



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message From DJJ Director Andy Block

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Kecia Brothers Introduces The SMART Way To Job Readiness

“For me, it’s not just about getting these kids a job right away,” says Eastern Regional Reentry Specialist Kecia Brothers about the “Job Readiness” program she started last June in seven Tidewater-area CSUs. “It’s about building their self-esteem and teaching them skills they can use for the rest of their lives. These kids leave here with the ability to edit their resumes, ask for a raise or a promotion, and search for job openings on their own.”

The intensive six-week program is already producing solid results: Two-thirds of the 27 students who have participated in the program either hold steady jobs or are completing school. Eleven more are currently in the program.

The program was originally designed for court-involved youth who have recently been released back into the community as a step to completing their parole and re-entering society. But Kecia has found that a large portion of her students are on probation and are simply looking for a way to learn job preparation skills they have never been exposed to.

Brothers’ curriculum consists of six weeks of job readiness preparation. The youth receive hands-on training in resume writing, interviewing techniques, securing and maintaining a job, and basic financial literacy. The overarching theme throughout the course is goal-setting, and Kecia teaches that all goals should be SMART (Specific, Motivational, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Bound). She has noticed that as the students’ self-esteem grows and develops over the six weeks, so do their goals and motivations.

Brothers says that at the beginning of the program some students see the course as simply a step to getting off of probation or parole. But as the course progresses, they really open up, teaching each other not only how to be good employees but supportive and valuable co-workers. By the end of the course each student has a formal resume, reference sheet, and an opportunity to open a bank account.

“Our youth face significant challenges transitioning into the workforce because they lack soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, good attitude, work ethic, respect, self-discipline, decision making and problem solving,” Kecia says. “Those skills extend beyond the workforce into communities and families.”

Thanks to Kecia for implementing the “Job Readiness” course that not only provides the skills kids need to get a job, but also the confidence to know they deserve one.

