



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message From DJJ Director Andy Block

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DJJ Aces First-Ever PREA Audit

Retiring Coordinator Susan Heck Leads Agency To 100% Compliance, Capping 36-Year Career

For Susan Heck, it was an appropriate way to end a distinguished 36-year career in the juvenile advocacy field with an exclamation point: Leading DJJ to a score of 100 percent on its first Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) audit.

PREA was first passed in 2003, but the U.S. Department of Justice didn't issue the first audit guidelines until 2012. That's when Heck became DJJ's PREA Coordinator, knowing that all preparations the agency made toward compliance would culminate in an audit that would take about a week to complete. The agency provided feedback to the U.S. Department of Justice as the guidelines were being established, all the while working with Juvenile Correctional Center superintendents and other DJJ staff to prepare the agency for the audit.

"There were many things we had to do that not only met PREA standards, but improved and supported other agency initiatives," Heck says. "We revamped the agency's hiring practices, strengthened our operating procedures, improved the process in which we screen our residents for sexual vulnerability, and coordinated our response to sexual abuse." She arranged for the training of more than 600 employees who regularly work with residents, and about 500 residents. Residents participated in a poster design contest in which PREA was the theme, and the public information office helped prepare a brochure that outlined residents' rights in plain language.

"Your efforts, both in achieving 100 percent compliance on the PREA audit and in helping to make DJJ's transformation to the Community Model successful, are already making DJJ a stronger agency," Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Brian Moran noted in a congratulatory letter to DJJ employees. "I am proud to share this success with the citizens of Virginia."

For Heck, the successful audit outcome was another satisfying result in a career that has served children in countless substantial ways. "The most meaningful work of



PREA Coordinator Susan Heck displays some of the posters created by DJJ residents as part of their PREA training, as well as a brochure that informs residents about their rights under PREA.

my career was with the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs in Virginia through Stop Child Abuse Now of Northern Virginia," Heck says. "I was given the opportunity through a DCJS grant to increase awareness of CASA and support the development of steering committees across the Commonwealth. It has been very gratifying to watch those early efforts grow."

Heck retires excited about DJJ's current direction. "Working with kids more intentionally and incorporating trauma-informed practice into the work we do with them has such potential," she says. "In 'Tattoos On The Heart,' Gregory Boyle states, 'You stand with the belligerent, the surly, and the badly behaved until bad behavior is recognized for the language it is: the vocabulary of the deeply wounded and of those whose burdens are more than they can bear.' In a lot of ways, that's where our transformation work is taking us, allowing and fostering a culture that supports healing for the kids in our care."

