



Department of  
Youth Services

## Message from DYS Director Harvey Reed Steering Youth Away from Gangs

January 20, 2015

In a recent survey of 250 DYS youth statewide, 90% say that gang involvement is “not worth it.”

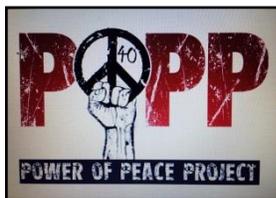
Yet, approximately 36% of our youth are considered active gang members.

Over the last two months, a group of employees from each facility sat down to discuss gang activity at their site. The employees, however, were there to do more than just talk about it. Their charge: Come up with a plan to reduce gang activity that will ultimately lead to fewer acts of violence and safer facilities.

Three DYS employees are leading this effort: Jack Vicencio, Facility Resource Administrator, Rob Stewart, Behavioral Health Services Administrator and Pat Hurley, Facility Resource Administrator. They did a lot of research surrounding gang activity and made a recommendation that DYS implement the “Public Health Model Approach to Gangs.” This model has four components:

- Describe and monitor the problem
- Identify the factors that place youth at-risk to engage in gang membership and violence
- Develop prevention, intervention and suppression strategies
- Disseminate prevention and intervention strategies

Now that we are into the New Year, new programs and projects are rolling out to curb gang activity at each facility. Let me share some of these with you.



At Circleville JCF, approximately 60 youth will be asked to sign a pledge over a two-day period, Jan. 20-22, committing to 40 days of peace in their facility.

The purpose of this event is simple - inspire youth to change their behavior and think twice about committing acts of violence. It's called the Power of Peace Project. Listen to the organization's founder, Kit Cummings, as he invites DYS youth to participate and explains how it all started:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkQpMfQ6GtU&feature=youtu.be>

Vicencio, who is organizing the event, says he is hopeful that the youth at the other facilities, Cuyahoga Hills JCF (ChJCF) and Indian River JCF (IRJCF), will also have an opportunity to participate in the Power of the Peace Project.

In the meantime, Dr. Melissa Dunphy, Deputy Superintendent at IRJCF, explains that staff and administrators are tackling gang activity with a different approach, focusing on the victim in addition to the perpetrator.

“As the committee reviewed the gang prevention program at Indian River, we recognized that we could enhance our support and services to the victim of gang activity, in addition to targeting the desired change in the gang member,” Dr. Dunphy said. “All too often the victims succumb to being a part of the gang.”

To steer them away from gangs, IRJCF staff will encourage the youth to take advantage of the mentorship program. This gives youth an opportunity to meet with a staff member on a weekly basis and talk about situations or events they may be encountering. Staff members volunteer to be a mentor. By offering this support, Dr. Dunphy is hopeful that the youth will refrain from joining a gang.

Dr. Jennifer Alpert, a psychologist at ChJCF, says their facility will be adopting a new program called Men’s Work that focuses on educating youth about violence through a series of discussions and role playing.

She explains, “Men’s Work will help the youth understand the consequences of their violent behaviors and give them the tools to make choices other than violence. The exercises will help them learn the roots of male violence, the role of violence in their lives, and actions they can take to change their responses today.”

Before joining ChJCF last May, Dr. Alpert worked in the Cook County Jail in Chicago, the largest in the country, and the Men’s Work program was very successful there. She is confident it will be beneficial to the youth at ChJCF.

As you can see, each facility is taking a unique approach to gang activity, and I would like to commend them for dedicating their time and talents to this effort.