

JUVENILES TEST SECURITY, PATIENCE AT NEW FACILITY DRAPER GENESIS CENTER GEARING UP TO HANDLE YOUTH WORK PROGRAM

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Gary Dalton was not surprised when two boys walked away from the Genesis Youth Center for juvenile delinquents.

The director of the Division of Youth Corrections had expected it.

The boys, ages 14 and 15, escaped last week from a crew working outside the facility located north of the Utah State Prison's maximum-security wing. They were captured 20 minutes later along Interstate 15 by prison SWAT members. "I just wish they would have waited a little longer before trying an escape," Dalton said. "We don't even have all the kids in there yet."

Genesis houses 12 delinquents in what was the prison's Lone Peak unit. By June, as many as 72 teens will live in the two-story structure.

The program was created during the past Legislature after the prison moved its firefighting, conservation, road-cleanup and asbestos-abatement teams to a new facility at Camp Williams, making space available at the prison.

Gov. Mike Leavitt said he hopes Genesis will be a "quick fix" to overcrowded youth corrections' facilities like Salt Lake Detention and Decker Lake.

Nearly half of the delinquents placed at Genesis are waiting for court hearings or trials. About 20 will be recently discharged from secure Youth Corrections units like Decker Lake, Dalton said.

All will spend their days cleaning up roads and parks for the state, local governments and civic groups as part of court-ordered punishment, said Genesis Director Gary Webster. While working in neighborhoods, the teens are supervised by at least one adult. At night, they are housed within razor-topped fences and watched by video cameras.

"As long as we continue to have kids out on work placement, they will be running away," Dalton said. "It's a new concept for them and most have never seen anything like it."

Teens must meet several criteria to get into the Genesis program. No sex offenders or juveniles with long criminal histories are taken. Candidates are screened for mental illness and other health problems.

That is good news to Draper Mayor Elaine Redd. Genesis and the Utah State Prison lie within the borders of her town.

"I am not worried about them being here," she said, "but I will be if the walkaways continue and the kids cause problems in Draper."

Dalton said the Genesis staff is still "working out the bugs" in the program's security. Supervisors are being trained to spot behavior that may suggest a juvenile is plotting an escape.

The center also may implement an orientation program for new arrivals to evaluate their behavior before they are allowed to work in the community, he said.

There are 14 community-based programs for juveniles in Utah. More than 700 youth received treatment in the programs last year. They averaged more than 20 felony and misdemeanor convictions and nearly 40% had committed life-endangering crimes, according to the Division of Youth Corrections.