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State juvenile program at West Farm to close

(Pierre)- A state transitional program for juvenile offenders near Sioux Falls will close this summer because of dwindling numbers of youth who are placed there, but it may be reopened for a new juvenile program.

The West Farm, a Department of Corrections (DOC) program that is operated by Volunteers of America, Dakotas, as a group care center for boys ages 14-17, will close by June 1. Youth in the program have completed their correctional placement and are transitioning back into the community.

“With a decline in the overall number of youth in the custody of the Department of Corrections, fewer youth needing the specialized group care service provided at West Farm and VOA’s goal to consolidate its group care services, we have decided to end the current program at West Farm,” said Doug Herrmann, Director of Juvenile Services for the DOC. “The date of the closure was planned to coincide with the ending of the academic year and allows the few youth left to transition easily into other options that are available.”

Facility improvements that are already underway will be completed in hopes of utilizing the campus again soon for a different type of juvenile program.

“A new Request for Proposals (RFP) will be developed by the DOC in the future to create a different type of program to serve older youth with different needs at the West Farm,” said Herrmann. “This program will fit with our goal to return more juveniles to South Dakota currently housed in out-of-state programs.”

The RFP will also provide an option for providers who submit competing proposals to include using the West Farm campus for any new program.

The West Farm property, located approximately 3 miles west of Ellis, SD, was originally a working farm that supplied food for the South Dakota State Penitentiary. The farming operation ceased in 1997 and the facility was converted into a juvenile facility in 1998.