



## The Budget Crisis

*In the last few months, DJJ has endured an impact from the state and national budget crisis like no other seen in modern memory. The agency has seen its budget slashed by 23% in a matter of months, forcing the agency to make drastic cuts, close facilities, and institute Reductions-In-Force for employees. This article takes a look at how it happened and what the future may hold in these hard times.*

### Crisis

In just a few months things changed at DJJ. The changes are reflective of South Carolina's and our country's economic meltdown that caused budgetary havoc (for DJJ,) resulting in the loss of children-serving programs and jobs, to meet budget reduction mandates.

As we continue to deal with the effects of the cuts, and not wanting to place the agency in greater harm of defying a federal lawsuit settlement agreement, DJJ

Director Bill Byars was recently given approval by the state Budget and Control Board to run a deficit through the end of this fiscal year. Still, while the past few months have been extremely challenging, some good

has surfaced—a high level of community support for the agency. Plus, we have received media attention because of supporters who refused to let our struggle go unnoticed.

“We knew in summer 2008 that we would be hit with a budget cut and were prepared for it,” said Director Byars. “We were okay at that point, but were unprepared for what followed. We had no idea that such a fierce tidal wave was coming - and so quickly. Things just started falling apart, and we got to where we couldn't absorb it anymore without drastic changes.”

Unlike many state agencies, DJJ is particularly vulnerable to state budget cuts because we rely

heavily on state funding. With little federal revenue to fall back on, DJJ found itself at the mercy of the state's rapidly growing budget crisis. By fall 2008, the Board of Economic Advisors began seriously cutting state revenue estimates. As a state, South Carolina relies heavily on state sales taxes for revenue, and by this time the Board was advising that the state was facing a rapidly deteriorating situation because consumers simply weren't spending. This forced a series of rapid-fire budget cuts.

“At first, we froze hiring and tried to absorb the



cuts in ways that would strain us but not break us, things like furlough days” said Director Byars. “But with our budget shrinking so fast and already halfway through the fiscal year, it just wasn't enough. Then we had to start looking at group home closings and Reductions-In-Force – that was the hardest. It was heartbreaking. So many good, dedicated people were losing their jobs.”

### Impact

The impact of the budget crisis on DJJ has been far-reaching and deep. The agency has been forced to cut funding for all of its agency-sponsored Teen-After-School Centers, all juvenile employment programs (JEEP), its Auxiliary Probation Officer program and many other front-end prevention programs. It has also been forced to close all DJJ operated community group homes: Greenville, Gateway Boys and Girls, Hope House, and New Charleston Place. Employees from the group homes lost their jobs in the process.

# THE LINK

A NEWSLETTER  
FOR DJJ  
EMPLOYEES

WINTER  
2009

FROM THE  
DJJ OFFICE  
OF  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

“We’ve had to cut from everywhere,” noted Director Byars “We had to lay off 266 people in a matter of a few months, and that’s out of an agency that only had about 1,650 employees. It’s also way out of proportion to the kinds of layoffs that other agencies in the state have made. We took a much harder hit than anyone else.”

“This crisis has cost us in every part of the agency, but it has really hit us on our front-end and prevention efforts,” said Office of Community Justice Director Brett Macgargle. “We’ve gutted almost all our efforts to keep children from coming into long-term commitment. We don’t want to go back to being overcrowded behind the fence and just warehousing our children.”

### **Stopping the Bleeding**

In February, Director Byars went before the Budget and Control Board to ask permission to run a deficit at DJJ. After reminding the Board of a previous lawsuit and referring to a published report and newspaper editorials and articles stating that DJJ could not withstand additional cuts and remain in compliance with a federal lawsuit settlement agreement, the Board agreed. DJJ was given permission to run a deficit for the remainder of this fiscal year. The request was troublesome (to the agency) because DJJ had always strived to keep its financial house in order.

“I knew that when we were looking at a 23% budget cut, that the cuts simply could not continue,” said Director Byars. “When I came to this agency, we had a federal lawsuit on our hands. When the lawsuit was dismissed we promised that DJJ would not slide back into the old habits that had plagued us in the past. We promised to find alternatives to commitment by maximizing the use of residential programs. We just couldn’t do that anymore with the cuts we faced.”

### **The Future**

The future of DJJ in so many ways is tied in with the future of the country’s and the state’s economy. And, as with so much of the economy right now, it is still unclear what the future may hold. “We are just hoping that we have turned a corner, that the worst is over,” said Director Byars. “The children of South Carolina are counting on us. We just cannot let them down.”

The Friends of Juvenile Justice (FJJ) and other community partners are providing unprecedented support to the agency on behalf of the children we serve. FJJ is supporting the operation of five Teen After School Centers and are continuing plans to landscape the grounds at the Bill Rogers Community Center, which is their premier contribution to the agency. FJJ and other supporters are using freedom of speech and grassroots’ methods to keep state leaders and the general public enlightened to DJJ’s needs in order to meet the needs of South Carolina troubled youth.

Despite the elimination of programs, the closing of group homes, and the loss of employees, Director Byars has maintained that he wants to have foundations in place to support the immediate rebuilding process, when the time is right. And, with a dedicated staff and die-hard supporters, the time will be right again for the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice.

### **DJJ Donates Chairs to Park**



As part of Saluda Shoals Park’s annual “Unearth Festival” in early October the Broad River Road Complex donated Adirondack chairs to the park, made by DJJ’s own Young Craftsmen. The Craftsmen are also working with Saluda Shoals Park to replace some of its worn-out bird houses. The agency is hoping to create an ongoing partnership with the park.

### **National Board Certified Teachers Embrace DJJ School District**

DJJ is proud to have a total of 10 National Certified Teachers among its school district staff. Four of the 10 teachers were recently confirmed as Board Certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. They are Betty Harrison, Michael



Alston, teachers at Birchwood School for boys, and Ronnie Corn and Paul DeLigt, teachers at the Willow Lane School for girls. They join Adrienne Applegate Margaret Walker, Lee Ann Forest and Ted Henderson, teachers at Birchwood, and Michael Martin and Pamela Childress-Altman, Coastal Evaluation Center school, who make up DJJ's total team of Board Certified teachers.

Accomplished teaching is the philosophy behind National Board Certification for teachers. Certification is achieved through a rigorous, performance-based assessment that takes one to three years to complete. DJJ is proud that its school district is very much a part of the framework of accomplished teaching.



*Michael Alston and Ronnie Corn*



*Paul DeLigt and Betty Harrison*

### **Carolina One Realty Holds Drive for Dorchester County Office**

In December, Carolina One Realty of Summerville chose DJJ's Dorchester County office as the target organization for their annual charity drive. Carolina One employees and agents donated much-needed clothing and household items to DJJ children and their families during the drive. Two of their employees also accompanied Salley and Community Specialist Vekiza Williams on shopping trips to choose winter clothes, paid for by donations of gift cards from Carolina One. At Dorchester DJJ's annual holiday drop in, the staff presented Donna Baxter and Chris McDaid of Carolina One

with a certificate of appreciation. The staff of Carolina One plan to continue this partnership with Dorchester DJJ throughout the year, as needs arise.



*Dorchester Count ISO, Torsha Salley and County Director, Debbie Smith, present certificate of appreciation to Chris McDaid and Donna Baxter of Carolina One Realty in Summerville*

### **Keeper of the Dream Award**



*Benjamin Dunlap, right, with Director Byars*

DJJ Probation Officer Benjamin Dunlap was recently awarded the 2009 Keeper of the Dream Award in recognition of his outstanding community service. The Keeper of the Dream Award is given as a legacy to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and was presented during a Community Scholarship Breakfast in honor of the late civil rights leader. Mr. Dunlap works in DJJ's Lancaster County office.

### **Second Chance Clothing Boutique Coming**

The Second Chance Boutique, a clothing closet, will soon open at Broad River and Shivers Roads. The boutique is a collaboration of the Friends of Juvenile Justice (FJJ) and DJJ to provide clothing to children and families served by DJJ. If you wish to volunteer at the boutique, contact Stacey Atkinson at (803) 896-9066. The boutique's opening date will be released at a later time.

