

District

EXTRA

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Drop-In Center Offers Youths Alternatives to Dropping Out

Mentoring and Services Provided for Offenders

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It's being called the first of its kind: the District's new non-residential juvenile offenders' facility that offers courtroom and probation services, mentoring, tutoring and

recreation activities all under the same roof.

The center, which opened Monday, is designed for youths awaiting trial or under court supervision and who live east of the Anacostia River.

The Balanced and Restorative Justice Drop-In Center is housed in a former diabetic testing office at 1110 V St. SE, near the "Big Chair" in Anacostia.

After \$900,000 worth of remodeling, the mazelike 5,100-square-foot facility holds eight offices for probation officers to meet

with clients and families. It also has a recreation area with a pool table and Ping-Pong table. In addition, there are 12 laptop computers. Tutors from Georgetown University are on site as part of the center's after-school mentoring program.

Counseling for parents and guardians of youths involved in criminal activity is available. The new facility also has a satellite courtroom where hearings can take place.

The center is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays and noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays.

"Keeping these kids positively energized helps us all and keeps kids off the street," said Judge Anita Josey-Herring, who presides over D.C. Superior Court's Family Court Division.

Superior Court officials, who oversee juvenile courts, said they expect to open other centers throughout the city in the coming months if funding is available.

"After years of focusing on arresting young

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Facility Provides New Path For Youths

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people and being tough on them in the system, we have to do something different," Mayor Adrian M. Fenty (D) said at the opening ceremony. "Young people are not predisposed to get into a life of crime or trouble. You have to have positive things for them to get into."

The center is funded with a \$575,000 grant from Family Court appropriations and about \$300,000 from the D.C. Justice Grants Administration Office.

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"We have to break this cycle from juvenile court to adult court," said D.C. Council member Marion Barry (D-Ward 8) during the opening program. "On this side of the river, hustling is seen as more important than going to school. We have to change that, and this center is something different do make that change." Officials said they expect to serve about 30 juveniles a day who have been involved in both violent and non-violent crimes. Job placement for youths and their parents will also be offered at the center.

One of center's primary goals is to prevent juveniles from becoming repeat offenders. "We want to create a place that is safe and fun for these kids as well as help them become accountable for what they have done," said Stephen Liggon, the center's supervising probation officer.

Also in attendance at Monday's opening ceremony were D.C. Council Chairman Vincent C. Gray (D) and Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), an author of the 2001 D.C. Family Court Act.