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Office of Juvenile Justice wants new regional facility

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Celebrates new reform model

By **Kelsey Scram - Reporter**

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BAKER, La (WVLA) -- David F. has lived at the Jetson Center for Youth for a little over two years. In the time he's been there, he's watched the program for troubled youth change.

"They definitely helped me get rehabilitated," David says. "Try to prepare me for when I go home., doing mock interviews and group sessions and trying to talk to you to see how you feel."

The Louisiana Juvenile Justice system recently moved from the correctional model of youth reform to the therapeutic model. It's fashioned after a similar approach in Missouri.

"Everything we do in the course of a day is very structure and its geared towards changing criminal behavior," says Mary Livers, Deputy Secretary of the Office of Juvenile Justice.

So far, Livers says the model seems to be working. After just one year, officials are seeing less youth returning back to the system than the year before. Still, there's always room for improvement. That's why the Office of Juvenile Justice recently went to the Bond Commission in hopes of funding a smaller, more modern regional correctional facility.

"This is an old, sprawling facility," says Livers. "It had a great purpose at one time. It no longer is ideal for the work we're doing." Livers says only a third of the facility is being used, but the cost to maintain the correctional center is pricey. A new facility could save the state money.

It would cost \$25 million to build, but once the project is finished, the state would save \$3 million a year. It's a plan David supports.

"It would definitely be better for the new youth coming in," he says.

Last week, the Bond Commission delayed the decision. Livers says even if they choose not to fund the project this year, she has hope that eventually the new facility will be built.

"It will be a long term investment. It makes sense for the state. This year may not be the best year because of the debt limit and so forth, but we're encouraged that at some point this is the right thing to do. We'll keep trying to promote this as long as we think of cost savings for the state."

Right now, Jetson houses anywhere from 75 to 85 young people at one time. Livers say the goal is to build several smaller regional correctional facilities across the state.