

DC Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services in Maryland was scaled to evoke a campus environment.

JUVENILE JUSTICE:

**JUST “DOING NO HARM”
IS NOT QUITE ENOUGH
A HUMANIZING APPROACH TO
REHABILITATION AND FACILITY DESIGN.**

Hippocrates advised his medical students to “do no harm” to anyone in their care. But for the District of Columbia Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), that wasn’t quite enough. And in their work rehabilitating juveniles they have advanced well past that belief, employing a daring corrections philosophy that is now supported and augmented by a striking new facility.

While some advocate spare-the-rod-spoil-the-child treatment to “teach them a lesson,” others promote what might be labeled as mollycoddling. Philosophers can and should debate such conflicts, but in the interim our young offenders are being “processed” in facil-

ities around the country—day in and day out. So, while theories are being posited, vetted, and tested, sound practices must be implemented, and the real, measurable results will ultimately determine the relative effectiveness of whatever path is chosen. Enter the DYRS. Staking out a new middle ground, they seek to provide comprehensive custody, care, and *treatment*, rather than traditional custody and control only—and with good reason.

“For the past 23 years we’ve been functioning under the constraints of a lawsuit; it was triggered by abysmal conditions at the old Oak Hill facility,” explains Vincent Schiraldi, DYRS director. “From the way the kids were



The center's 125-seat auditorium hosts regular performances by NBYDC students.

treated to the design of the facility itself, the facility was dreadful. It looked like a prison, with layer upon layer of razor wire. Rooms were freezing cold or blistering hot, depending on proximity to the boiler.

DOING LESS HARM RATHER THAN DOING GOOD

"Juvenile facilities are often designed just to 'do less harm,' rather than to actively do some good," Schiraldi continues. "The overarching idea is to keep inmates confined but safe through correctional hardware, mechanics, and design; that's it, though. However, we believe facilities should do more than just keep people locked up and safe. We believe that if you treat people like human beings, maybe they'll turn out like human beings, which is, by the way, what we want when people come out of a facility."

Schiraldi and DYRS had already put their program into action; some years ago they elect-

ed to adopt a new model of juvenile justice similar to the "Missouri Model." But Schiraldi and DYRS also had some help. Back in 2004—even prior to Schiraldi's appointment as director of DYRS—Adrian M. Fenty was serving as a city councilman. (He is now the mayor.) In that capacity, he authored legislation to close the old Oak Hill facility and construct a new, state-of-the-art facility. Then in 2006, Councilman Fenty drafted and sponsored emergency legislation to fast-track the procurement and construction of the new facility under Schiraldi's leadership, who was appointed in 2005.

\$42 MILLION YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Fenty's efforts and Schiraldi's operational philosophy have now come together to produce a dramatic new 60-bed center (the old facility had 188 beds), the District of Columbia New Beginnings Youth Development Center, in Laurel, Maryland. The \$42 million state-of-the-art secured juve-

nile rehabilitation center, completed in May, more closely resembles a college campus than a correctional complex.

The NBYDC design boasts five new one-story buildings totaling 83,000 square feet: a main campus building, three housing units, and a gymnasium with a warehouse. The campus building houses admissions, medical services, the superintendent's offices, food service, dining facilities, a theater, the student commons, academic education and vocational training, as well as administrative offices.

The residential units will consist of three separate "home-like" 20-bed buildings subdivided into 10-person living units, rather than one institutional 60-bed facility. The facility reflects the tenets of the Missouri Model throughout—small, safe, youth focused, and community oriented.

Scaled to evoke a campus environment, the 15-acre site includes an interior student courtyard with basketball courts, and a recreation yard that

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But it isn't just attractive and functional; the NBYDC will also be a U.S. Green Building Council LEED-NC certified facility. It is ultimately expected to earn LEED-Gold certification.

Although the facility is aesthetically striking enough to pass for a bucolic, affluent college campus, the question remains: what effects will the new facility have, and how will it work with the more humane treatment program implemented several years ago?

DYRS' VISION: REHABILITATION

Schiraldi says there's already been "a 19 percent drop in recidivism," comparing data from 2007 with 2004. And the data for 2008—which will reflect the effects of the new approach to population management as well as their revised approach to rehabilitation—will be available soon. "While I believe our program is working, I also think these data indicate that hard lockdown facilities like Oak Hill do tremendous harm to juveniles.

"We could put up a beautiful new facility, but if we didn't make any programmatic changes, the kids would tear it apart. Conversely, you can run a good program in a poorly designed prison-like facility. However, the best scenario is to do both at the same time—and that's what we're doing here."

Andrew Cupples, AIA, design principal of the NBYDC project, and a principal at AECOM Design, agrees. He led the design team that partnered with the joint venture building team of Tompkins Builders, Inc., and Hardee Industries to form the design-build squad. He credits the facility's success in supporting Schiraldi and the DYRS's vision to a very simple principle.

"We listened. They had a very clear and compelling concept of what they wanted. We just paid

very close attention to their operational philosophy and helped them carry out their vision. As Vinny [Schiraldi] explained, this facility is about *rehabilitation*, not just custody and control. Obviously there is still a custody function, but the facility focuses more on care and treatment. The gym, the visiting area, the dining area, the auditorium are all used for programs, many that treat the community as an integral component. Bringing the community into the facility was a big part of their intent, and the philosophy is carried out throughout the entire facility design.

"For example, rather than having one big housing unit, each of the residential units is a largely self-contained environment. The bedrooms, two single bathrooms (no group showers), and a laundry room are all off each unit's dayroom. There are no control rooms—there's just a desk in the middle of the room. The dayrooms are carpeted, and they receive abundant natural light from an



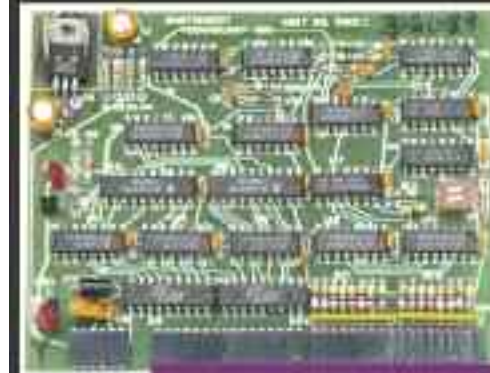
Incorporating natural light and visual and physical connections between indoors and outdoors, the facility was specifically designed to support the operational philosophy.

outdoor courtyard."

The gym and the auditorium also illustrate how design helped bolster the DYRS philosophy. The full-sized gym has overhead ventilating doors and can also be accessed from outside of the perimeter. A visiting team from the community can come in and play against an NBYDC team after passing through a sally port.

Empowering the center's theater program, the 125-seat auditorium hosts regular performances by NBYDC students. In addition to performing for the community, NBYDC students have competed successfully at the Folger Shakespeare Theater competition, performing *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. In fact, while competing largely against suburban public schools and Washington private schools, NBYDC was one of only two schools invited back to perform on Shakespeare's birthday. At the competition, NBYDC also received the "best ensemble award," and one student won the "best actor award."

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The full-sized gymnasium can be accessed from outside the perimeter to allow visiting teams to play.

The auditorium is also used for internal end-of-term awards ceremonies that are held for every eight weeks for academic achievement. According to Schiraldi, these ceremonies are extremely important to the kids; they also serve as a great illustration of the program's efficacy.

"Tough, inner-city kids traditionally view it as their job to not look smart, because in their reality looking smart just isn't cool." But during a program that imitates the Academy Awards, he says, "It doesn't matter that there are 60 tough juveniles in the auditorium; in the gap between when they list the nominees and when they name the winner, you can hear a pin drop. And when they announce the winner, the kid always jumps out of his seat and runs to the front and everyone cheers like crazy. This is not the behavior you are used to seeing from these same kids."

EFFECTIVE & AFFORDABLE

With so much emphasis placed on using high-quality materials and precision design to support the treatment philosophy, cost is naturally a concern. But Gregory J. Offner, CCM, AECOM principal in charge, points out that the facility is both effective and affordable.

"The cost-per-bed for this facility is only slightly higher than at many other facilities, but it's still very competitive. And there are mitigating economies of scale because the facility also houses other DYRS elements, including administrative office space as well as systemwide warehouse storage. In addition, many materials chosen were actually less expensive than their traditionally hardened equivalents, and they were strategically located in order to maintain a secure environment. But the biggest efficiencies were obtained through the close working partnership between [all

the stakeholders]."

Defining human value is a difficult task. But in a way, Vincent Schiraldi and the District of Columbia Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services have sidestepped the predicament. In accepting the kids' intrinsic value on faith, they have created an effective philosophy to rehabilitate the youths in their charge through innovative methods and programs—and a state-of-the-art facility that supports those aims.

Hippocrates admonished his medical students to "do no harm" to anyone in their care. Schiraldi and the DYRS respect that tenet, and they manifest that belief through a daring corrections philosophy that is supported by a striking new facility. Hippocrates would undoubtedly be pleased. ☘

Arthur Schurr is New York-based freelance writer who reports on the facilities design industry.

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