

For Immediate Release

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YRTC-K Accredited by American Correctional Association

Lincoln – “A very justifiably proud group of professional staff.”

That’s how a team of auditors from the American Correctional Association (ACA) described the staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney after the facility once again met their standards for accreditation.

The team of auditors representing ACA visited the facility last spring during a three-day audit and provided YRTC-K with a detailed written report of their findings.

The facility was found to be 100 percent compliant on 38 mandatory requirements and 99.2 percent compliant on 333 non-mandatory measurements.

YRTC-K has received 100 percent compliance on the mandatory requirements in previous audits, but the 99.2 percent compliance on non-mandatory measurements is a new high, said Jana Peterson, YRTC-K administrator.

“It was the best audit we’ve had at the facility. It was really a team effort with the youth and staff working together to accomplish it,” Peterson said. “It’s reassuring to have an outside person come in and verbalize your team’s strengths as well as provide helpful suggestions about how to improve.”

Thomas Pristow, Director of Children and Family Services, congratulated Peterson and the staff on accomplishing the high accreditation ratings. “In the last couple years, staff has intensified its focus on ways to better serve the youth and operating the facility in a safe and efficient manner. The ACA’s audit shows that our hard work has paid off so we can better help young men to return to their communities as productive citizens.”

During their visit, the auditors toured YRTC-K’s facilities and visited with 60 youth and 45 staff members.

The auditors' report highlighted the staff's commitment to youth, their technical knowledge and professionalism. They also complimented YRTC-K's recreational and educational programs which were both well-regarded by the youth.

According to the auditors' report, all the youth interviewed were "positive about the educational program, the vocational program and particularly, the extensive recreation program."

The auditors said the recreation program offered an "impressive array of opportunities to develop and learn sportsmanship, physical fitness, self-confidence and constructive leisure-time skills."

"I just think you have to be proud of the quality of life offered to the youth here and our education, religious and recreation programs are key parts of that," Peterson said.

The auditors also gave high marks to YRTC-K's use of EQUIP, which they referred to as "an evidence-based program which has been empirically validated to motivate the youth to learn social skills to equip them to be productive citizens."

All the youth said they believed the program was there to help them learn life skills that would help them be successful and generally, they were all positive about their YRTC experience.

Both youth and staff reported feeling safe at the facility, which the auditors described as having "adequate and appropriate" security for the youth served.

The auditors also were impressed with the YRTC's physical plant, noting that while the buildings are older, they are well maintained, upgraded and renovated.

Overall, the auditors said YRTC-K left them with a very good impression, and their report said: "It is obvious staff take great pride in the facility, its operation and its program."

"The comments of the auditors and their ranking of the YRTC's operation at Kearney further support our work there," said Kerry Winterer, DHHS CEO. "We're proud of the work of our staff and applaud them for their dedication and hard work to provide an environment that helps the young men at the YRTC prepare for a better life when they leave."

The three non-mandatory areas where YRTC-K was found to be non-compliant were: daily water temperatures for the dishwasher were not being consistently recorded, there was no documentation that youth assigned to dishwashing in the kitchen had been appropriately trained, and youth in the Dickson unit were not getting the recommended one hour of exercise each day.

The three-day audit for accreditation is conducted every three years.

The ACA audit team included:

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- Denis Shumate of Beloit, Kansas, is a recipient of ACA's highest honor, and has worked 40 years in public service, including 35 as superintendent of the Beloit Juvenile Correctional Facility. He has audited facilities for more than 25 years for ACA.
- Laura Tafoya of New Mexico is correction administrator/quality assurance manager for the New Mexico Corrections Department. She has 25 years of experience in the field.
- Michael Radon of Petersham, Massachusetts, is an ACA auditor and chairs an accreditation team of experts, providing a comprehensive audit, reviewing nationally recognized standards in correctional settings, drug and alcohol residential facilities and community-based facilities. Radon also contracts with the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

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