



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message from
DJJ Director Andy Block

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

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The Picture Of Success

Contributing to the success of the “Take Your Shot” photography workshop at CSU 4–Norfolk were, standing from left: Probation Officer Monique Selden; ODU Criminal Justice Professor Dr. Allison Chappell; ODU Women’s Studies Chairman Dr. Jennifer Fish; Probation Officers Jeremy Patterson, Ajannah Duncan and Tonya Shell. Seated, from left: Probation Officer Feliscia Williams; Fiscal Manager Melvina Ramsawh; Parole Supervisor Mark Wood; Probation Officer Jeff Kess; Office Services Assistant Jasmain Morris.

Wood’s Capstone Project Exposes Youth To World of Photography

“I’ve never been recognized or picked for anything,” the excited young man told his Norfolk probation officer as he proudly watched others admiring his photography. “We’re important today!”

This was the reward CSU 4–Norfolk Parole Supervisor Mark Wood and his staff recently experienced from an idea that finally came to fruition 10 years after Wood first mentally filed it away.

Wood was attending a Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) convention about a decade ago when he saw a display about a youth photography project. He liked the idea, thinking that something similar could work sometime in Norfolk.

At last September’s Justice Transformation Institute (JTI) session when it came time for participants to create a “capstone project,” Wood saw his chance, creating the “Take Your Shot” photography program for at-risk youth. “I wanted to do something that really impacted the kids at ground level,” Wood says. “Putting cameras into the



A youth participant in the “Take Your Shot” photography workshop displays her work at the concluding event: A gala exhibit held at the Slover Public Library in Norfolk.

hands of kids who had never held them before was far out of their normal world. Their response was extraordinary.”

Wood knew from the start that he would need plenty of help to fully realize his vision: An eight-week session of photography classes, two classes a week, topped off with an exhibit of the youths’ work at a catered, semi-formal gala.

He reached out to the Norfolk Public Library, which provided classrooms and the reception area for the gala. The library’s YOU Media program also provided the cameras and catered the final event. Two instructors at Old Dominion University were intrigued by the idea, and enthusiastically offered assistance: Dr. Allison Chappell of the Criminal Justice Department, and Dr. Jennifer Fish, chair of the Women’s Studies Department who also is an accomplished photographer herself.

And then of course the CSU 4 staff, which donated countless hours of their own time to drive participants to classes, and helped them shop for appropriate attire for the gala while donating almost \$1,000 from their own pockets.

The result was an experience for eight fortunate young people who learned a great deal more than just how to work a camera and take a good photo.

“We had them fill out an application and do an interview to get into the program, just as they would as if they were going for a job,” Wood says. “After the interview, we debriefed with them, letting them know how they could improve next time.” During the class sessions, students visited the ODU photo studio where they learned about careers in both videography and photography. To practice what they had learned, they visited Norfolk’s light rail, the city’s picturesque waterfront, its botanical garden, and the ODU campus.

It all came together at the



Above: Mark Wood talks with two participants about their photos. Below: Samples of student photography from the “Take Your Shot” program.



final gala exhibit and auction, where photos printed and framed courtesy of ODU were on display at the library. Participants could invite anyone they wished. About 100 people came, including family and curious community members. Photos sold from between \$65 and \$100, with all proceeds going to the photographers.

“It was a great bonding experience for the kids and for

us...they saw us in a different light,” Wood says. “They actually enjoyed hanging with us. It took away the ‘probation/parole’ feel to it. When we were shopping or in the library, we didn’t talk about probation at all.”

“Our message to the kids who participated in this program was that they are important *every day*,” says Probation Officer Monique Selden.