

PLACER COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

SERVICES TO ASSIST VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNDER STATE MANDATES (PRESLEY FUNDS)

COMPLAINT 99B–22

Background/ Summary

The 2000-2001 Placer County Grand Jury continued an investigation started by the previous Grand Jury related to complaints about the shelter operated by PEACE for Families.

Started as the Auburn Women’s Center in 1978, PEACE for Families is a private, non-profit agency dedicated to serving victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. While there are other area agencies involved with domestic violence, there are none in Placer County that provide the kind of comprehensive services offered through PEACE for Families.

PEACE for Families helps individuals and families deal with domestic violence by offering services that include:

- a 24-hour emergency crisis telephone line,
- 24-hour crisis intervention teams available in an office setting or on-site at hospitals and other locations,
- violence counseling for women, men and children,
- community outreach to Placer County schools and service organizations,
- legal assistance, mostly with the preparation of temporary restraining orders and custody orders, and
- the emergency shelter

The PEACE for Families shelter provides critically needed temporary housing for victims of domestic violence. The shelter, which can accommodate up to 31 women and children at a time, is leased from the County. The lease is administered by the Facility Services Department, which is responsible for exterior maintenance, service and repairs of the facility. PEACE for Families must pay for all interior maintenance, service and repairs.

PEACE for Families offers a 60-day emergency shelter program for abused women and their children and administers a federally funded 6-month transitional housing program that includes substance abuse treatment. Shelter programs are designed to educate families in non-violent conflict resolution and other general life skills to help them achieve self-sufficiency and independent living.

The Grand Jury commends PEACE for Families for providing these critical services for extremely vulnerable, often desperate women and their children escaping domestic violence.

PEACE for Families receives funding from a variety of sources, including Presley funds from the County through a contract with the Health and Human Services Department. Presley funds (named for the author of the California Senate bill) are \$23.00 from each marriage license issued in Placer County. These funds are designated by law¹ to be "collected by the county clerk for deposit into the county domestic violence programs special fund" for disbursement to approved programs. Approved programs are those that reduce and/or ameliorate the incidence of domestic violence. Placer County's contribution of Presley funds to the PEACE for Families was \$45,567 in each of the fiscal years ending June 30, 2000 and June 30, 2001.

In addition to the funds from the County, PEACE for Families also receives substantial Federal and State funding, a number of grants, and private contributions.

While the Grand Jury commends PEACE for Families for its efforts in the ongoing struggle against domestic violence, some opportunities for strengthening the agency were noted. These included opportunities for the County to provide additional funds to the agency; to support the agency in its routine maintenance of the emergency shelter; and to encourage the agency's compliance with the financial reporting requirements stated in the written contract between the Health and Human Services Department and PEACE for Families.

Discussion

The Grand Jury's investigation was limited to the use of the \$45,567 annual allocation of Placer County Presley funds to the operation of the shelter, and administration of the building lease between Placer County and PEACE for Families. Section 933.6 of the California Penal Code states, "A grand jury may at any time examine the books and records of any nonprofit corporation established by or operated on behalf of a public entity, the books and records of which it is authorized by law to examine, and, in addition to any other investigatory powers granted by this chapter, may investigate and report upon the method or system of performing the duties of such nonprofit corporation."

The Grand Jury interviewed County administrators as well as shelter staff, and toured the facility on November 14, 2000. We were generally pleased with the living conditions and programs at the shelter; however, we feel continued vigilance and increased financial assistance from the County are needed to ensure that all County residents who need shelter services receive them.

¹ California Welfare & Institutions Code, Chapter 5, The Domestic Violence Centers Act, § 18305.

In investigating the PEACE for Families shelter, the Grand Jury noted the following:

- The County's annual allocation of approximately \$45,600 in Presley funds PEACE for Families is not consistent with the critical services needed in Placer County. While the County legitimately funds the housing and training of jail/prison inmates at an annual cost of approximately \$8,287,859 (about \$29,599 per person per year²), the annual County funding for this agency dedicated to protecting women and children from domestic violence represents only about \$228 per person per year.³

As noted by shelter staff, additional County funding could be used, for example, to provide longer-term transitional housing for clients who are working to achieve independence and avoid returning to the violent environment from which they are seeking shelter.

- During the tour of the shelter on November 14, 2000, the Grand Jury observed routine maintenance issues that had not yet been addressed, including leaky bathroom faucets and exposed electrical outlets.

Under the current contract with the County, the Facility Services Department is only responsible for external maintenance, service and repairs of the shelter facility. PEACE for Families is responsible for internal maintenance, service and repairs. They may request Facility Services to perform these services by submitting a Facility Services Service Request form and paying approximately \$35 per hour in labor charges, or they may use an outside vendor.

- Prior to the fiscal year ended June 30, 2000, the Health and Human Services Department failed to provide copies of financial audits of PEACE for Families subpoenaed by the Grand Jury.

The annual contracts between Placer County and PEACE for Families for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2000 and June 30, 2001 require an annual independent auditor's report, financial statements and accompanying notes along with a report on PEACE for Families' internal control structure. The contracts require PEACE for Families to provide the County with a copy of each audit report within 30 days of receipt. The Grand Jury heard testimony that Health and Human Services Department officials approved deviations from these contract terms; however, there was no written documentation to confirm the changes.

Lack of documentation of amendments to a public contract with a private agency may lead to lack of accountability for public funds.

² This figure is based on an average of 280 inmates per day, in minimum security only, as stated in the 2000 – 2001 Placer County Final Budget, page 483. This inmate count and the corresponding annual cost do not include maximum security inmates.

³ Calculation based on the PEACE for Families emergency shelter assisting approximately 200 domestic violence victims each year. This figure was obtained from the PEACE for Families quarterly newsletter, Spring 2001 edition, page 5.

- The Health and Human Services Department failed to provide copies of progress reports requested by the Grand Jury.

The annual contracts between Placer County and PEACE for Families for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2000 and June 30, 2001 require PEACE for Families to submit quarterly progress reports to the County which reflect progress made in implementing the services and achieving the outcomes in the contract's Scope of Work and to assure PEACE for Families' compliance with the contract terms. The Grand Jury heard testimony that Health and Human Services Department officials approved deviations from these contract terms; however, there was no written documentation to confirm the changes.

Lack of documentation of amendments to a public contract with a private agency may lead to lack of accountability for public funds.

Finding 1

There is a great need to assure a safe and healthy environment for individuals seeking safety from violence at home, and requiring emergency shelter. While PEACE for Families is doing a good job of filling this need in Placer County with limited resources, additional financial assistance from the County beyond the \$45,567 they currently receive each year would enable the agency to improve the quality of shelter available, serve more domestic violence victims, and expand the scope of services offered to sheltered women and children.

Recommendation 1

The Grand Jury recommends that Placer County provide additional funding to ensure the continued success and necessary growth of the PEACE for Families emergency shelter. To aid victims of domestic violence, the Grand Jury further recommends County officials look to existing resources, such as designating a portion of the County's tobacco settlement funds for use by the shelter.

Finding 2

The Grand Jury observed routine maintenance issues during its inspection of the shelter, including leaky bathroom faucets and exposed electrical outlets.

Recommendation 2

The Grand Jury recommends that the Placer County Facility Services Department provide maintenance, service and repairs to the entire building (interior and exterior) at no cost, to assure a safe and healthy environment for families escaping a violent

environment. The Grand Jury further recommends that the Placer County Board of Supervisors approve this as an ongoing expenditure.

Finding 3

The Health and Human Services Department did not obtain periodic progress reports and annual financial audits from PEACE for Families as required by the contracts. There was no written documentation to indicate changes were made to the contracts that would have waived these requirements.

Recommendation 3

The Grand Jury recommends that all changes to County contracts be documented, agreed to in writing by all parties, and enforced to ensure the continued viability of the written contract.

Finding 4

The Department of Health and Human Services did not hold PEACE for Families accountable for submission of financial information specifically related to the use of the County's Presley funds (including annual audits and periodic progress reports) prior to renewing their annual contract.

Recommendation 4

The County should ensure that annual independent financial audits are completed and quarterly progress reports submitted as stated in the written contract.

Respondents

Executive Director, PEACE for Families
Placer County Board of Supervisors
Placer County Executive Officer
Placer County Facility Services Director
Placer County Health & Human Services Director

RESPONSE REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS TO:

The Honorable James D. Garbolino
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of Placer
Historic Court House
101 Maple Street
Auburn, CA 95603