
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

'Tis the season to be jolly...heaux, heaux, heaux, OJJ! It's 13 days until Christmas, on this Friday the 13th. I know everybody is busy as we are going about our days, seeking the hottest gift items for children, grandchildren and other loved ones. Sometimes the best gifts are the ones that are not material things – gifts of our time and our presence. Think about giving a gift certificate for volunteering time to help a neighbor. Which brings up an interesting question: just who is our neighbor? The real answer is that everyone that we come into contact with is our neighbor. Think about those less fortunate than ourselves (which, by the way, I know that every one of you does every day, just by coming to work at an OJJ office or facility) and all the things that we can do to make their holidays a little brighter. I hear that my staff member who asks her family for a goat (for an impoverished family) every year now asks them to choose from the international children/family relief group's catalog. The family enjoys choosing, and she looks forward to seeing what is given.

Of course, we all know that our Number One goal in working with our youth is ensuring their safety – physical, emotional and sexual safety. We know that our treatment practices won't work until we have achieved safety for our youth. To work toward this goal, many members of the executive team were in New Orleans for several days this week, attending a PREA summit with several other states. The states that joined us were Kentucky, Georgia, Texas and Alabama. As you may remember, OJJ received a grant that provided the opportunity for us to work with other states on ways to implement the PREA standards. The grant allowed a series of meetings with other states to compare notes and see how far along we all are with preparations for the first audit, which must be completed by August 20, 2014. One of the things we are doing as a group is assisting in shaping the national response to PREA by working to develop a cultural toolkit for juvenile justice. I think it's really cool that once again, Louisiana is at the forefront in leading reform efforts. Modeling the way, as it were!

As you know from recent trainings, PREA is very important to every employee of OJJ and has become an everyday part of life throughout the agency, not just at the secure facilities. The facilities are striving in every way toward compliance. They are having regular PREA committee meetings and they should have PREA language incorporated into their SOPs. In other words, PREA should be woven into their regular daily routines and their way of doing business. I want to emphasize the urgency of PREA compliance, especially the short timeframe remaining before that first audit in August.

I want to recognize our Investigative Services staff for providing PREA training statewide and for obtaining the video that really brings home the message during these trainings. A big pat on the back to the IS team for rearranging their schedules to get out in the field to get the PREA training done. Another note – our participation in the regional PREA summits provided the mechanism for us to obtain the video.

To update you, Engineer Curtis Badon has been working like crazy to help finalize the drawings and construction plans for the Acadiana facility. We should have the final plans ready to go out for bid early in 2014...and then, can groundbreaking be far behind? Have faith, we ARE getting there. I think maybe we'll have a small celebration when the shovels finally turn some Avoyelles Parish earth.

I'll close now, with my sincere thanks as ever, to each and every member of the OJJ family in every office and facility, for all you do every day to meet the mission. I hope you will enjoy the ever-changing weather this fall weekend.

Sincerely, "Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

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