



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message from
DJJ Director Andy Block

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

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“I Didn’t Realize I Was This Smart.”

– Youth Who Recently Completed Goodwill’s “GoodPath” Program

Just one year after it began, Goodwill’s GoodPath program stands as an outstanding example of what our Service Continuum was meant to accomplish when we launched the effort in October, 2016.

Our two Regional Service Coordinators, AMIKids and Evidence-Based Associates, were tasked with locating and contracting with direct service providers throughout the Commonwealth to make available a wealth of different youth services, including employment and workforce readiness.

In Goodwill of Central and Coastal Virginia, AMIKids saw an organization not only with a strong presence in central Virginia and Hampton Roads, but also a history of helping people who might not otherwise have a chance to get some basic job skills and an opportunity to work.

“While we realized that Goodwill usually worked with adults, we went to their Community Workforce team with the idea of working with DJJ to provide a similar opportunity for court-involved youth,” says AMIKids’ Regional Service Manager Betty Dixon.

When Goodwill’s Vice President for Community Workforce John Dougherty learned of DJJ’s interest, he jumped at the chance. “I had been in the human service system for many years with a focus on youth and families before joining Goodwill in 2015,” Dougherty says. “I’ve always looked for better ways for people involved in the system to have a pathway back out.” At several community meetings he attended, he said he repeatedly heard DJJ youth say that they needed a way out of their prior situation, often referring to poverty, dangerous living environments and negative environmental influences. “What that told me was that they needed work, income, and resources that would gain them



Top: Goodwill’s Program Manager for Reentry Natasha Winfree presents a certificate of completion to a recent GoodPath program graduate. Center: A graduate gives a public speech, one of the program’s requirements. Bottom: GoodPath participants work at Goodwill’s Richmond Support Center.



AMIKids' Eastern Regional Services Manager Ernest Madison and Goodwill's Program Manager for Reentry Natasha Winfree at Goodwill's Richmond Support Center.. AMIKids and Goodwill collaborated to create the GoodPath program, from which 18 youth have graduated in its first year of existence.

access to a new life. So, when I arrived at Goodwill, a perfect opportunity was born.”

Working with Dixon and AMIKids' Eastern Regional Services Manager Ernest Madison, Dougherty's Community Workforce team devised the GoodPath program: Ten weeks of intensive learning in which eligible court-involved youth would learn about a wide array of job readiness skills in a combination of classroom work and paid on-the-job training. Participants learn social skills, how to control emotions, money management, digital literacy, and how to communicate, verbalize feelings, complete a resume, do an effective job interview, and create a realistic budget. They also receive help researching colleges, and learn how to apply for a student loan and financial aid. Even after a youth graduates, Goodwill staff will monitor the youth for a year to ensure his/her success.

“The GoodPath program combines learning, exposure, experience and the natural reward of financial compensation for the work they do,” Dougherty says. “We believe that this kind of youth program is unique to Goodwill in Virginia.”

Since the program's inception, 18 youth have completed the program and received certificates. About half of those have gone on to fulltime jobs, two of them with Goodwill. Two have joined the military.

“If you put these kids to work, they don't have time to do all the other things they've done to get in trouble,” Madison notes. “For years, they've been told what they can't do. We show them what they CAN do.”

CSU staff who work with the youth are noticing the successes as well. “One of my clients liked the program so well, she asked to stay in this area instead of moving to North Carolina with her family,” says CSU 13–Richmond Probation Officer Jennifer Nicholson. “By advocating for herself, she is now in the independent living program arranged for by AMIKids. I truly believe the program is a great tool for the youth we serve.”

“It is incredibly inspiring to see these youth experience pride in their successes, and perhaps for the first time, a vision of hope,” says Dixon.

“The most notable success is to see the GoodPath participants and their families' display of hope and pride when they finish the program,” Dougherty says. “It's like they are able to see a new future for themselves, and that is what we are all about.”

“The most meaningful thing I ever heard a youth say when he was done with this program was, ‘I didn't realize I was this smart,’” Winfree says. “I almost broke down in tears right then ... that alone made the whole effort worth it.”