
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

Vol. 6, No. 3, August 30, 2013

Hello, Everybody:

Good grief, it's Friday again, y'all! It seems like we were just having this conversation and a whole week has already gone by. Well, at least with this Friday, we can look forward to a long weekend.

I was able to attend two organizational Community Liaison Board meetings this week, at Swanson and Jetson. We are creating three boards, one in each region, that will work with each facility. As part of our community outreach, we are forming these boards with members of the community who will serve as partners to help us better meet our mission. This is another way to improve our partnerships with our communities, on behalf of our kids.

This has been a week full of history. Think about where you were this week a year ago, when Hurricane Isaac flooded many of our south Louisiana communities as it took its time and slowly meandered through the state. Can anyone forget eight years ago yesterday when Hurricane Katrina started the events that ended with the drowning of New Orleans? And how about an event of another kind? Fifty years ago this week, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his "I have a dream" speech in Washington. Sometimes a storm can be a good thing when it washes away the gunk and allows clean new thinking to flow and take hold.

It's already Labor Day – the official end of summer (try telling that to the thermometers, it's still in the 90s) and the official beginning of football season. (Fall? Isn't that when the weather cools off a little?) Someone asked about the fashion police saying it's time to put away the white shoes, pants and skirts until next Easter. Our Young Professional Fashion Advisor says that outmoded dictum was invented by people in northern climates and does not apply to us down here in the subtropics, where summer doesn't end until the end of September. I recently learned that etiquette expert Emily Post has relented and said it's fine to wear white year round. So if you want to wear white pants for a while longer, it's okay with Emily.

I'd like to loop back to an event that took place early last week. I don't think I said enough about Antoinette Tuff, the Georgia school bookkeeper who talked down a would-be school shooter armed with an AK-47 and 500 rounds of ammunition. I want to double back and give some of my thoughts about this. I guess I would say that perhaps the definition of bravery is when you fight the three normal reactions to a threatening situation: flight, fight or freeze. In this case, Antoinette Tuff definitely had to control her emotions and do none of the three. That, my friends, is heroic. I've been in corrections for over 34 years and in most cases where people have been hurt, it's been out of fear. Fear breeds aggression, and I'm sure Ms. Tuff was afraid, but she found the inner strength needed to not panic, she was strong but affirming, and she was able to de-escalate a very dangerous situation. She used her intellect and her humanity to stay composed yet strong and reassuring. And as a result, no one got hurt. She is extraordinary.

I know that these kinds of situations can and do occur in dealing with our youth, and I applaud and admire the strength of our staff who compose themselves and do not act based on fear, but out of concern for the safety of all involved. More times than not we can verbally de-escalate our kids without the use of physical interventions. The use of force should only be used if it is absolutely essential and all other efforts have failed. So, thanks to all of you for all your acts of bravery, every day, in every office and facility, as you meet the mission.

Sincerely, "Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

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

Office of Juvenile Justice • PO Box 66458 • Baton Rouge, LA 70896 • e: Whatsupdoc?OJJ@la.gov • www.ojd.louisiana.gov