



# DJJ FORUM

Where DJJ employees gather to stay informed and celebrate our victories

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

Sept. 18, 2020

## From Planting To Plate



SOW, NURTURE



### *Bon Air Staff Helping Residents Learn Full Cycle Of Growing, Eating Veggies*

In the two years since a Bon Air resident discovered a stray watermelon seed and decided to see what would happen when he planted it, about 30 Bon Air residents in two living units, with the volunteer help of Bon Air staff members, have discovered the joys and rewards of planting and nurturing a garden, harvesting what they grew, and then enjoying it at the dinner table after they have helped prepare it.

“The most amazing thing about how the gardening effort has progressed is the sense of community that has developed among residents and staff, especially since the pandemic began,”





## HARVEST



says Residential Administrative Specialist Patee Brock. “The more residents that hear about what’s going on, the more that want to participate. And everyone is learning new skills in the process.”

Last year, Unit 54 planted a garden with the support of Behavioral Services Unit Therapist Sasha Baier, Community Coordinator Stephone Evans, RS-II Richard Holder and Marquisha Jenkins, and RS-I Ian Jackson and Bryan Ellis. This year, Unit 54 and Unit A4 were both given the go-ahead to plant gardens of their own, The newest garden is being led by RS-1 Martha Kairu, RS-1 Earnest Barksdale, Community Coordinator Pamela Williams and Community Manager Angela Haule.

The process begins with the selection of an appropriate garden plot, tilled by Bon Air’s maintenance staff. Residents then decide what crops they wish to grow and plant the seeds when warm weather arrives. They ensure that the plants are watered and the plot remains free of weeds.

Brock notes that other Unit 54 and Unit 4A residents not yet involved in the program will sometimes stop to look at the plants growing tall, and step forward to become a part of the process themselves. Staff from other units and departments often visit to admire the gardens and enjoy, as one staffer put it, “a moment of serenity.”

Vegetables are harvested whenever they are ready, which varies during the growing season. Bon Air’s Food Service staff often prepare the vegetables for the residents and staff to eat. Residents who are Serve Safe certified help teach other residents about appropriate techniques for food preparation, safety, and hygiene.

The cycle is complete when residents and staff who grew the vegetables sit down together to enjoy the special pleasure of consuming something they grew themselves. Any remaining vegetables are shared with staff throughout the Bon Air campus.

“The gardening project has turned out to have so many positive aspects,” says Brock. “It reinforces a sense of community, a key ingredient of the Community Treatment Model. This helps develop skills that will foster their success when the residents return to their communities.”



*Bon Air Food Service Worker Roderick Moore takes vegetables grown by Unit 54 and Unit A4 residents and creates a vegetable salad for residents and staff to eat.*

## PREPARE



*Residents who grew the vegetables use them to prepare a fresh salsa to share with the rest of the unit.*

## ENJOY





*Vanessa Grooms leads a fitness session at CSU 13 last year, above, and waves from the center of the pack at a 10K race run last year.*



*Leonard Hopkins leads attendees of the 2018 CSU Summit in breathing exercises, above*

# DJJ A Double Wellness Winner

## *Grooms, Hopkins Among Only Five To Win DHRM Award*

CSU 13–Richmond Diagnostic Unit Supervisor **Vanessa Grooms** and Training and Development Coordinator **Leonard Hopkins** have both been named winners of CommonHealth Champion Awards, an annual recognition sponsored by the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management given to employees who motivate others to make healthier choices and “implement a policy, practice, or activity to help create a culture of wellness in the workplace or beyond.”

“Vanessa’s and Leonard’s achievement is especially notable since DHRM bestows only five CommonHealth Champion Awards every year,” notes DJJ Director Valerie Boykin. “They receive nominations from agencies all across the Commonwealth. Especially during these stressful times, I am proud to know that two of our employees are garnering well-deserved attention for inspiring others to keep fit.”

DHRM describes the award as “an opportunity to celebrate the many ways that we work together to inspire and create healthy workplaces in the Commonwealth.” Winners receive a gift along with a framed certificate signed by the Governor.

Hopkins has been a wellness champion for DJJ employees for many years. He has conducted classes focusing on healthy eating habits and nutrition, physical fitness, and stress reduction. He also started a wellness and

fitness webinar for remote workers during the COVID-19 teleworking status.

“I receive numerous testimonials from residential employees about how Mr. Hopkins has improved their lives through fitness, weight loss, and improved health,” says Training and Development Director Patrick Bridge. “A couple went so far as to say that Mr. Hopkins saved their life through healthier choices and improved habits.”

“My passion is to help people to become better at living a healthier and positive lifestyle,” says Hopkins.

“Vanessa has truly inspired many of us to lead healthier, productive and overall better lives,” says CSU 13 Director Kim Russo. “She has been a positive influence in our workplace.”

Four days a week, Grooms leads her colleagues in an exercise schedule ranging from Pilates, kickboxing and other intensive exercises. She also created a “resiliency space” with massage chairs, aromatherapy diffusers, tabletop waterfall fountains and flameless candles which staff use to meditate and relax amidst a stressful day. “I encourage my colleagues to be healthy to the point of researching each of their concerns and providing resources and balance,” Grooms says. “Healthy living for me is a mindset that translates into a lifestyle. There’s no shortcut to healthy living. It’s an everyday conscious decision of healthy eating, exercising and mental stability.”



## CSU 28–Abingdon

There is no doubt who CSU 28–Abingdon Probation Supervisor **Kevin Downs** works for during the pandemic, thanks to his niece, Julie Waldrep, who lives in Boone, NC. Inspired by Kevin’s two vehicle license plates which read “28TH CSU” and

“VA DJJ,” Julie made four masks emblazoned with the DJJ logo and the Commonwealth of Virginia seal. When Kevin asked CSU 28 Director Darcy Janson if he was “too dedicated,” Darcy reportedly replied, “Maybe, but also very entertaining.”

## Training and Development



**Jerry Johnson**, who leads the Residential Services training team for the Training and Development Unit, was recently the first to receive the unit’s newly-designed “challenge coin” from Director Patrick Bridge. “Jerry continued to teach the Basic Skills for Direct Supervision classes while all other in-person training had been suspended by the agency,” Bridge says. “His performance, and that of his team, in the face of this challenge kept his team motivated and focused during an unprecedented training scenario.”

The coin’s new design includes DJJ’s core values: Safety, Connection, Purpose, and Fairness.

“There is nobody more deserving of the very first of these coins than Jerry,” Bridge says. “His decades of service have touched untold numbers of people. If DJJ has a heart and soul, he is it. He is our moral compass that always points to ‘do the right thing.’”

# Retirements



## Regina Snow

CSU 27–Pulaski Probation Officer **Regina Snow** will retire effective Sept. 1, after serving the youth and families of the 27th District for 27 years.

“Regina has been the model co-worker, always professional and respectful,” said CSU 27 Director Rob Hiatt. “For anyone who is new to the profession, you need not look further than Regina for an example of success in the office. She can be relied upon completely, she will provide you an honest opinion, and she can disagree with you without making it personal. We can always rely on Regina to be kind, even when it’s difficult to be kind.”



## Joyce Biringer

**Joyce Biringer**, who for the last five years worked as an Administrative Assistant at Central Office supporting the Reentry and Practice Improvement and Services Units, retired in June after 21 years of service. She joined DJJ in 1999 and worked her first 16 years as an Administrative Assistant and Registrar for the training unit. A “virtual” retirement party was held in her honor.



## Necessary Training Keeps Rolling During COVID

*Left: Guillermo Novo serves lunch to the first RS-I class held during COVID-19. Right: The Residential Training Team meets to discuss training for the first RS-I class. From left: Stephanie Morton, Jerry Johnson, James Wallace, Dan Lawson, Alexis Brown.*