
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

What is happening in America these days? It seems like every day there's a new report about a senseless killing somewhere in the U.S. and this week it happened right here in Louisiana. Two St. John the Baptist Sheriff's deputies were killed and two more were wounded by a group of people. News reports say that some of them are identified as anti-government "sovereign citizens" who feel that laws do not apply to them. We still don't know why they targeted the deputies in LaPlace, but we do know that several of them were fugitives and had had run-ins with law enforcement in other states. I know you will join me in praying for the families of the deputies who were injured and killed. If you have ever wondered whether we do important work here at OJJ, this rash of violence should be ample proof that our work is not only vital, but may also be lifesaving. We know that over 40 percent of the youth in our system have a mental health diagnosis. The better work we do, the safer our world may be. If we can help even one young person to get past the anger and anti-social tendencies that are the root of senseless violence, we may well be saving countless lives.

Let's change gears. The annual Governor's Conference on Juvenile Justice was held here in Baton Rouge this week, and it was well attended as usual. In the opening session, I got the chance to recognize our staff who attended the conference, and I got a lot of feedback that many of the workshops were interesting and beneficial. We have an obligation to stay current on information that helps us to do our jobs. There were workshops that were extremely beneficial and it's always a good time for our staff to get together from across the state, meet each other and put names with faces.

I also was able to watch our youth perform at the opening session – a combined choir of youth and a handful of staff from Bridge City and Swanson gave a rousing rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, as well as a full 30-minute set of inspirational music. I have to say, I prefer a traditional, unvarnished version of our National Anthem, and that's just what the kids did. It's pretty impressive that they sounded like they had been rehearsing together for a while, when you consider the distance between facilities. They only rehearsed together twice, and once was the morning they performed. Many thanks to all the staff who spent time working with the kids, especially Choir Mistress **Seletar Gosa** of Bridge City and **Chaplain Ricky James** of Swanson. I have to say, our kids stole the show again this year, with the silent auction of artwork by kids at all three facilities, and the scrumptious display of goodies prepared by BCCY Culinary Arts Instructor **Chef Ron Sonnier** and his students. They hosted the breaks Thursday and people lined up to be served cookies, and lemon squares, and peanut butter/butterscotch yummys.

Last night, thanks to our local host, Baton Rouge **RM Michelle Thomas**, we had a large crowd of OJJ staff who got together to break bread at Drusilla Seafood. It was so crowded with OJJ staff that they almost didn't allow me to sit down. It seems **Angela B.** had reserved a seat and was guarding it with her life. As I humbly took another place at the table, her so-called friends threw her under the bus and denied her three times while they watched this train wreck. Everybody enjoyed kidding Angela and wished her well at her new agency. All kidding aside, it was fun. I look forward to the next opportunity to see what happens next when a group of OJJ folks get together.

Many thanks to **DA J. Schuyler Marvin**, and our friends in the 26th Judicial District Attorney's office, who hosted a press conference in Bossier City Monday, where we announced a partnership in which a new tracker program will be put into place there. This is yet another excellent program to help our youth learn to be accountable and to make better decisions, and turn their lives around.

You may notice that the volume of WUD has changed this week – we have been having these weekly chats for a full four years now, and today begins year five. God willing and the creek don't rise, we will have another 260 or so more. If you'll keep reading, I'll keep writing. With that, I'll close, with my thanks to each and every one of the OJJ professionals, in every office and facility, for all that you do, every day and every night, to meet the mission.

Sincerely,
"Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

Mary L. Livers, MSW, PH.D, Deputy Secretary