



THE RESIDENTIAL CIRCLE-UP

Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

January 2022



The Fall-la-Ganza at Bon Air featured several team-building activities including the sack race, left, and the football toss.

Team-Building Highlights “Fall-la-Ganza”

Community Manager Desiree Walker recently orchestrated the Fall-la-Ganza Harvest Fest to bring together the Emerald City Cluster for a fun-filled, team-based event. The Fall-la-Ganza included the classic and well-loved harvest festival style activities such as a pie eating contest, sack race, and cake walk. Participants also were able to enjoy festival treats including cotton candy and popcorn prepared fresh by staff volunteers.

Many staff came together to make this event a success, including Patee Brock, Karen Taylor, residential practice improvement coaches (RPICs), recreation staff, maintenance staff, and cluster unit staff. Several staff even volunteered to participate in a “pie in the face contest,” which provided a laugh for residents and staff alike. The residents of the Emerald City Cluster also helped prepare for the event by creating props that were used in the festival photo booth.

The event was a great success enjoyed by all residents and staff who attended.



**Deputy Director's
Message**

Joyce Holmon

*Be Proud Of 2021's
Accomplishments*

As we exit the holiday season and enter the season of new beginnings, let us reflect on this strange yet accomplished year in the life of Residential Services. The work we do here is not easy and it is not for everyone. I see those of you who have recently begun your journey with DJJ, and I hope you will choose to learn and grow with our agency long term. I also see those of you who have been here for five years, 10 years, even 40 years, and I applaud your endurance and
(See “Message,” page 2)

Message *(Continued from page 1)*

willingness to commit yourselves to improving the lives of these young people. I recognize and appreciate the challenges faced by both new and senior staff and how you continue to overcome them. Many of you show up every day in spite of the difficulty of this work, in spite of being short staffed, in spite of the long hours. I know the challenges are often there. I also know that we have accomplished a great deal and we have a lot to be proud of.

First and foremost, we made it. We made it through 2021 while maintaining low numbers of COVID cases among our youth. We had a combined 49 resident cases between Bon Air JCC and Alternative Placements from March 2020 until December 2021. That's 21 months of limited COVID transmission among our youth. Limiting the spread of COVID so significantly in that span of time is something we should all consider a great accomplishment.

Second, I would like us to consider other ways we have managed through the COVID crisis so far. We were granted the ability to become a certified vaccination distribution site for our staff and even for some community members. Over 700 doses of the Pfizer COVID vaccine have been administered on the Bon Air complex, to include our recent booster clinics. I applaud the medical team for their consistent efforts in orchestrating these clinics as well as those of you who have chosen to participate. Many staff have become fully vaccinated either at Bon Air or in the community, leading to better COVID mitigation inside the facility. We were

also able to celebrate those of you who made this decision by hosting a two-day vaccination appreciation event with free food and treats for staff with at least one vaccination.

Third, I would like to tout our extended use of alternative placement options for direct care youth. As of January 2020, over one third of direct care youth were housed in alternative placements. Since then, Bon Air's population has continued to decrease. This has allowed us to compress units, promoting better coverage. Increased coverage will ideally lead to less need for drafting, hopefully boosting morale among line staff at Bon Air. Even more importantly, this decreased population allows for more effective service provision leading to better results for our young people.

Lastly, Bon Air received an excellent report on this year's certification audit. Although we always have room to improve and grow, we should be proud of the high marks we received on this. It shows that, despite the challenges of COVID, we have upheld our procedures and program expectations to continue providing the best care to our residents.

As we head into the new year, I hope you will enter it with a renewed sense of pride and a positive attitude. Be encouraged knowing that the work we do here is important and that you are making a difference in the lives of our residents. The accomplishments listed here are only a few of the things we can be proud of from this year, and none of them would be possible without your commitment and dedication. Continue doing this great work.



More Fall-la-Ganza Photos

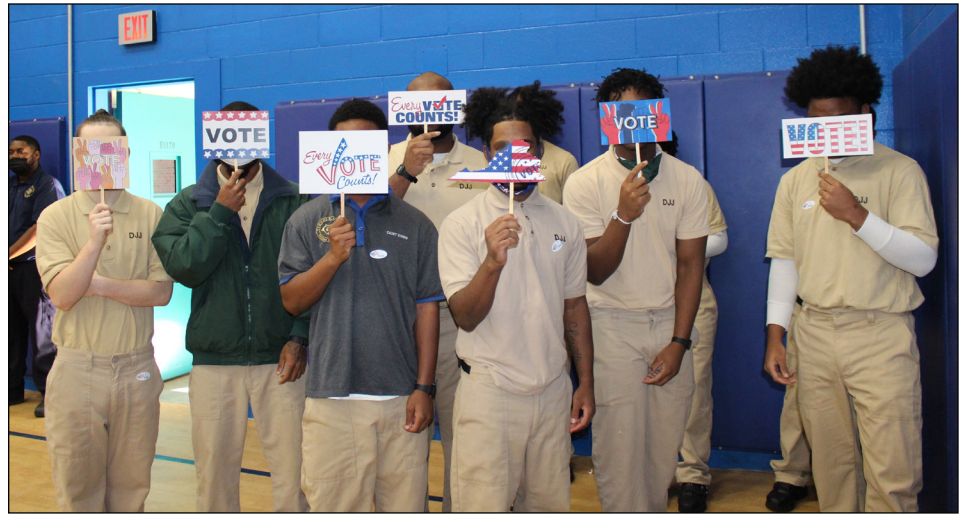
Left: Patee Brock and Franklin Wilkes serve popcorn. Top: Pie-eating contest. Right: Rukiya Bellamy organizes the activities.

Gubernatorial Race Is Focus Of Second Mock Election

Residents of the Student Government Association (SGA) and many staff have made dedicated efforts to create voting opportunities for our residents at Bon Air JCC. These efforts have been fruitful as the residents have participated in a second election, this one for Virginia governor.

Residents first experienced this privilege during the 2020 presidential election. The SGA and staff worked to engage all residents in a mock election process that included campaign posters and flyers for each candidate, education on voting rights and history, and discussion on voter eligibility. Ultimately, 81 residents voted in the mock election and 18 residents cast actual ballots in the presidential election.

After an engaging and successful experience with the presidential election, the process was repeated for the 2021 gubernatorial election in November. The SGA again conducted a mock election in which 134 votes were cast, including 89 from residents and 45 from staff who participated. The SGA began preparations weeks in advance with the help of Assistant Superintendent LaKeisha Henry, RS-II Franklin Wilkes, Art Instructor Meghan Hamm, RAS Patee Brock, Residential Program Manager Shaun Parker, and Tom Breedlove. DJJ Policy staff Lara Todd and Edward Bunting also engaged in the election process. This election cycle included additional education via TED Talks, SGA-made educational materials for

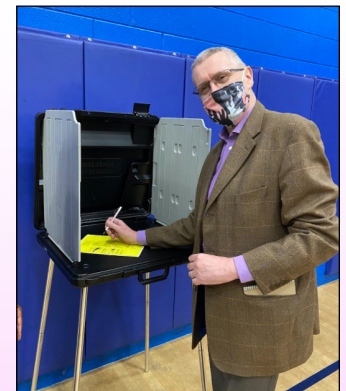


residents, and hand-made signs about the voting process. Eighteen residents were registered to vote and 16 chose to cast their ballots in the Virginia election. Wilkes collected their ballots and hand-delivered them to the Chesterfield County Registrar's office.

By having residents engage in such activities, staff are promoting civic responsibility that impacts the resident's positive community engagement upon their release. Keep doing the great work that improves the lives of the youth in our care!



Top: SGA member oversees the ballot box while another resident votes. Below: Records and Legal Support Manager Lara Todd and Records and Policy Coordinator Edward Bunting offered their advice and support during the process.



Counselors To Be Recognized Monthly

Community Manager Angela Haule recently introduced the Counselor of the Month initiative through which staff may nominate any counselor to be recognized for their good work.

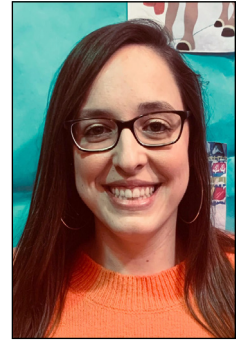
“Their daily tasks are often executed seamlessly,” Haule says. “As a result, their efforts are frequently overlooked. This is our opportunity to show our appreciation for our counselors.” Staff may nominate counselors by the 25th of each month through a GoogleForm. CM Haule announces the recipient of the award typically by the last working day of the month. The chosen counselor receives a certificate of recognition as well as the Counselor of the Month parking space for the entire following month. CM Haule also recognizes this achievement in a campus-wide e-mail celebrating and recognizing the counselor’s hard work.



Winkler



Mitchell



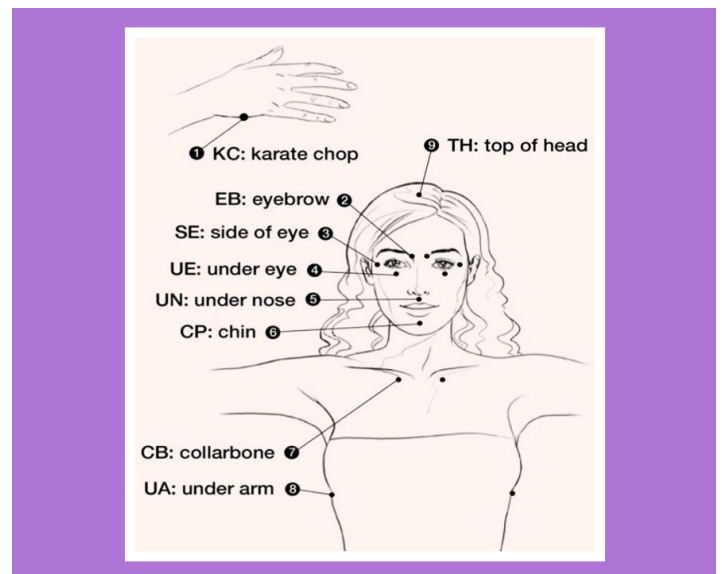
Leigers

So far, three counselors have earned this honor: Alexa Winkler (September), Ayonia Mitchell (October), and Ashley Leigers (November). Many thanks to all of our great counselors and to CM Haule for taking the initiative to recognize their efforts.

Spotlight on Wellness: “Tapping” Into Lower Stress

During this quite different era of COVID, it may be time to explore a few somewhat different techniques when it comes to self-care. As the Deputy Director shared in the August newsletter, self-care is critical if we hope to be proficient in our jobs as well as live happy, healthy lives outside of work.

Many of us have been bombarded with messages that may have contributed to a heightened sense of chronic stress. We know that chronic stress has been linked to poor emotional and physical health outcomes. This may be the time to expand our self-care strategies to enhance our self-healing capabilities. Some of the greatest minds have highlighted the role of energy. Inventor Nikola Tesla said, “If you want to find the secrets of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration.” Comprehensive Energy Psychology refers to a group of interventions useful for improving the body’s dynamic energy systems. One such technique is Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), also known as Tapping. While bringing to mind a stressful event or condition, you tap on specific acupressure points (see image). By tapping, an electromagnetic message is communicated through our connective tissue to decrease arousal in the threat response system of the brain. Numerous clinical trials have shown that EFT is effective in reducing anxiety and depression and in changing biological markers reflecting improved immune functions and reduced stress hormones. For more complex issues, such as clinical depression or chronic pain, it is strongly



recommended that you consult an EFT mental health practitioner to guide you through your recovery and become proficient in using tapping as a useful technique for self-management of anxiety and stress. You can get an introduction to the basic components of this mind-body intervention by going to www.thetappingsolution.com.

Since striving for optimal functioning helps us build a range of resiliencies we can call upon during times of increased stress, you may want to consider adopting some simple positive energy techniques that can be practiced on a daily basis for maintaining healthy natural energy flow in the body (see Donna Eden’s Daily Energy Routine on YouTube).