



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message From DJJ Director Andy Block

May 11, 2015

“I’ve Never Been So Excited To Come To Work.”

– Christa Minnicino, Counselor, Bon Air JCC



From left: Cobra logo created by Unit 55 resident; Sgt. Patricia Abel with resident; JCO Angela Dorsey and Counselor Christa Minnicino.

Bon Air Unit 55 Already Embodies Community Model

“Jake” has been a resident in Bon Air JCC’s Unit 55 since last August, when the unit became one of the first two of DJJ’s new Community Treatment Model pilot programs. There is an unmistakable tinge of pride in his voice when he tells this story:

“We’ve had a few guys transfer here who were behavior problems in other facilities. But as soon as they get here and see how we do things, they’re not a problem any more. They just seem to sense that things are different here, and they become part of the family.”

Staff and residents alike report that the feeling of family in Unit 55 is the biggest and most important positive change that has occurred there since the Community Treatment Model pilot began. They have established strong, trusting relationships; they talk through issues instead of handing out automatic punishments; they support each other and keep each other in check.

“I’ve never been so excited to come to work,” says Counselor Christa Minnicino. “It’s amazing to me how much better the atmosphere has been since we began this approach. We’ve established some great relationships with the kids, because they know we’ll be here to talk to ... they’re not seeing someone different all the time.”

One of the most important cultural shifts that Resident Specialists will become accustomed to is the ability to really

listen. “There’s no more ‘I’m the boss, I’m in charge,’ ” says Sgt. Patricia Abel. “We listen to the residents, and help them to make the right decisions themselves, so they can take credit for the changes in themselves they brought about on their own.”

To improve the appearance of the unit, residents are allowed to create artwork and other cosmetic improvements. One resident created a cobra logo, which the unit quickly adopted as its mascot. A game room equipped with popular electronic games was created and is used as an incentive: Residents must stay charge-free to earn a chance to use it. And once a month, the entire unit – staff and residents – sits down for a family-style dinner catered by the Bon Air food service staff.

“The key to great listening is never taking anything they say to you personally,” says JCO Angela Dorsey, who trained as a nurse before coming to DJJ. “I enjoy establishing positive relationships with these kids ... I really think this is my calling.”

Formal Unit team training for the transition begins today at the Virginia Public Safety Training Center, with activation of the first unit scheduled for May 26. The first Beaumont Team Unit begins training June 8, with activation of its first Unit scheduled for June 22. Full implementation at both JCCs is expected to take about two years.