
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

Well, it's been a full work week – five whole days and all very busy. We had a very productive leadership meeting in Vidalia, at the conference center right on the Mississippi River. We experienced some thunderstorms that knocked out the lights and air conditioning for a little while. But we adapted and survived – isn't that what we do in OJJ? I think we had a good day - we started off as we usually do, talking about our budgets and the outlook for the fiscal year. We then moved on to three minutes of fame where we asked each manager and director to take three minutes apiece to tell us their accomplishments and their goals. You could tell that each of our leaders was very proud of their staff and the work that they are doing. It was really a great experience for me to hear of all of the wonderful things that are going on across the state. I heard a lot about our successes. I heard a lot about our restorative justice field trips, and how people are working together. It was really cool. The lights and air came back on; we had a working lunch, and to wake everybody up we had a great learning exercise. Chief of Operations Ellyn Toney created a PREA jeopardy game that tested our knowledge on all matters PREA. Needless to say the range of knowledge varied from excellent to needs improvement. We know who we are – and we know who needs to study up. But it was fun and educational at the same time. We always talk about CSoC and Behavioral Health, and we ended the day with Q&A. Then for some of us it was off toward home and for others of us, like Asst. Secretary Sean Hamilton and me, it was off to New Orleans.

Even the trip down there was exciting - we hit a bad thunderstorm around St. Francisville and a bad traffic jam around Baton Rouge. But we made it to New Orleans, to be at Bridge City early Friday morning to take part in a documentary film about juvenile justice, that is being centered around Bridge City Center for Youth. A filmmaker from New York had heard about the Missouri Model and she called Mark Steward of MYSI, who suggested she contact us. She scouted us out several months ago and liked what she saw. So this week, she and a cinematographer spent four days shooting at BCCY, taking in all the activities that our youth experience. Mark Steward and his wife, Alice, joined us for the shoot. They filmed lights on in the morning, classroom instruction in school, lunch and dinner in the dining hall, recreation periods, group discussions, check ins, check outs, circle ups. They filmed groups having a good day, a bad day, and lights out. They did extensive interviews with BCCY's leadership team, Yours Truly and Mark Steward. Today (Saturday) they interviewed individual youth. Reports are that the team of two is so low key and so empathetic with youth and staff that they forgot the camera was there and they acted completely naturally. Director of Communications Jerel Giarrusso was there for the entire shoot to smooth the way. This documentary production is going to take quite a while to complete, so we won't be screening it any time soon. But we will keep you posted on the progress, so stay tuned.

I had a sad experience this week that I want to share with you. There was a neighborhood cat that I called Elvis (because he looked like another cat of my acquaintance that was called Elvis) who wandered in one day, and I fed him and cared for him for him for a bit. But I felt that he had an owner so I didn't want to keep him. The next time I saw him was this week, when he looked like he'd been seriously injured. So I took him in and took care of him because he was in really bad shape. I took Elvis to the vet the next morning, and she said he was so far gone that she had to put him down. Someone had apparently poisoned this cat with antifreeze, which tastes sweet to animals. Poor Elvis suffered terribly before he succumbed, and it was hard to watch. It's hard to believe people can be so cruel. I guess you all know that I'm a huge animal lover, so it really hurt my heart to see a creature suffer and die. Maybe it was accidental. But if somebody did this intentionally, I hope that one day they will develop more empathy toward all creatures. One of the things that is good about our Second Chance Kennel program at Swanson is that it helps nurture the empathetic treatment of animals. Hopefully we will have a horse program soon at Jetson that will be of the same philosophy.

Well, changing gears – I'll close with my thanks to each and every member of the OJJ family, in every office and facility, for all you do every day to meet the mission.

Sincerely, "Doc"

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