



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message From DJJ Director Andy Block

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“It Keeps Them Off The Street”

Partnerships Help Loudoun's Evening Reporting Center Serve At-Risk Youth Inexpensively



Left: CSU 20L-Loudoun's Walter Kenney assists youth with homework at Loudoun County's Evening Reporting Center. Above, from left: Walter Kenney, CSU 20L Probation Supervisor Hampton Strosnider, Loudoun County Prevention and Intervention Specialist Antwaun Jackson, Northern Region Program Manager Dee Kirk, volunteer Vianca Herrera.

When Loudoun County-area kids first enter the Evening Reporting Center (ERC), CSU 20L-Loudoun Probation Officer Walter Kenney leaves little doubt as to who is in charge.

Everything from the enthusiastic welcome a youth gets, to the encouragement on the basketball court, to the no-nonsense instructions Kenney doles out during dinner preparation and cleanup is delivered in a booming voice that commands instant attention. It's the same voice, along with a twinkle in his eye, that he uses during the lively card game with the kids after they have enjoyed a dinner they helped create.

It's all part of a three-year-old community-based program in Loudoun County designed to provide an alternative to detention for youth on probation who commit technical violations or other delinquent acts. The 21-day program provides highly structured and

well-supervised group activities during the high-risk time between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays.

As Kenney's 37-year career nears its end, he clearly relishes the opportunity the ERC program provides him to, as he puts it, "return to my roots."

"This gives me the chance to do what I love to do most: Work directly with the kids," Kenney says. "The opportunities are unlimited as to what we can do with this program."

Inspiration for the ERC program first came from Albuquerque, NM, where CSU staff observed a similar program that provides immediate access to services in the form of alternatives to detention, says CSU 20L Probation Supervisor Hampton Strosnider. "We are fortunate that Loudoun County had just vacated a building that housed its youth shelter. We are grateful to have been able to use this building since we started the program in 2013."



Left: As a regular part of Loudoun County's Evening Reporting Center program, volunteer Vianca Herrera involves all youth in the preparation of an evening meal, which they consume together after helping to set a table. Right: Walter Kenney supervises recreation activity.

The program is done in partnership with the Loudoun County Departments of Family Services and Parks, Recreation and Community Services, and Loudoun County Public Schools. Costs for the program are kept extremely low with donations of food and computers. Youth also have free access to any facility operated by the Parks and Recreation Department.

The ERC provides different services to participants such as light dinner, career exploration, life skills and job readiness skills, games, movies, and sports activities. Youths participating in the program meet the following criteria:

- Referral from Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and Juvenile Court Services Unit.
- 14 to 17 years of age, male and female.
- Resident of Loudoun County under the purview of the Loudoun County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court.
- Facing court action for a new criminal offense in lieu of a detention order being issued.
- Participating as a part of a graduated sanction as imposed by the Probation Office in lieu of a probation violation being filed.
- Low protective factors as reflected on the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI), especially involving the components of family, youth's free time/employment and school status.

To ensure eligible youth have a positive experience, Kenney works with Loudoun County school guidance counselors, teachers and transportation officials, as well as the youths' families and probation officers.

"We make it clear to any youth who comes here that academics comes first," Kenney says. "In this setting, they can learn how to become organized, get tutoring, and have access to a computer, all while learning social skills, decision-making and problem solving."

A typical day begins with free time and a snack, followed by dinner preparation and eating the meal together. They then have a group activity, followed by homework and tutoring.

"They have structure here, more than what I can do at home," says the grandmother of a youth she was dropping off at the ERC. "I'm grateful for the program, because it keeps them off the street. It's really good for kids who come from broken homes. They need a strong male role model, and they get that here."

While the program is currently available only weekday evenings during the school year, Kenney hopes that it eventually can be expanded to become an all-day opportunity throughout the year.

"We've served about 60 youth during the three years of the program, and we've seen success," Kenney says. "Grades have improved, and some have gone on to college. If nothing else, it just gives kids someone to talk to, which can be extremely valuable in their lives."