Juvenile Detention Home Almost Ready

By JIM McMahan
Advertiser Staff Reporter

An 11-year-old boy suspected of committing three burglaries was apprehended by Lafayette City Police on Thursday. He was released into his mother's custody the same day because the city had no adequate facility for detaining juveniles.

The following Sunday, the same youth was taken into custody by authorities on charges of burglary. Police felt they had to detain the boy this time so he was placed in a small cell in the city jail, which is often referred to as the "drunk tank."

Several years ago, the city police apprehended 2,774 juveniles in a jail. The only alternative to jail was to release the juveniles to the care of their parents. This solution is inadequate in many instances because the parents are unable to cope with the delinquent behavior of their children.

However, statistics indicate that this has been the remedy most frequently used in the city. In 1970, the city police apprehended 2,774 juveniles but detained only 67. The remainder were released, without any rehabilitation services, into the same environment in which they had committed delinquent acts.

Planned Nine Years

Today authorities no longer have to choose between jail or rehabilitation when they come to the attention of local authorities until the disposition of their cases by the courts. It is not a correctional institution; most youths coming to the home are expected to stay for two days to two weeks.

The security measures are similar to those of a jail, with a high fence surrounding the playing area and the areas beyond them. The atmosphere will be dramatically different from that of a jail where adult criminals are kept. A home environment and a staff well-trained to handle juvenile problems will be maintained.

The 10,000 square-foot facility is located on six acres of land; it consists of two buildings— one to home juveniles and the other to be used for administrative purposes.

Middle so that male and female youths are separated. A communication system has been installed in the middle of the building which can be used to monitor the rooms, to talk to the juveniles individually or as a group or to pipe in recorded music. An attendant will be on duty around the clock.

The personnel working at the facility will be supervised by Kenneth Ward of Monroe who was recently named administrator of the detention home. Ward has been a social worker before coming to this position and has an extensive background in juvenile work.

Any youth in Lafayette Parish below the age of 17 who is involved in a court case and who has no other adequate place to stay can be placed in the home. Children who have been abandoned or those involved in divorce cases will be housed here along with delinquent youths.

All of the rooms are private except one which has two beds. Specialized plumbing cannot be easily damaged as it has been installed in the 10 rooms.

Two Sections

The two sections of the home include a combination dining room, a recreation room, a small library, a visiting room, and a gymnasium. The examining room, which is a roofed structure, will be available to members of the staff who will need to examine the youth as needed.

Much of the recreational equipment that will be used at the home has been donated by the Women's Club of Lafayette. That organization has already provided two ping pong tables and basketball equipment and two television sets.

Assistant Listed

Assistance has come from other organizations too. Post 69 of the American Legion Auxiliary has donated money to be used at the facility and one of the garden clubs in Lafayette is expected to landscape the grounds.

The facility, which was designed by O'Rourke and Godwin, was built by Ernest Simon and Son at a cost of $364,902. The expense of financing the facility was divided evenly by the city and parish. The $75,000 needed for operating expenses will be provided by the city and parish for 10 years.

Local Citizens

Many local citizens have worked for years on committees to make the detention home a reality. Phil Claire is chairman of the committee established by the police jury to oversee the construction of the new facility.

Members of the governing body were appointed by a seven-member commission to set general policy for the detention home. Members of the governing board are Abel, Campbell, Domingue, John, Mays, Segura, Segura, and Love, and Prejean.

Juveniles in Lafayette Parish have not been treated until now. Since the facility can be used as a regional detention home if space is available.