



Sonoma Developmental Center Factsheet (May 2015)

Summary

The Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) is one of the oldest state-run developmental centers in California. Operating since 1891 near Glen Ellen in Sonoma County, this licensed residential facility for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities has a current population of over 400 resident “clients.” Situated in a rural area about an hour north of San Francisco, SDC operates on a 200-acre campus with over 750 acres of adjoining open space that is part of the rich history of this property. SDC is also a critical link in a regionally important wildlife corridor and is a unique community asset.

The Legislative Analyst Office has recommended closing SDC within the next 10 years. The 2014 “Task Force Report on the Future of Developmental Centers in California” issued by the Health and Human Services Agency calls for the “fundamental transformation” of the remaining state-run developmental centers away from large, residential facilities. As part of the FY 2015-2016 budget deliberations, there have been calls for the expedited closure of SDC.

Sonoma Developmental Center Coalition & “Transform SDC”

A coalition consisting of the County of Sonoma, the Parent Hospital Association, the Sonoma Land Trust, the Sonoma Ecology Center and other local groups have come together to create a comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement process to have a thorough dialogue about future uses of SDC property. This coalition is engaging the community, representatives from the state and federal government, professionals in various fields, and other relevant stakeholders to explore options for the future of the site that preserve the unique human health, community, and natural resources provided by SDC.

The Sonoma Developmental Center Coalition is working to develop an entirely new vision for how this facility can serve a host of community needs and still provide targeted care for specific individuals with developmental disabilities. Toward that end, the County and local organizations have raised over \$500,000 to begin a robust planning process, the Transform SDC Project. The Center for Collaborative Policy (affiliated with CSU Sacramento) has been retained to facilitate and lead an 18-month public planning dialogue designed to give everyone in the community a voice in shaping SDC’s future.

This unprecedented effort from local Sonoma community members is already underway to discuss and plan for the future of SDC. The Transform SDC Project will:

- Study and incorporate the Developmental Center (DC) Task Force recommendations for SDC
- Study the previous DC closures for “lessons learned”
- Plan for appropriate services for remaining residents with severe medical, behavioral, and intellectual developmental disabilities
- Consider SDC’s unique human, workforce, and community assets
- Consider SDC’s unique ecological, wildlife, water, and geographic issues

We believe the Legislature and the Administration should leverage this unique coalition and local planning process when making decisions that impact the future of SDC.

Sonoma Developmental Center Closure Challenges

SDC has a unique population with significant challenges: As of March 2015, 99% of the SDC client population had medical problems, including 55% with epilepsy and 57% with cerebral palsy, with 27% dependent on technology/equipment; 37% with severe behavior problems; 41% with mental health diagnoses; and 43% prescribed behavioral medications.

Placement into community settings will have to be individualized, and will require a full array of supportive providers and services for the remaining residents with severe medical, behavioral, and intellectual developmental disabilities.

SDC is in a rural setting with limited community resources: Recent DC closures have been in urban settings (Agnews in San Mateo County and Lanterman in the Pomona area), where significantly more community resources were already available, including housing, medical services, education and training facilities.

Because of its rural setting and age, SDC provides a number of unique, on-site medical services, including the following:

- Durable medical equipment (DME) manufacturing and modification facility for items such as wheelchairs;
- Facility for communication devices;
- Orthotics/shoe shop making specialized footwear; and
- Full array of health clinics and a dental clinic that performs sedation dentistry.

Before these services are eliminated, it needs to be determined how they will be provided for in a community setting.

Many rely on the SDC for their livelihood: SDC is the largest employer in the Sonoma Valley with over 1000 positions of highly trained and dedicated employees.

Prior to closure, these individuals need job placement assistance and the community needs to ensure that their specialized services are retained.

SDC is a regionally important wildlife corridor that requires preservation: The majority of the SDC property is undeveloped, and sits at the heart of the ecologically sensitive Sonoma Valley, constituting an essential link in an 85 mile wildlife corridor that links large protected habitat areas on the Sonoma/Marin coast with 800,000 acres of protected lands in the Blue Ridge-Berryessa Natural area in Napa and Lake counties.

Next Steps

1. In spring of 2016, the SDC Coalition will present recommendations on the future of SDC to the state, including economic data that analyzes different cost and income scenarios for potential future uses.
2. The Coalition will continue to work with state representatives on the legislative and budget proposals related to SDC.
3. The Coalition will also continue to work with federal representatives, regional centers and DDS to explore ways that the health care infrastructure and staff expertise of SDC can continue to provide services to both residents and those living in community settings.