South Carolina
DEPARTMENT OF
JUVENILE JUSTICE

# THE LINK

A NEWSLETTER FOR DJJ EMPLOYEES

SUMMER 2009

FROM THE DJJ OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## The Bill Rogers Community Connections Center
## The New Face of DJJ

"Last Christmas we put up a nice Christmas tree and holiday decorations in the Bill Rogers Community Connections Center for the first time," says DJJ Special Projects Manager Ray Cavanagh. "And the last thing I expected was to have parents thank me and tell me that this was the only Christmas tree their family would have. The Center has become more of a welcoming home than any other building we've ever put up at DJJ. It's such a unique place."

It may be hard to imagine anything resembling a "home" behind the razor wire of DJJ's Broad River Road Complex. It may be even harder to imagine dozens of state agencies, community organizations, law enforcement organizations, and The Governors' Juvenile Justice Advisory Council turning to DJJ for use of one of the most state-of-the-art meeting facilities in the area. But the Bill Rogers Community Connections Center has surprised a lot of people in its first year of operation, and it is transforming the outside world's perception of DJJ.

The Center began as a simple request from Judge Byars to the Friends of Juvenile Justice Foundation (FJJ). "I told them that we needed a new place for visitation for the children, a place that would be secured but that didn't remind people they were in a prison," says Judge Byars. "What we ended up getting was way beyond what I ever expected one of the best gifts ever given to the state by private donors."

Since its dedication last September, the 10,000 square foot facility has also enjoyed a reception from DJJ and the outside world that no one ever anticipated. "We knew that a lot of people would want to put it to use," said Cavanagh. "But we had no idea just how much use it would get."

The Center is used first and foremost as the central location for DJJ boy's visitation. DJJ has witnessed a 75% increase in juvenile visitation in less than a year of operation. "With the atmosphere, the privacy, and the openness of the building; it just doesn't feel like a prison," said Judge Byars. "Families feel comfortable coming here." The Center has seen a similar increase in volunteers and mentors, with the Center being reserved


every night for volunteer visitation. "With all the groups coming in here we have also been able to boost volunteer recruitment significantly," added Cavanagh. "People are coming for a DSS meeting, or a SLED luncheon, and they are so impressed with the place that they end up as DJJ volunteers."

In addition to its size, openness, and the ability to host 300 guests in its central meeting space, the Center also boasts state-of-the-art videoconferencing, audio-visual, and presentation equipment that helps attract many of these outside agencies to the facility. "We prioritize child-serving agencies and organizations like DSS and the Guardian ad Litem program, but it didn't take long for word to spread," said Cavanagh. "Now we have so many others using the facility for their meetings and conferences."

Another attraction of the Center, its welcoming appearance, has also improved greatly since its dedication. The interior of the Center features a large collection of artwork, handcrafts, and

decorations produced exclusively by DJJ juveniles. “We are actually holding art competitions for the children to contribute to what we call the Hope Gallery,” said DJJ Director of the Community Behind the Fence Stacey Atkinson. “And the children are helping with landscaping the Center grounds.” FJJ’s next phase in development of the Center is an extensive garden and entranceway that will expand the visitation and meeting space of the Center and allow for more outside events as well—all funded by private donors such as Columbia Green. “The children are helping landscape all that too,” added Atkinson. “We’re using it as a teaching tool to teach them about everything from landscape planning to construction. Forty children are being paid through an apprenticeship program supported by private donors.”

DJJ youth artwork from the “Hope Gallery”

And, finally, the Center has helped to improve DJJ security. With the new security procedures that the Center has allowed, better surveillance equipment, and a metal detector at the Center entrance has reduced contraband being brought in during visitations. “One of the big problems we had was visitors bringing in contraband to the children,” notes Cavanagh. “But we saw a big drop-off of that kind of activity when we opened up the Center. It’s now very hard to bring in contraband that way.”

The Bill Rogers Community Connections Center has exceeded all expectations in its first year of operation. It has become, and likely will remain in coming years, a more welcoming home for DJJ.

## Omar Tyree Speaks to Youth at Birchwood School

Omar Tyree, a New York Times best-selling author and motivational speaker, recently spoke to youth at DJJ’s Birchwood School on the importance of literacy and determination in their lives. DJJ teachers report that the students responded very positively to the message, with many of the students expressing interest in becoming writers and entrepreneurs themselves after hearing Tyree speak.

Omar Tyree, a 2001 NAACP Image Award recipient for Outstanding Literature in Fiction and a 2006 Phillis Wheatley Literary Award winner for Body of Work in Urban Fiction, has published 16 books and that have sold nearly 2 million copies worldwide. With a degree in Print Journalism from Howard University in 1991, Tyree is also a well-know lecturer and children’s book author. He founded the Urban Literacy Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving literacy in urban and disadvantaged youth, in 2005.

## DJJ’s JCO of the Year Recognized


Carlie Rakosky, a JCO at the Willow Lane Campus, is DJJ’s 2008 Correctional Officer of the Year.

Rakosky had been recognized earlier by the South Carolina Law

South Carolina
DEPARTMENT OF
JUVENILE JUSTICE

Enforcement Officers' Association as DJJ's 2008 Officer of the Year.

## New County Directors Appointed

Melissa Bell-Gunn and Karen Buddin were recently promoted as County Directors for Georgetown County and Lexington County, respectively.

Ms. Bell-Gunn had served as the Interim Director for Georgetown County since September 2008. Ms. Bell-Gunn has been with agency for over nine years and has previously served in positions as an Intake Community Specialist and Intake Supervisor.

Ms. Buddin has been employed with DJJ for over 30 years, and had most recently served as the Interim County Director in Lexington.

## Community Services Announces ICCI Winners for the Quarter

(from left) Robert Baucum, Ben Dunlap, Margee Claborne, Karry Guillory, Anna Hall

Karry Guillory, Gloria Bennett

DJJ's Community Services Division recently recognized its "**I**ntegrate, **C**ollaborate, **C**ommunicate, so DJJ won't have to **I**ncarcerate" (ICCI) program winners for the quarter. They include Robert Baucum (from the Community Alternatives office), Gloria Bennett (an administrative assistant at the Detention Center), Margee Claborne (an intensive supervision officer for the Beaufort and Jasper County offices), Ben Dunlap (a community specialist for the Lancaster County office), and Anna Hall (an intensive supervision officer for the Anderson County office).

The ICCI award was designed to recognize Community Services Division employees for: integrating programs into an array of services for juveniles, collaborating with other youth-serving organizations, communicating effectively within and outside the agency to enhance programs and services, and for establishing partnerships for community involvement to promote preventive services for our youth.

## USC Law Students Volunteer to Teach "Choices"

Students from the University of South Carolina's School of Law recently volunteered to teach a new curriculum to youth on the John G. Richards campus. The "Choices: Legal Awareness Sessions of Juveniles" curriculum had previously been taught in DJJ group homes as a diversion program. This ten lesson series was developed by DJJ's Mike Gannon and USC law professor Pamela Robinson, as part of a partnership with the USC law school pro bono program.

## DJJ Spartanburg County Office Recognized for Partnership

Michael Smith, DJJ's Spartanburg County Office director, recently accepted an award from the City of Spartanburg on behalf of his staff for their partnership with the Spartanburg Public Safety Department. The city presented Smith with a plaque and a proclamation at a recent luncheon, in recognition of the staff's assistance and commitment to providing preventive and rehabilitative services to juveniles, including alternatives to incarceration.

South Carolina
DEPARTMENT OF
JUVENILE JUSTICE