



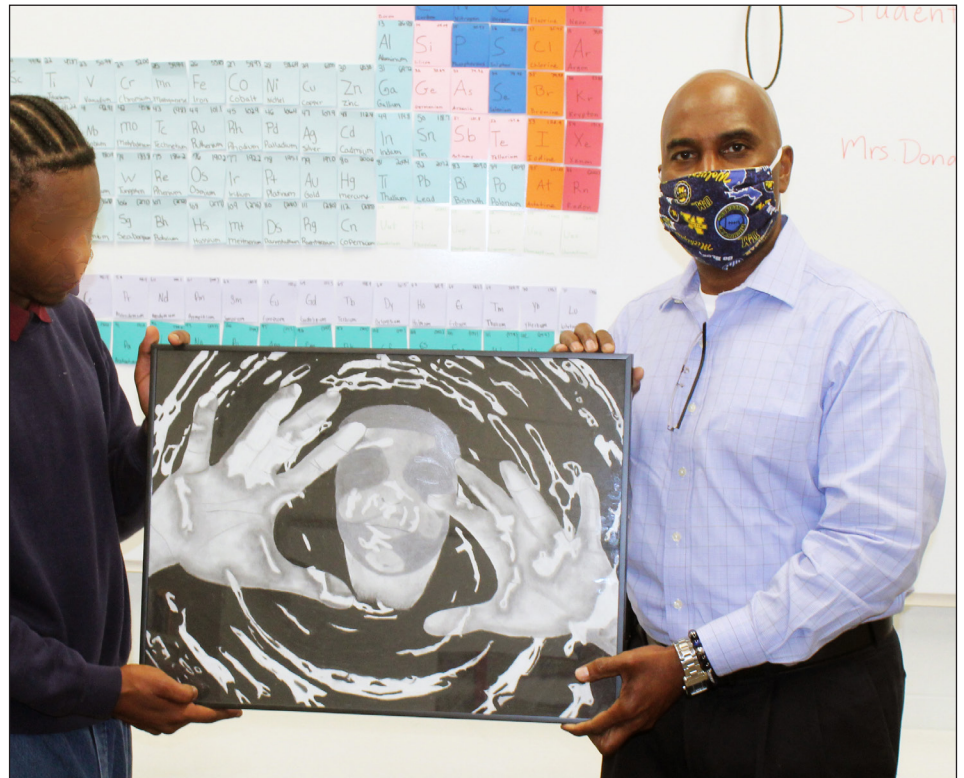
## The Power of Community Support

### *Reentry Advocates Help Connect Youth To Positive Influences*

In recent issues of the *CSUnity*, we have closely examined the eight Evidence-Based Principles (EBPs) to help us get a stronger understanding of them, and have provided some excellent examples of how they are being implemented.

In this issue, we will look at the last three EBPs. We will focus especially on EPB No. 6, “Engage Ongoing Support in Natural Communities: Realign and actively engage pro-social supports for offenders in their communities.” We then will see how the final two EBPs (No. 7, “Measuring Relevant Process and Practices” and No. 8, “Providing Measurement Feedback”) help us to assess and improve our practices.

Research has shown that a juvenile offender’s family members, spouses and other supportive members of the communities they live in can have a powerful positive influence in reinforcing the juvenile’s desired new behaviors.



*Northern Region Reentry Advocate George Peoples worked with this youth for 2½ years.*

Our families are the vital connection for our youth in the community. We need to encourage their involvement from first contact with the juvenile justice system. If we wait until their child is nearing release, we miss important information, as well as chances for the family to bond and build a stronger relationship. DJJ has employed family advocates who have experienced the system, to support family engagement

and provide insight for our staff to better understand the needs of families.

DJJ strives to improve our support and engagement of families by:

- Creating regional support groups as a platform for families to use their voices to be part of their loved ones treatment plans and to help structure the development of agency policies and procedures.

- Keeping families informed

through newsletters, family town hall meetings and other means of communication such as e-mail. A DJJ e-mail has been set up to provide families with an electronic means of communication.

•Offering virtual meetings and increased telephone calls, to support ongoing engagement in lieu of face-to-face contacts in accordance with safety COVID protocols.

Upon release to the community, we rely heavily on partnerships with community providers to support and reinforce positive behaviors. Collaborative agreements with child-serving agencies such as the Department of Social Services, DMV, the Department of Medical Assistance Services, and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services are critical to ensuring youth have access to Medicaid, housing and treatment. Even more critical are partnerships with community organizations to provide resources that governmental agencies cannot support. Organizations like Assisting Families of Inmates provide funding to support resources like clothing, work-related equipment and educational supplies that help youth succeed during their transition to the community.

DJJ's reentry advocates work closely with our CSU staff to help youth returning to their communities establish healthy relationships and positive activities wherever possible. In this issue of the *CSUnity*, we introduce you to our reentry advocates, who share some of their success stories.



## **Kecia Brothers**

*Eastern Region*

The Job Readiness Program, which all of DJJ's reentry advocates participate in, serves as an evidence-based practice program to assist youth transitioning from incarceration to employment by providing employability skills, pro-social support, job-search, and resources.

This program, done both in person and virtually, prepares youth seeking employment

by developing skills and knowledge that is essential for success and advancement. The program teaches a variety of skills associated with employment and transition, such as communication skills, problem-solving, life skills, critical thinking, workplace behavior, and goal-setting.

In his first Job Readiness Program session with me, one young man said that he had just been to a job interview that he didn't think went well. He said the interviewer asked him to share five reasons why he should be hired for the job. The youth replied, "I am better than everyone in the building. I am smart. I know a lot. I can get things done. I am good." We focused his training session on interview "dos and don'ts." We discussed his past employment, skills, and talents. I helped him develop strong reasons why he should be hired for a job, using the soft skills learned during the session.

The youth contacted the interviewer, apologized for not taking the first interview seriously, and requested another interview. The youth told me the interviewer appreciated his apology and scheduled him for another interview. The young man has held a couple of jobs since that time, and continues to improve his interviewing skills through refresher courses in the Job Readiness Program. He just landed his most recent job last month.



## **George Peoples**

*Northern Region*

What's rewarding to me is providing assistance to the young men and women who are returning back to the community: Helping residents with Medicaid, Snap, learner's driver permit, community college (FAFSA), military, independent living, workforce applications, funds for work and medical needs, and funds for enrolling in vocational and technical classes in the community.

In one recent case, I worked with a resident for more than 2½ years as his reentry advocate in our Community Placement Program (CPP). While in CPP he owned up to his mistakes and took responsibility for his actions and decided

to really buckle down, completing his GED. He completed online OSHA certifications in a number of courses along with completing two classes at Piedmont Community College. Amidst many challenges he was able to complete and publish his first children's book entitled "Just Be Me." One of his favorite pastimes is art illustration. He was selected by the Charlottesville Black Art Collective to showcase some of his artwork at the McGuff Art Center for Black History Month. I completed his Medicaid and FAFSA so he could continue his education.



## **Rowena Callis-Poythress**

*Central Region*

Some of the most valuable assistance we can give youth on our caseload is to help them find a career direction. One of the residents I worked with received his high school

diploma while incarcerated. He needed help figuring out how to pursue a vocational trade after he was released. I connected him with the Workforce Alliance at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. I assisted him with completing the application for the Workforce Credential Grant. He enrolled in the Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) program. He was awarded the grant, the class was paid in full, and he successfully completed the course.



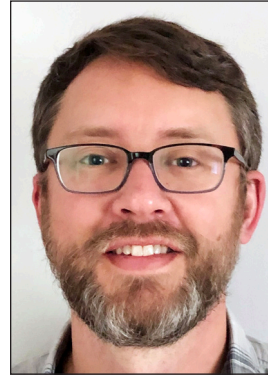
## **Sasha Davenport**

*Southern Region*

A youth I was working with was released from Prince William Detention Center and was going to live with a family member in Minnesota. His mother did not have a way to pay for him to get from Virginia to

Minnesota, nor could she get to the facility to see him off at the airport. He could not be released until he had a viable way to get to Minnesota. His parole officer had to submit the interstate

compact for the youth to go to another state. In the meantime, we needed to find money for him to get to Minnesota, as well as get his mother to the facility that day to see him off at the airport. I reached out to Assisting Families of Inmates (AFOI) to request funding from the Hearty Fund. After days of working with AFOI, the airline ticket was purchased, the youth received his release date, and transportation was found to get the mother to the facility to take him to the airport.



## **Jarrod Davis**

*Western Region*

One of the most important aspects of successful release is helping youth meet their educational goals. Educational institutions within the youth's natural community can best serve their needs. I and our

region's parole officers have worked with several youth by arranging tours of local community colleges and assisting with the enrollment process: FAFSA completion, class enrollment, and housing.

One young man was interested in becoming a personal trainer after graduation, so I accompanied him to a meeting with a school counselor to finalize his class schedule and to answer any questions he had. This young man was still actively enrolled in community college upon successfully completing his parole obligations.

## ***EBPs 7-8: Measuring Our Outcomes***

EBP No. 7 states that accurate and detailed documentation of case information along with a formal and valid mechanism for measuring outcomes is the foundation of evidence-based practice. This measurement includes changes in offender cognitive and skill development and the evaluation of an offender's recidivism. Employee performance should be regularly assessed to achieve greater fidelity to programs design, service delivery principles and outcomes. Once measured, the information must be used to monitor progress and change.

EBP No. 8 states the importance of providing

feedback to offenders regarding their progress to build accountability, and is associated with enhanced motivation for change and improved outcomes. The same is true for CSU employees. There is a need to monitor and evaluate service delivery and fidelity to EBPs. Regular performance and case reviews should occur with an eye on improving outcomes and a focus on reducing recidivism. Measurement and feedback should be conducted in the spirit of continuous quality improvement. Lastly, the use of quantifiable data is valuable to share with community partners to gain their buy-in and support.

Historically, the Department has measured compliance with regulations and procedures through the self-audit and certification processes. In addition to determining individualized services for juveniles, staff are evaluated by how accurately they are in entering the necessary documentation in BADGE within certain timeframes. Subsequently, the feedback loop can be focused on transactional activities (i.e. case contact compliance, case note documentation, timeframe adherence and forms completed). Frontline staff and supervisor interactions may concentrate on demonstrating compliance. The compliance focus approach is therefore transferred to the juvenile under supervision. A juvenile's success is then measured by external outcomes such as attendance, conditions compliance and completion of court ordered requirements.



*Above: Eastern Region Reentry Advocate Kecia Brothers helped this resident find her own apartment in the Tidewater area. Left: Dr. Brian Lovins is working with DJJ on a new probation model that focuses on a youth's outcomes.*

As DJJ continues its investment in learning and implementing best practices, there has been an increased emphasis on measuring internal change of juveniles and staff delivery of evidence based practices. The YASI assessment and reassessment allows employees to measure changes in attitudes and beliefs of juveniles while under supervision. The EPICS

model allows for supervisors to provide measurable feedback on probation sessions.

Lastly, the Department contracted with Justice System Partners, and specifically Dr. Brian Lovins, to create a new probation model that focuses on creating an environment that emphasizes a coaching model that will be used by supervisors and probation officers that will focus on juvenile outcomes.