

## New Juvenile Justice Center Designed with a Therapeutic Approach

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By Lindsey Coulter  
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BUNKIE, La. — When it comes to planning justice facilities, a design that works well for adults generally doesn't fit the unique needs of youth offenders, and vice versa. As such, when the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) began planning the new \$20.1 million, 61,000-square-foot Acadiana Center for Youth in Bunkie, the office relied on guidelines from the Louisiana Model for Secure Care created specifically to support youth offender rehabilitation.

Like the therapeutic Missouri Model of Secure Care that inspired it, the Louisiana Model centers on grouping youthful offenders into 10- to 12-bed dormitories. These groups of 10 to 12 youth serve as cohesive family units, ensuring group accountability through group treatment. The youth live and attend school together as well as participate in recreation and share meals together daily.

The project broke ground in August 2014 and anticipates a May 2016 completion. Architectural firm Barron, Heinberg & Brocato of Alexandria, La., was selected through a competitive bid process in November 2011. M.D. Descant of Bunkie, La., is completing construction and E.E. Consultants Inc. (also of Alexandria) is serving as the electrical engineer.

Once completed, the Acadiana Center for Youth will feature nine buildings on a more than 20-acre site. These will include an administrative building; a fully staffed medical, dental and mental health suite; a school with both traditional and vocational classrooms; and a gymnasium. The facility will also include three housing buildings with two dormitories each as well as a cafeteria, warehouse, maintenance area and a mechanical building. The facility will serve a maximum 72 youth offenders in need of

secure care.

“In planning a youth facility, you really have to keep treatment in mind,” said Sean Hamilton, assistant secretary responsible for both facility and field operations at OJJ. “In adult facilities, it is about safety, security, public safety and movement. In a secure facility for juveniles, there are elements of all of that, but it is really focused on treatment. One of the things we recognize is that virtually every juvenile offender will likely be released from a secure setting and will go back into the community. That is not true in the adult system. So, we have to prepare our young people to work on the issues that caused them to make poor decisions — which caused them to offend and enter into our system — to give them some formidable and pro-social skills so that, when they go back into the community, they will be productive, law-abiding citizens.”

Although the facility will focus on rehabilitation, it will still include a number of security systems and features commonly associated with adult facilities. Doors, locks and windows throughout the complex will all be detention grade, and an arched fence with no-climb mesh (making it virtually impossible to scale) will define the perimeter.

While the facility will not seek LEED, it will include sustainable and energy-saving features. A variable air volume AC system that cools air much more efficiently, for example, is expected to surpass stringent current state of Louisiana energy codes.

Although the facility is still months from completion, the OJJ anticipates it will be effective and successful, and is already making plans to convert existing facilities to the more therapeutic model. Aside from Acadiana, the OJJ is also preparing to replace and/or build new facilities near Baton Rouge and Swanson.



Once completed, the Acadiana Center for Youth will feature nine buildings on a more than 20-acre site. Photo Credit: Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice

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