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# what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

We started the week with our employee appreciation program at central office on Monday (we just could not squeeze it in last week). It featured a full spread of barbecue and all the fixin's, prepared by, you guessed it, Chef Sonnier and the Bridge City Culinary Arts students. They didn't just fix the food and send it, they came and served it, resplendent in their white uniforms and hats.

Some of you might have seen OJJ in the news this week. We are continuing efforts to get the replacement of facilities at Jetson and Swanson in place. The process is a slow one, but we will keep plodding along. Keep your fingers crossed!

There has been a flurry of activity at the Legislature this week that is also keeping us front and center. The budget debate is in full swing. The budget has cleared the House – with a few cuts – and is now in the hands of the Senate. I got invited to Senate Finance yesterday to address potential budget cuts for the next fiscal year. At this point, we are anticipating a slight increase in average caseload in the field, which will lead to a reduction in positions. I know that news like this can be discouraging, but we can sustain this reduction without laying off any staff. We will also be working on our Title IV-E processes so that we can benefit from additional federal funding. The session does not end until June 2, so stay tuned, there is still much debating and negotiating in progress. As always, I will keep you posted.

As most of you know, the annual Governor's Conference on Juvenile Justice was held in Baton Rouge this week. OJJ youth were center stage and stars of the show on the opening day. The annual silent art auction featuring OJJ youth artwork was set up, and got a lot of oohs and ahs from conference attendees who were bidding on the items. Thanks to Administrative Assistants Wanda Murray and Mitzi Sonnier for the excellent display of artwork. The opening session began with the national anthem performed by the OJJ Choir – youth from Swanson and Bridge City, accompanied by staff member musicians. After the keynote speaker, the choir returned and rocked the house with two numbers – “Smile” and the popular Pharrell Williams song “Happy.” You just can't sit still through that number, and I have to admit, I was on my feet. Undersecretary Connie Percell got members of the audience up and dancing. The kids had a ball and we got lots of leads for future gigs! Thursday Chef Sonnier and his students hosted the afternoon break by serving their yummy treats. It's such a tradition now that people start asking for lemon squares the day before!

Along with the traditional participation by youth, we were pleased to have a first. Youth from Bridge City were co-presenters at the conference. “Ten Years of OJJ Reform: Balancing Public Safety and Rehabilitation,” included an overview of OJJ reforms focusing on LAMOD. The youth from Bridge City described LAMOD and how it has helped them, and then they demonstrated some of the group processes that are the backbone of the treatment model, such as check-ins, circle ups and group sessions. Session attendees also got a taste of the Culinary Arts students' brownies and cookies. While the conference always allows everyone to learn a lot and do some great networking, it has become a tradition to showcase our youth and their accomplishments.

Well, I'll close with my sincere thanks to each all the members of the OJJ team, in every location, for working with the youth every day, teaching them skills and allowing them to shine. You should all be proud!

Sincerely,  
“Doc” *Dr. Mary Livers*

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