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Four terminated, widespread corrective action follows Duval Academy escapes



By Stephanie Brown
November 09, 2015 at 3:00 am EST



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Negligence, lack of training and policies, refusal to contact police.

Just a few of the allegations against the government contractor that runs Duval Academy, and the main reason a [combined seven teens were able to escape in two](#)



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It's some of the changes the contractor has made following the escapes- but the process of ensuring long term change is still ongoing.

FULL STORY: [Two teens escape by climbing up Christmas tree](#)

FULL STORY: [Negligent maintenance "most important factor" in escape of five teens](#)

The Duval Academy is a non-secure residential treatment program on Ricker Road for non-violent, male teen offenders. It's run by Youth Service International, a company which is contracted by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice to run several facilities around Florida.

The contract for the Duval Academy was worth \$8.88 million at the time of the escapes. I found a contract amendment dated just last month, however, that boosted that total to \$9.65 million.

AUDIO: [WOKV investigation raises questions about Duval Academy management](#)

A WOKV investigation has uncovered two Inspector General reports in to these escapes, and we've been pushing to see what's happened to ensure the State is getting what it's paying for and to make sure local youths are safe.

Negligent maintenance

The Inspector General noted that negligent maintenance at Duval Academy was the single biggest reason the youths were able to escape in the second incident. For weeks, the teens had kicked out windows and walls, to the point where they were able to essentially move freely in their housing unit. On the night of the escapes they used that access to stack up chairs in front of the module doors to block out staff before causing \$20,000 in damage- including flooding which led to their relocation, and ultimately their escape.

GALLERY: [Surveillance shows Duval Academy teens throwing chairs, targeting cameras](#)

Grounds keeping negligence was a concern in the first incident. Two teens ran off while being moved to a portable classroom and were able to use an improperly



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Contract documents show YSI has managed Duval Academy since July 2013. It's unclear whether maintenance was an issue under the first year of the contract, but the Assistant Facility Administrator told the IG he'd seen issues since at least July 2014. The youths were not charged relating to any of the property damage in these incidents.

The maintenance crew at the time was terminated during their probationary period because of unsatisfactory work, at least in part including that they weren't properly using the work order system. That means the State wasn't able to get records relating to some of the ongoing maintenance.

WOKV obtained a copy of the Corrective Action Plan in place for Duval Academy, which says Plexiglass is no longer being used in the youth rooms, instead ¾ inch Lexican has been installed. The document further says all walls have been repaired DJJ says the contractor also completed new landscaping and replaced exterior lighting. In July, YSI paid nearly \$2000 to repair holes in the gate.

YSI further says they installed a second fence line at the facility. None is visible from the street, but a spokesman tells WOKV the second fence was added along the back.

Safety concerns

The IG report on the second incident noted there had been staff turnover at Duval Academy as a result of the employees not feeling secure because of the negligent maintenance. WOKV requested information on the turnover rate, but a statement from DJJ says only that they are working to address that.

"The program must work toward implementing sustainable corrective action to establish an environment that is conducive to positive youth and staff interactions," the statement says.

YSI also says they take safety seriously.

"Incidents like this are not taken lightly and the safety of the youth within the program, and the safety of the surrounding community, is of the utmost importance to us," says a statement from Youth Services International Regional Vice President



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Part of the concern of staff, specifically on the night of the second batch of escapes, was that while the youth were escalating, the Assistant Facility Administrator allegedly denied their request to call in police. The IG says the policy that has since been put in place still requires approval of an AFA or Facility Administrator, something the IG says should be reconsidered. "Failure to Report" was included in the Corrective Action Plan.

Lack of training and policies

The only employee reprimanded as a result of the first escape did not have training in many key areas, including line movement, even though she had been at Duval Academy for five months.

Staff training is a focus of the Corrective Action Plan DJJ issued for Duval Academy- it shows at least eight training areas were added to new hire orientation and those require quarterly refreshers. A Bureau of Monitoring and Quality Improvement annual review I uncovered from March, however, found "failed" compliance for in-service training, grievance process training, and suicide prevention training. "Limited" compliance ratings were given for youth supervision, staff training on behavior management system, pre-service certification requirements, mental health and substance abuse assessment/evaluation, treatment discharge planning, and several other areas.

GALLERY: [Surveillance footage of escape through Duval Academy laundry room](#)

A statement from DJJ says all staff who were working at the time have either received enhanced training or been terminated.

There were several shortfalls noted in the IG reports as well dealing with written policies, including an inconsistent understanding of whether Supervisors should be present when moving a group of youths. The reports show those areas have since seen policies put in place.

Accountability and oversight

WOKV confirmed four people were terminated relating to the two escapes, although two of them were from a St. Johns facility which was also operated by YSI at the





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Additionally, there are no administrators terminated as a result of these incidents, according to documents and DJJ. I confirmed the Facility Administrator at the time is no longer at Duval Academy, but YSI declined to say whether he had been reassigned, demoted, or terminated, and if that was in response to what happened.

Contract documents show, as of October, YSI is now getting paid more per-bed to run Duval Academy in order to hire more staff. The appropriate ratio is determined case-by-case, according to DJJ, but Duval Academy was changed from 1 staff per 10 youths to 1 staff per 8 youths while the teens are awake. I asked if the change came in response to the escapes, but DJJ said only that it's part of a statewide adjustment.

DJJ itself immediately increased monitoring of the facility, and initially Duval Academy saw an average of bi-weekly supplemental monitoring visits. DJJ says the facility currently gets supplemental monitoring visits on a minimum monthly basis, which is considered a "high category program" under a prioritization tool used by the Department.

Both DJJ and YSI declined interviews with WOKV.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement confirms to WOKV that YSI is actually facing an investigation right now relating to a facility it manages in South Florida. I'm told that investigation is ongoing, but there are no other active probes by FDLE in to the company at this time.

I asked DJJ whether they felt comfortable with how YSI handled these incidents, and if they feel the appropriate corrective action was taken. The statement I received in response says all items in the Corrective Action Plan were "sufficiently addressed", but had no further indication of satisfaction except to say they remain engaged, and will continue close oversight.

"Should progress not be made on that action plan, DJJ will evaluate additional contract action," says the statement.

GALLERY: [Surveillance shows teens damaging Duval Academy over several days](#)

[YSI manages a total of eight facilities across Florida right now](#), each is a multi-





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that is now managed by a different company. The contract with Duval Academy lasts through June 2018.

I asked YSI what happened that allowed the facility to become so damaged and why no administration was reprimanded in response. A statement in response said the personnel and policy changes they put in place were all accepted by the DJJ as "satisfactory".

But the response seems far from satisfactory to some of your representatives. WOKV took this investigation to Tallahassee. **Hear what your lawmakers want to happen next with this multi-million dollar contract, coming Tuesday on Jacksonville's Morning News beginning at 5 AM.**



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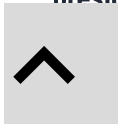


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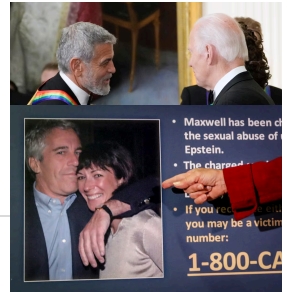
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