



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message from
DJJ Director Andy Block

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

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Hedgepeth Thankful For His DJJ Family

Richard Hedgepeth has a message for all DJJ employees that he hopes they will take to heart:

“There is a benefit you receive when you join DJJ that you just can’t pay for: you become part of a family. Yes, we may fight and bicker occasionally, but when the need really arises, we’re here for each other.”

Hedgepeth, a community coordinator at Bon Air JCC, knows this from firsthand experience. Nineteen months ago, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and was told he had between six weeks and six months to live. But he is still coming to work every day, looking fit...and is eternally grateful for the support he has received from all levels of the DJJ organization, which he largely credits for his successful battle thus far.

“The most important thing I want to tell my fellow employees – and especially anyone thinking of joining our agency – is that our transformation isn’t just about our residents: It’s about us, too,” Hedgepeth says. “It’s about the positive things we do for each other that ultimately builds a better team.”

Hedgepeth points out that the residents he and his team work with are quick to pick up on these changes, and react accordingly. “Rumor gets around—they know,” he says. “They come up and offer a sympathetic hand. I use the



Above: Richard Hedgepeth, left, and some of his supportive Bon Air colleagues. Right: CSU 15 Probation Officer William Fells has been by Hedgepeth’s side from the beginning, offering a special level of moral and spiritual support.



opportunity to let them process with me. We talk about cancer and death and surviving. It gives the kids more buy-in, and makes them a stronger part of the community.”

Hedgepeth’s prognosis looks promising: He is scheduled to begin a four-part treatment that only a handful of patients in the U.S. have ever received. The goal is to “stop the growth of the tumor in its tracks.”

In those first harrowing weeks, Hedgepeth made all the plans he thought he’d have to make: Tying up loose financial ends, how and where to be buried. But with the power of his DJJ family pulling for him all the way as well as a new treatment, Hedgepeth’s fighter stance looks as strong as ever.

“I’m going to beat it now, so I’m not going to worry about that any more.”