



# NEWS

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Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

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## **VOLUNTEER MENTORING PROVIDES INCARCERATED YOUTH WITH MUCH-NEEDED ADULT GUIDANCE, SUPPORT**



**Richmond, VA, Jan. 24** -- "You can tell these kids all day, but it's [mentors] coming out here, week after week. That's how they know that you care: by investing in their futures."

That's why Stephen Cotton has become a mentor at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center. January is National Mentoring Month, and marks the one-year anniversary of Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's Re-Entry Mentoring Program. Coordinator Ashley Williams invites others to follow in Cotton's footsteps to provide

incarcerated youth an adult they can trust -- something they may never have had before.

"All of Virginia's 1.26 million school-aged children and youth could benefit from the presence of a trusted, caring and consistent adult mentor in their lives," Williams says.

"This is especially true for the more than 180,000 of them who are living in poverty and approximately 600 incarcerated juveniles who may lack the resources or positive guidance and support to become productive adults."

DJJ is committed to improving the lives of youth, reducing recidivism, and improving public safety in the community. The Re-Entry Mentoring Program strives to prepare juvenile offenders for entry back into the community. Mentoring provides residents with a supportive adult who has the opportunity to offer them academic support, pro-social guidance and employment preparation.

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The program matches volunteers from the community with juvenile correctional center (JCC) residents who anticipate release within 120 days. Mentors commit to spend one hour a week with their residents until their release, and then provide support two hours a week for the remainder of time following the resident's re-entry into the community.

Mentors are always in high demand at both the Bon Air JCC and the Beaumont JCC, Williams says. All mentors receive a 3-hour "Introduction to Mentoring" training conducted by the Virginia Mentoring Partnership and other DJJ professionals. The Department of Juvenile Justice currently recruits from the Richmond metro area and the Tidewater region. Those interested in getting involved, or learning more about this program, call or e-mail Ashley Williams at (804) 588-3896 or [Ashley.williams@djj.virginia.gov](mailto:Ashley.williams@djj.virginia.gov).

# # #

**PHOTO CAPTION:** Stephen Cotton mentors a resident of DJJ's Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center. "The mentoring program allows me to have one-on-one contact with the kids where I feel that I can reach them better," says Cotton, who has served as a mentor for two years.