



# WHAT'S WORKING

A Message from  
DJJ Director Andy Block

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

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## A Place To Live—And So Much More

*Apartment Living Program Director William Wimbish talks with a resident of the South Beach Villas Apartments in Virginia Beach (below), where the program is housed.*



### *Apartment Living Program Also Provides Intensive Life Skills Course*

The formal name of DJJ's Apartment Living Program in Virginia Beach describes only the opening chapter of a rich, multi-faceted story of rehabilitation and renewal for the juveniles fortunate enough to participate in it.

Residents of DJJ direct care who are nearing completion of their commitments and preparing to reenter the community often find themselves in a tough spot: They realize that the challenging home or neighborhood

they left is precisely the place they don't want to return to, for fear of falling back into the old habits that got them into trouble in the first place. In the worst cases, they sometimes even face homelessness.

"Those are the kids this program is specifically tailored for," says William Wimbish, the Apartment Living Program's director. "But providing shelter is just the starting point. By the time they've completed their



*Residents participating in the Apartment Living Program are expected to keep the living quarters neat and clean at all times. Staff conducts daily inspections to ensure that residents are adhering to program rules during their four-month stay.*





*Apartment Living Program staff, clockwise from left: Group Home Worker David Bell, Program Director William Wimbish, Tidewater Youth Services Commission Executive Director Shawn Sawyer, Program Assistant Director Amanda Cassimore.*

four months with us, they've learned a whole series of life skills we require, so that they are truly ready to be self-sufficient in the community."

DJJ has worked side-by-side with the Tidewater Youth Services Commission (TYSC), the Apartment Living Program's contracted administrator, since 1977. But early last year marked the first time DJJ provided funding dedicated to re-establishing TYSC's apartment program, which ended in 2008 due to lack of funds, as part of the agency's continuum of services.

Youths eligible for the program are recommended by DJJ parole officers, who know their situations better than anyone. DJJ and TYSC staff then begin meeting with potential participants months in advance of their scheduled release to find out if the resident is a suitable candidate: Whether they would have the necessary commitment to the program and have the mindset to succeed. "A youth has to tell us he wants to come here," TYSC's Executive Director Shawn Sawyer says. Wimbish adds, "By the time they get out, we know them, and they know us, and they're ready."

A key component to the program is focusing the resident on a realistic career goal, and taking steps to achieve success. "We first establish the goal, then we



*Program Director William Wimbish in a typical apartment living area.*

## Program Expectations

- ❖ Gain employment.
- ❖ Continue school studies.
- ❖ Learn how to shop for healthy groceries.
- ❖ Plan and learn how to cook a menu.
- ❖ Complete anger management training.
- ❖ Keep apartment clean and orderly.
- ❖ Open a bank account and save 70% of earnings.
- ❖ Obtain a driver's license.

identify what I call the 'tangibles:' that is, what we actually can do in pursuit of the dream," Wimbish says. He cites the example of a resident whose aim was to become a lead guitarist. Tapping into the considerable resources the TYSC has established in Virginia Beach over the years, the resident enrolled himself in the School of Rock, where he was not only a student, but helped teach others. Then Wimbish helped get him a job at the Virginia Beach Convention Center, where he could help set up sound equipment and hobnob with performers who could tell the resident about the business. The young man now plays regularly in the area, holds two jobs, and lives in an oceanfront apartment.

"My favorite thing about this program is that I'm working," says one participating resident. "I'm here because, if I go home, I'll just go back to the same thing I was in before that got me into trouble twice. This gives me the opportunity to NOT be around that environment."

"This program provides a critical reentry stepdown service for incarcerated youth returning to the community as part of DJJ's ongoing transformation effort," says DJJ's program liaison Katherine Farmer. "Openings are available, so we encourage parole officers to identify additional residents they believe would benefit from it."