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# what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

I am really excited about a meeting we conducted on Tuesday, Nov. 10. We go to a lot of meetings, but this one really got me pumped. Assistant Secretary Girard Melancon set up and facilitated a "Listening Meeting" because we want to hear from parents what it's like to have a child in our care, and how OJJ can provide the best possible services to adjudicated youth and their families. What better way to find out what their needs are, and what they are thinking, than to go to parents and ask them.

We decided to hold meetings with our parents statewide. At these meetings, staff members are not doing all the talking. We are listening to the parents. We held our first listening meeting in Baton Rouge, at the Oasis Christian Church on E. Brookstown Drive. Many thanks to Pastor Charles E. Wallace, for opening the church to us and for his heartfelt blessing.

Many thanks, also, to our Probation and Parole Officers in the southeastern part of the state, who contacted parents and assisted in getting them to the meeting. In attendance were parents, Regional Managers, Program Managers, Probation and Parole officers and supervisors and other staff from the regional offices in Baton Rouge, Orleans/Jefferson, Hammond, Thibodaux, and Lafayette, as well as a number of leadership staff from Jetson and central office.

What an uplifting night it was. We asked the parents how their children and grandchildren came into contact with the juvenile justice system and they opened up and told us their stories. We heard their feedback and learned about some of the challenges they face. So many older people are raising grandchildren, so many people seek assistance for their children and don't know where to go for the services they need. We heard some of the ways we can help and heard suggestions from experienced parents, grandparents and foster parents. We watched while parents shared their ideas with other parents, and we heard loud and clear that some parents feel like they are alone with these issues. They were grateful for an opportunity to network and support one another. They asked us "Why haven't you held these meetings before?"

We heard parents praise the work we are doing at Jetson and in the probation and parole field offices. One grandparent said that when his grandson got into trouble they were "lucky enough to get a good judge who sent him to Jetson." His grandson is in the choir and getting his GED. "If he had stayed on the streets, he'd be dead by now," the grandfather said.

It was so encouraging to see the proud faces of OJJ's executive team and leadership staff when parents stated that we are doing a good job with their kids. We had better get used to hearing praise for Jetson, and I am very happy that Director Daron Brown was there to hear it firsthand. I am confident that we will continue to hear parents give Jetson, Bridge City and Swanson high marks as we continue to transform our facilities into therapeutic communities that change lives.

I appreciate the positive interaction and the open dialog that we shared with our parents. The meeting in Baton Rouge was just the first. We will let you all know when meetings are scheduled in other parts of the state so you can encourage your parents to attend, and so you can be there to hear what they say.

I can think of no better way to find out what services are needed so we can do an even better job of meeting the mission.

Sincerely,  
"Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

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