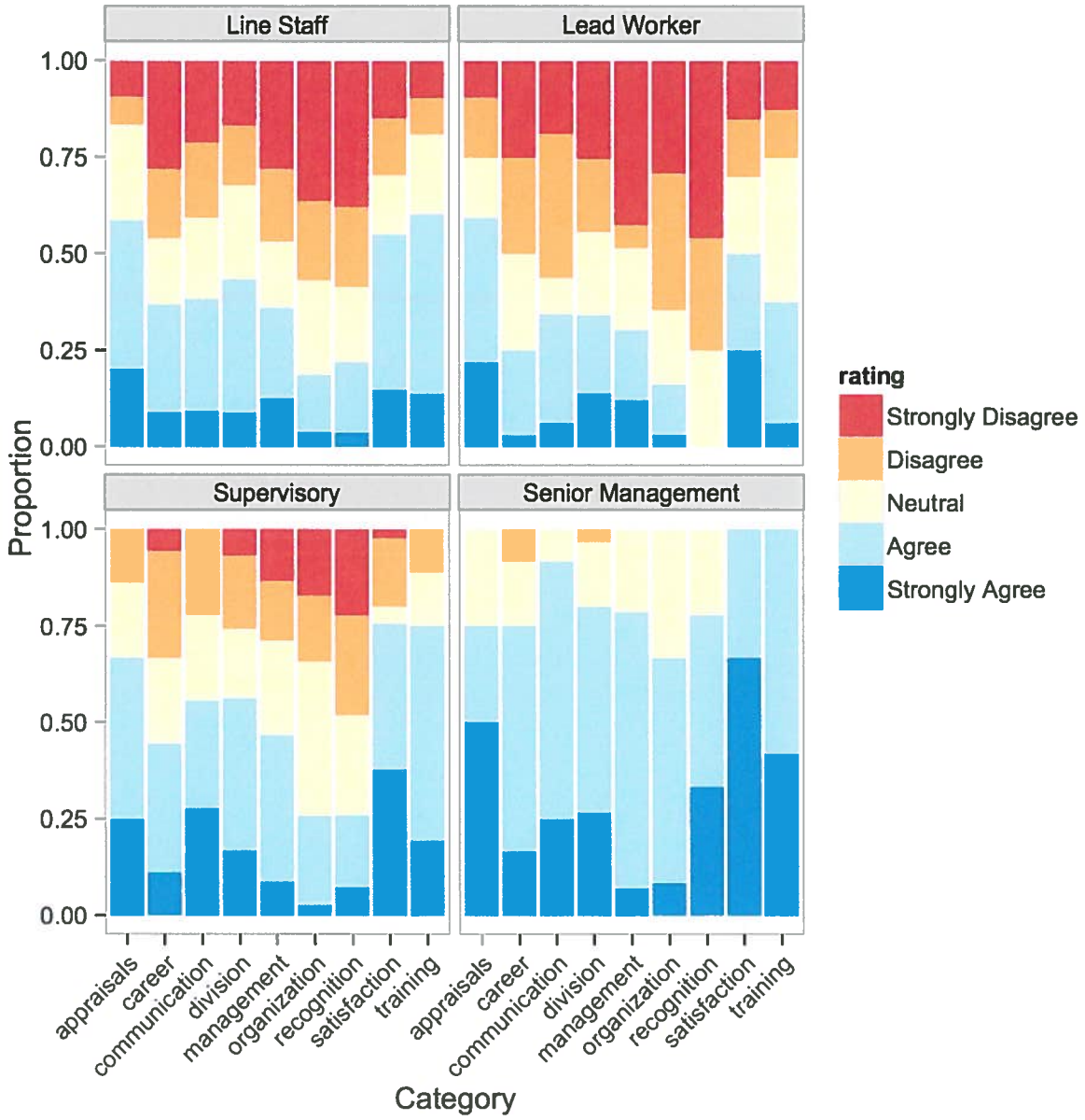


Figure 1. Proportions of responses within the nine statement categories, grouped by employee rank.