

**Ted Lechner Youth Services Center
Yellowstone County
Billings, Montana**

Historical Background

Yellowstone County Jail to the Ted Lechner Youth Services Center
Detention and Sheltercare Facilities under same roof

Licensure

Montana Department of Corrections

Compliance Monitoring

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

Youth Services Center, A Unique Operation

Safety and Security - Building structure

Juvenile Specific Training

Operational Philosophy - Unique emphasis on human relationships

Programmatic Summary

Use of day-rooms vs time in cells

Complaints and Grievances

Procedures for handling reports and grievances

Injuries to Staff or Detainees

Procedures for how reports and grievances are handled

Personnel Matters

Staff hiring practices

Qualifications and Expertise of Staff

Length of stay

Impact on offenses

Facility Funding

Montana Board of Crime Control

Yellowstone County

Regional Counties

Non-Regional Counties

Federal Government - U.S. Probation, U.S. Marshalls

Detention Alternatives

Programming as a step-down

Programming to prevent detention

Relationship with Juvenile Probation

Shelter Care

Collaboration and Partnership

Programming -

Emergency Placement, Transitional Placement, Detention Alternative

Evaluation and Assessment

Plans for the Future

Wish list

Improved Technology

Additional Training

Recommendations for other communities

Size of the community does not matter; but size of the unit to detain and effectively manage juvenile offenders does.

Written comments to the Council

As the director of the Ted Lechner Youth Services Center, I am pleased and honored that the Council will be hearing information about our facility. I sincerely regret that I cannot attend the meeting. I am confident that Joy Mariska will expertly present information on our facility. I also respectfully submit these written comments.

The Youth Services Center has a long tradition of caring for detained youth in a manner that prevents violence and provides safety for youth in Montana. It often seems that it is accepted that there will be a certain level of violence in facilities that detain violent youth offenders. In fact, violence can be prevented in detention facilities.

I will ask you to imagine the following scenario. You are a 15 year old youth who has been arrested for a violent assault. You are brought to "jail" for the first time. You are angry at the officers and you expect even worse from the guards. Instead, you find yourself in the custody of people who introduce themselves and explain to you that their job is to keep you safe and to take care of you. They seem to care about your health, feed you if you are hungry, and assure you that they are not judging you. When you meet other youth in the facility, they seem relaxed and happy. The rules are explained to you and enforced fairly. You are invited to school and then to play volleyball with other youth and staff. The food is good and the staff members make sure that you are warm, comfortable, eating well, and sleeping well. They say "please and thank you" and they assume that you will do the same. They make sure that you get to talk to your family and your lawyer. The worst thing that has ever happened in your life has resulted in your placement in a place that makes you feel safe and surrounded by kind people. This is what we offer the youth placed in our care.

We are successful because we absolutely believe that our job is a sacred trust to care for youth. We are absolute in our security practices and youth are aware that there is no opportunity to escape or harm anyone. The foundation of best practice in detention is a belief that these youth are entitled to our care and concern. We approach every youth in a manner that reflects our care for our own children and we work every day to provide for their needs.

Our 24-bed facility is small, and that allows for an environment that facilitates professional interpersonal involvement and engagement. However, the strategies that we use are applicable in any individual unit within larger facilities. We must look at how we can use facility design to create these environments within larger facilities.

I sincerely hope that this information is helpful to your discussions. I would be happy to provide additional information about our program at any time. Again, thank you for your time and your interest in juvenile detention.

Valarie Weber, MSW
Director, Ted Lechner Youth Services Center
Billings, MT