
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

This edition is coming to you from the grand old city of New Orleans. Communications Director Jerel Giarrusso and I are in a board room watching the wind blow through the palm trees on Convention Center Blvd. I'm in attendance at the Governor's Conference on Juvenile Justice. I didn't get here until Wednesday evening and unfortunately missed the opening session. The keynote speaker was John Broderick, Dean of the University of New Hampshire Law School and former New Hampshire Supreme Court Justice. He shared his family's story of struggle with a son who was diagnosed with mental health disorders and who landed in jail for a serious crime. With the current focus on mental health issues that can lead to criminal behavior, the topic could not have been more timely. Mr. Broderick is very courageous to share his family's story – removing the veil of secrecy that often prevents people from seeking the help that can prevent tragic crimes and needless heartbreak. We are so fortunate that Dean John Broderick was available to share his message with us. After his presentation, there was a performance by the All-OJJ Choir, comprised of youth and staff from all three secure facilities. Each facility's group has been practicing several numbers and they got together last week at Swanson for a rehearsal. We even had a representative from central office, with Curtis Badon adding percussion. The choir opened the conference with the National Anthem, then performed a set later. The songs featured solos by several vocalists, but their finale "OJJ is on Fire" (think "This Girl is on Fire by Alicia Keys) got members of the audience to their feet and drew both tears and applause. The number included recitation of our mission and vision statements, guiding principles and a list of our agency's accomplishments over the last year. It was a very emotional experience for many conference attendees, who I'm told, let the choir know how much they appreciated the performance. Many thanks to BCCY's Seletar Gosa, JCY's Frances Bailey and SCY's Rev. Rickey James who led their youth and knitted the three groups into one cohesive choir. We can look forward to seeing them perform together again in the near future. I can't wait to see them myself.

Asst. Secretary Sean Hamilton and I conspired to get Regional Director Carolyn Lewis to the conference by having her coordinate the traditional dinner where OJJ staff attending the conference gather together for dinner and fellowship. This year we had about 50 staff who met at Drago's Restaurant – a nice crowd. But the reason we had to make sure that Carolyn was in attendance was so she could be present at the conference to receive the Don Wydra Award, named for an OJJ deputy secretary who dedicated his life to improving juvenile justice in Louisiana. The Wydra Award is a coveted honor that is the highest accolade for a Louisiana juvenile justice practitioner, and I can think of no one more deserving that our own Carolyn Lewis. I hope you will join me in congratulating her on receiving this recognition for a lifetime of dedication to our mission.

I've been hearing good things about the workshops here at the conference and I was able to see for myself the quality of the presentations. I sat in on the PREA workshop and listened to our staff members, Chief of Operations Elyn Toney and Jetson Director Angela Sutton, present. Also presenting was Mara Dodson of The Moss Group, and Wayne Liddell, a correctional consultant. It was well-attended, and I didn't see anyone falling asleep, so I think the audience agreed with me that they did a really good job.

Wednesday I was a speaker for a national webinar presented by OJJDP. My topic was isolation in secure facilities, and it was my first webinar presentation. About 400 people participated, and I thought the webinar was very well done. I was told that most people who participated were pleased with the presentation.

A lot of times, the publicity we get is geared toward the secure facilities, which are very visible in our communities. But all the work that is going on in our communities is invisible, as it should be. But we know it is not truly invisible, so to all the field staff who work every day to navigate the complicated system of courts and services, you are doing an excellent job, and you are very visible to us. In fact, I started my webinar presentation with my thanks to people in the community who are working so hard to keep kids from going into the deep end of the system. So, I'll close with my thanks to each and every one of you in every OJJ office and facility, for all that you do every day, to meet the mission.

Sincerely, "Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

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