

OYA *In the Loop*

January 6, 2009

The last few weeks of the year blew in not only snow, but also several significant events that affected us – some good, some bad.

First, though, I think it best to talk about several sobering incidents that are reminders of the importance of our work, and also its perils.

In the early hours of December 21, eight youth at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility executed an escape plan in which three of our staff were injured.

At approximately 12:30 am on the Cedar Living Unit, campus security (CS) was called to respond to a fight that was taking place in the dorm. CS staff removed one girl from the dorm and as they returned to walk through the dorm to address others, several youth began advancing on them. The youth used weapons (a metal bar and mop handle) that had been hidden in the dorm to assault staff and also struck staff with their fists. Additionally, they spread a slippery substance on the floor that compromised staff's footing.

Then, when staff opened a door, the youth pushed their way past staff to gain access into the courtyard. Shortly thereafter, the local police arrived and secured the outside perimeter. Officers accompanied staff into the facility where youth were apprehended in the courtyard and in the kitchen sally port.

The State Police are investigating, and we are eager to see those involved prosecuted.

The staff at OCYCF rallied to deal with the incident. I even know of one person who cancelled his vacation and others who reported in the middle of the night to help. Bill Siegrist, Joal Traynor and Kenny Liverett, the staff who were injured, have not yet returned to work. Please join me in not only wishing them well, but also acknowledging the good work of the staff of OCYCF in working through this incident. I'm sure that Assistant Director Palmateer is eager to share the lessons learned at the appropriate time.

Last week on New Year's Eve, three youth on parole were involved in an apparent gang-related shooting in Gresham. According to reports, William Butler allegedly shot Darius Perry. Ramond Lawrence then allegedly shot Butler.

Not only is this tragedy self-evident, but also others in our custody and staff knew the youth. The boys have relatives and friends in custody, and staff are actively engaged in helping them work through their grief.

The incident is also a poignant reminder that gang activity is very much a risk to the community, our staff and our youth. Several OYA staff worked New Year's Eve and in the days following to assist police in the investigation, even though I'm certain the incident took a toll on them.

I am determined to do everything within my power to ensure that your workplace is safe. And you can help – if you have ideas please let your supervisor or assistant director know. You can also share your thoughts via our In the Loop email: oyaintheloop@oya.state.or.us.

I'm equally committed to making sure that the emotional aspects of critical incidents are dealt with appropriately. I know that our assistant directors are available to work through issues with affected staff, but most importantly I want to remind you of the services available through the state's Employee Assistance Program. Information is available at <http://www.oregon.gov/DAS/PEBB/EAP.shtml> or by calling (800) 433-2320.

The commitment of our staff to their professional responsibilities was also well demonstrated during last month's snow storms. Facing two feet of snow and treacherous conditions, you showed your mettle by reporting to or staying at work to ensure the safety of the public and the wellbeing of our youth. That grit continues to be shown by our staff in Central and Eastern Oregon who brave the elements almost daily. Cabinet members concur -- although our intentions are good, we don't say it enough: Thank You.

As Assistant Director Palmateer shared with you, Larry McKinstry has been selected to be the new superintendent of Rogue Valley YCF in Grants Pass. We are pleased that all of our superintendent positions are now filled.

Of course there's one huge job yet to be filled. I'd like to bring you up-to-date on the search for a new director.

A nationwide recruitment announcement went out in the fall, and a number of people submitted applications. Those were carefully reviewed, and several candidates were selected for initial interviews by phone. I was a member of the interview panel, and I was quite impressed with the credentials of the people we interviewed.

The finalists will be interviewed in person – hopefully within the next four weeks. If a prime candidate surfaces from that group, he or she will sit down with the Governor, who of course makes the final decision.

I'm hopeful that we'll have a start date in March to begin a smooth transition.

Legislative session begins next Monday, and our legislative team in Central Office is gearing up. Assistant Director Jean Straight and Public Affairs Manager Perrin Damon will lead and coordinate our efforts in the Capitol. Jean and Perrin will have a regular presence in the Capitol, developing relationships with legislators and their staff and

providing information about OYA. Fariborz, the assistant directors and I will be available for committee testimony and in-depth conversations with legislators.

Just as critical is the team in the office comprising Robyn Cole and Amanda Lowe-Davies, with others contributing as necessary, who will track legislative bills and prepare information for presentation.

I'd like to remind you that every legislative inquiry needs to be addressed promptly with assistance from one of the people I've mentioned above. If a legislator or their staff contacts you, please confer ASAP with the legislative team to most quickly and accurately respond. That team, in turn, will run all budget questions through Linda Gesler and all statistics questions through Dave Brooks. Additionally, each assistant director is geared up to track bills or address issues that may affect their division.

Our budget activities over the last few weeks focused on preparing the budget narratives we present to the Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee. Additionally, the Legislative Fiscal Office asked us to prioritize our services, and we are in the process of deciding what we would recommend, and the order in which cuts would be taken, if we had to whittle the organization down to its core.

Population management is another hot topic on the Cabinet's list of concerns. Shirlee Pierce and Seantel Heisel analyzed our facilities' population, the demand forecast and the risk levels of our youth and presented their findings yesterday. In short, there's no easy answer to accommodating all of the demand for our beds. We asked Shirlee and Seantel to continue their work and present options for our consideration.

That's it for today – I want to reiterate my gratitude and appreciation for all of your efforts to work through the challenges of the last few weeks.

Bobby