

# Step by Step:

## Planning for the Successful Opening of A New Juvenile Detention Facility

By Shelley Zivicki

This year, the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) replaced Spofford Juvenile Center, the City's only secure juvenile detention center, with two new, state-of-the-art, 124-bed secure facilities.

The final step in this process took place on January 18, 1998, when without any fanfare, DJJ professionally and smoothly began operations at its new facility in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx. On August 1, 1998, DJJ opened its second new facility, Crossroads Juvenile Center, in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, and achieved the City's goal of moving out of Spofford Juvenile Center. DJJ staff made the process look easy. But it wasn't.

The facility development process at DJJ took place over a period of more than a decade. Involved numerous staff at all levels of administration and operations, and required that close attention be paid to hundreds, perhaps thousands of details. Why did it appear to go so smoothly? Planning, patience and preparation.

### Planning is Needed

Bringing a new facility online involves focusing on a tremendous number of details, from safety and security to supplying an adequate number of wastebaskets. The process is daunting. The most difficult task may be introduc-



ing both staff and juvenile residents to a strange environment and new methods of operation. The surest guarantee of success is to engage line staff in the change from the very beginning.

Involving staff at all levels of operations in the process of change achieves two critical objectives: it taps the knowledge, experience and perspectives of personnel in their particular areas of expertise, and it builds staff "buy-ins" for the new facility and for the new procedures for operating that facility.

Staff will begin the process of breaking "old habits" as they go

through the process of rethinking and modernizing operations. Staff need to be integrally involved from the start of the design process through movement of the first residents into the facility.

At the front end of the process, the architectural program should reflect an objective analysis as well as a subjective staff assessment of the efficacy of the current plant, operations and agency mission. At the back end of the process, staff should participate in developing policies and procedures to reflect changed operations, particularly security operations, in a

new physical plant. Policies and procedures form the standards and rules for the operation of a facility and a standard for measuring staff performance.

#### The Committee Process - Finding And Implementing Solutions

Planning for the transition to and operation of DJJ's new facilities took a monumental effort by staff already stretched with their ordinary workload. It is all the unsung heroes who participated in this process that made a successful transition.



possible.

A core committee of key agency personnel detailed tasks in fourteen different areas, including security, computerization, furniture and equipment, training, staffing, public affairs and so on. Fourteen committees, comprised of staff at every level of agency operations, were formed to address tasks in each of these areas and recommend approaches or solutions.

Committee membership demanded a serious time commitment for meetings, researching issues and writing reports and recommendations. There were

many staff complaints about the process, including: lengthy meetings; too few or too many on a particular committee; delays in decision making by the Executive Staff; too many issues to be addressed, etc.

Despite the complaints with the committee process, it produced some tremendous results: first and foremost in the quantity and quality of the committees work products. The work product of each committee reflected the diverse composition of its members and their expertise in all areas of agency operations.

Perhaps more importantly, the committee process created an informed staff that became vested in the process of opening these facilities, and the prospect of doing business in a better way: a staff that moved from complaining about problems, to finding and implementing solutions.

#### Staff Involvement and Dedication

To successfully transition approximately 500 staff and 250 residents from one operating facility into two new facilities, involving three distinct sites in two boroughs, DJJ staff had to develop detailed operational plans for the move. Committee members made numerous and invaluable contributions to the details of the transition plans.

For example, the head of the agency's Procurement Unit, along with the Furniture and Equipment Committee, handled DJJ's outfitting of the new facilities. That is, they identified all the equipment and supplies that DJJ needed to purchase internally, and handled preparation of specifications, bids and purchase orders. But it was individual committee members that ensured that the building was properly outfitted: Food Services staff established kitchen requirements; Group Services staff focused on the living quarters; Educational staff addressed the school needs; Plant Management Staff handled the shop requirements, etc.

Other examples of how challenges were met by staff

through the committee process:

- fine tuning the security systems
- identifying staffing needs; drafting work orders
- developing a transportation plan
- conducting an inventory of existing furniture and equipment
- developing criteria for assigning youth to the new facilities
- establishing hospital affiliations in our new locations
- planning for the physical movement of supplies and records
- planning for the reassignment of staff and movement of youth
- assigning offices and
- developing visitation plans.

#### Meeting the Challenge

Historically, DJJ has been at the vanguard of change and advanced thinking and programming in the juvenile justice arena. Yet DJJ has been challenged over the years an untold number of times with questions such as why do we need more schools? Why put so much effort into these facilities?

DJJ takes pride in its accomplishments and successes. It is the challenge of every entity that deals with an at-risk population to follow the lead of DJJ. The objective was to create the most efficient and effective physical environment, programming and services for the population served. That is DJJ's mission, and the opening of its new facilities is a clear expression of the Agency's and City's commitment to that mission.

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