
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

Vol. 7, No. 6. October 10, 2014

Hello, Everyone:

I made it to Sweden and back. What a trip! As you may have heard, I was asked to go to Sweden as part of the U.S. State Department's delegation to visit Swedish prisons. The current President of ACA could not go on the trip, so the honor fell to me. So I said, o.k., somebody has to do it, so it might as well be me! Ha ha. It was a great learning experience and they really worked us hard. It was no joke when I tell you they worked us hard. We toured the women's prison, the maximum security prison, and a Level 2 prison as well as their central office and a probation and parole office. That took three 16 hour days to accomplish, and a plane ride back to the major city in Sweden, Stockholm. The official business ended on Friday morning with a panel discussion for the staff of the "Kriminalvargen" and with the Swedish press.

The whole experience was very interesting. What I found to be the same was their very dedicated staff. Their staff were very knowledgeable and professional, and really believed in what they do. (Sound familiar?) In addition, they utilize the same research based practices of "What Works," with risk and needs assessment, followed by treatment plans for each individual. The Swedes operate their adult system much like we operate our juvenile system. (Interesting!) The Swedes do not incarcerate as many people as we do in the U.S. The largest prison in their country held 450 inmates. In other words, they appear to keep more people in their communities with services and reserve the institutions for their highest risk inmates. (Sound familiar?) They utilize leaves (furloughs), and family visitation as incentives. (Sound familiar?) The average stay is approximately 8 months. (Sound familiar?) The staffing ratios are the same for the adult system as ours in the Office of Juvenile Justice in Louisiana. During waking hours, the ratio is 2 staff with approximately 12 inmates. (Sound familiar?) Their recidivism rate is 40% which is higher than ours, but then they are dealing with adults....whereas OJJ has a better chance of making more impact. These are just some of my thoughts about how we are the same, so next week, I will talk about some of our differences. And I will tell you about some interesting facts about their culture, and how it drives their policies and practices. Stay tuned if you are curious!

I'm sure you all are aware that the deadly Ebola virus has made it to U.S. shores – which was entirely predictable considering the worldwide community we live in. People travel to everywhere from everywhere, and it was only a matter of time until that virus arrived here. There are no direct flights from western Africa to the U.S so the Ebola victim who arrived in Dallas had flown through a hub in Belgium. See why it was just a matter of time? People move around all over the world. We sent you all an information bulletin last week, with information from the CDC, and I hope that has been helpful. The main thing to remember is that the disease is still very isolated and it's also difficult to transmit – not like the flu, which is spread through the air. You have to have actual contact with someone who is ill with the virus and is showing symptoms. So if you don't know anyone with Ebola, you are very unlikely to contract the disease. I hope we don't have a panic where people start screaming Ebola whenever someone has the sniffles. We have plans in place at the secure care facilities to monitor any youth or staff who exhibit symptoms. So let's all stay calm, safe and healthy.

This week we welcomed a new member of the central office staff. Denise Dandridge, MN, MA, RN, is our new Health Services Administrator, who is replacing Kelly Smith, the first person to hold that position at OJJ. Kelly will be leaving us sometime soon, and she is staying on to assist in the transition. Denise comes to us from DHH, and has an extensive background with public health issues. Watch for more information about Denise as we welcome her to the OJJ family.

I was able to visit Bridge City today for the grand re-opening of the swimming pool. It's been closed for several years, and a member of our community liaison council donated the funds to clean the pool and renovate it. Youth from each dorm had time to swim and play water basketball, and the weather was perfect today, so everyone enjoyed the event. Of course, Chef Sonnier and his Culinary Arts students grilled hot dogs and hamburgers, and had all the fixin's – a good time was had by all. Many thanks to the staff and our donor, for making this a great day for the young people here at Bridge City, with the lasting benefit of a beautiful pool the youth will enjoy for many years. The pool will be an incentive for the youth to behave well and be successful with their treatment programs, as going swimming will be a reward for good behavior and making good decisions.

Wishing you all a wonderful fall weekend, with my heartfelt thanks to every member of the OJJ family, in every office and facility, for all you do every day and everywhere, to meet the mission.

Sincerely,

“Doc” *Dr. Mary Livers*

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