

Women's History Month

We Honor 17 DJJ Women With More Than 40 Years Of Service

To bring our observance of Women's History Month to conclusion, today I have the distinct honor of recognizing 17 extraordinary women who have served DJJ for an astounding combined total of 732 years. Their long-standing dedication and devotion to helping our youth and families inspires all of us anew. There is obviously something special about the mission of DJJ that attracts employees with a calling to help young people and keeps them here far longer than most of them expected. Like them, I also heard the calling just over 40 years ago. After leaving for an extended break in service to do related work, I heard the call again as I returned to the agency almost 10 years ago. I so admire their commitment and fortitude for over four decades and hope you will join me in this salute.

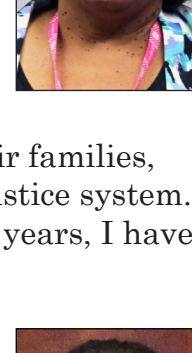
We are fortunate that these ladies have continued to share their talents to the benefit of the youth and families we serve. They have been a major part of DJJ's history. The agency was a part of the Commonwealth's Department of Welfare and Institutions when at least one of them was hired, then it became the Department of Corrections from 1974 until 1990, then the Department of Youth and Family Services from 1990 until 1996 when it became the Department of Juvenile Justice. I encourage our newer employees to get to know them, listen to the wisdom they have acquired through the years, and learn from their experiences of adapting to an ever evolving and changing system. I imagine that it may not have always been easy; however, they have survived and continue to thrive and contribute every day.

Please take a few minutes to read the profiles below of these dedicated servants (one requested to remain anonymous). We asked each of them these three questions: What brought you to this line of work, what has been most impactful about the work, and did you ever expect to be with us this long? I believe that you will find their stories and insights compelling.

We close with also recognizing an additional group of 15 recent retirees over the past three years, some of whom contributed over fifty (50) years of service with a combined total of 670 years of service. We want to once again thank them for their service and hope they are doing well in their current endeavors.

– Valerie Boykin, Director
Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

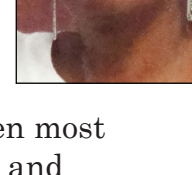
Clarice Booker 47.5 Years
Certification Analyst, Certification Unit



In 1973, I became the first female correctional officer hired in the previously all male Virginia State Penitentiary. I later joined the newly developing program at the Women's House on Spring Street. When I became a juvenile probation officer in Chesterfield, I realized I had found my niche working with juveniles and their families. I've been able to make a positive difference in the lives of juveniles and their families, and have worked with staff all over the state to improve conditions in the juvenile justice system.

I really did not expect to be with the agency this long, but as I look back over the years, I have had a good career path and one I did not foresee when I started in 1973.

Deborah Thomas 46.5 Years
Office Services Specialist, CSU 24-Amherst



At the suggestion of a friend, I learned about and applied for a job in 1974 for vacancy with the Amherst Court Service Unit. After getting the position as secretary, I worked closely with the probation officers, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court clerks and judge. Working with our youth and their families has been most impactful. The initial engagement with clients is pivotal: demeanor, professionalism and impartial approach to managing that first interaction establishes the tone for the clients' overall experience. Approachability and effective communication (and listening) skills has afforded me the opportunity to impact the lives of our youth. Many return to our office, just to say hello or to update me on their lives. They often reminisce about their experiences and defining moments of change, due to the advice and guidance provided.

God blessed me with a position that allows me to create meaningful opportunities to impact the lives of others. Although I could not have anticipated remaining with DJJ for 46 years, the enjoyment I receive from colleagues and the satisfaction of helping others truly sustains me.

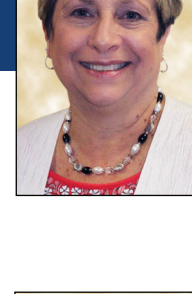
Sylvia Alston 46.4 Years
Counselor Supervisor, CAP Unit



I have always advocated for the less fortunate and have tended to defend those who appeared to be bullied and excluded, usually because they weren't part of the "clique." I'm very passionate in work and play and believe we all should be provided the opportunity to excel, both personally and professionally. Seeing DJJ's continuous effort to provide programs to address the various needs of committed residents has been most impactful.

I can't say I expected to be with DJJ almost 47 years, but I definitely expected to be working as I love the challenge of "exercising" my mind and body.

Angela Valentine 44.7 Years
Chief Deputy Director



I began my career as a probation officer in Henrico County with an all-female caseload. I strove to be a role model and a support system for these young girls. I was on my way to a lengthy career in juvenile justice and never looked back. I am honored to be the Chief Deputy and as part of the DJJ family, I strive to bring out the best in everyone by supporting, guiding and inspiring others.

Martha Carroll 44.5 Years
Director, CSU 16-Charlottesville



While a student at Randolph-Macon College, I volunteered at Hanover Learning Center (later Hanover Correctional Center) and the 14th District CSU. The summer before my senior year I interned in the Charlottesville office of the 16th District CSU. The relationships with children and families and my colleagues have been the most impactful. I love seeing our kids succeed and families become stronger. I have also been fortunate to work with many amazing colleagues.

I always knew I wanted to work with kids and families, but I don't think I always planned for it to be at DJJ for such a long time. Because every day is different and the challenges are always changing, the work has never felt stagnant.

Debbie Paulus 44.3 Years
Administrative Program Specialist III, CAP Unit

The job sounded interesting. I had never heard of anything like this before: I had no idea there was a place for kids who had gotten in trouble to go to be evaluated and placed in juvenile correctional centers. I had never really thought about how much trouble kids got into and that they were actually sent away from their homes. The days are never the same: There is something different every day that comes up.

I never expected to be anywhere this long! When I first started, my oldest child was 5 and starting kindergarten. Now he's out of college and married. I feel like I'm the one who grew up here!

Gloria Bartley 44.3 Years
Deputy Director, CSU 2-Virginia Beach



I wanted to help people. That's why I do this kind of work. The most impactful thing to me is being able to assist families with positive changes in their lives, being a champion for equal treatment of youth and their families who come into our system which includes ensuring parents have a voice about their children. I've enjoyed being a part of the changes I've seen within our CSU and DJJ since I started working in the system, such as focusing on the needs of our families, a family/client focused system, family engagement, JDAI, and Evidence-Based Practices, utilizing what the research proves works.

I considered retiring 10-11 years ago. But then a new director was hired – Olympia Perkins. Olympia had an amazing vision for a system change, and then made it happen. We also became a JDAI site which involves equitable treatment for our youth. I am glad I decided to stay, because I would have missed an exciting era in the history of our CSU.

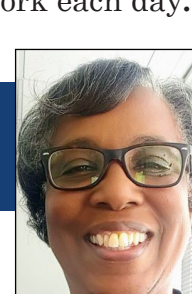
Paige Quattlebaum 42.5 Years
Probation Supervisor, CSU 31-Woodbridge



I was a young, idealistic kid out of college, thinking I could make a difference in a young person's life. Whereas the hands-on experiences in working with youth and families has provided many impactful moments, my greatest takeaway has been the past year during the pandemic. My staff (as did so many) remained on the front lines. Observing my co-workers maintain a positive attitude – being creative in continuing to deliver quality services, often by trial and error – was impressive. I was so moved by their dedication to the job and caring of their clients' welfare; moreover, being part of the "solution." My staff supported each other every step of the way. We have always been a great team, but we became more like a family.

The work I do has been so inspiring. My coworkers make it a pleasure to come to work each day.

Nadine Whitley 42 Years
Parole Officer, CSU 4-Norfolk



Simply put, I came into the juvenile justice field because of my desire to help and support. I did my internship at Norfolk Court Services Unit and found the experience fascinating. So I thought, why not, this might be an interesting place to work. I love seeing the joy in our kids' faces when they realize they too can achieve and accomplish their dreams despite the challenges.

Did I expect to be with DJJ for 42 years? Absolutely not!

Linda Thurston 41.9 Years
Intake Officer, CSU 14-Henrico



I first came to DJJ in 1978 at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center in the position that is now known as a Residential Specialist. Prior to that time I had done delinquency prevention work in a grant funded program, and before that I was in college, where I did my internship with delinquent Native American youth on a reservation in Oklahoma. I always felt a need to work with youth that did not have strong support systems and were at risk for "falling through the cracks" into further delinquency. I've worked in the Department of Correctional Education as caseworker and teacher, and later as a probation officer, intake officer and supervisor at the Henrico Court Service Unit.

I think the thing that has impacted me the most has been the number of youth that have "made it" and not come back through our doors. When we see youth recidivate in DJJ, it is sometimes tempting to be discouraged and feel that we somehow may have "missed something" and could possibly have done one more thing to keep them from progressing further into the justice system. It is those times that I remind myself of all those youth that have not returned and are presumably living successful, productive lives. I sometimes see them working at local businesses, and some have occasionally stopped by just to say "thank you."

I can honestly say that I never expected to work for any department or agency for this length of time, but also that I never wanted to be anywhere else! It has been a most rewarding career and seeing the young lives that did not progress further in the juvenile justice system has made all the difference!

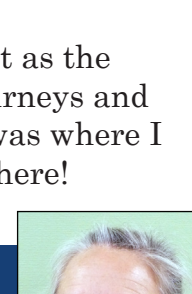
Lotus Wheeler 41.8 Years
Director, CSU 7-Newport News



I have always had a love for helping others and an interest and intrigue for government and the law. After several changes in my major, I found my niche in administration of justice and public safety with a minor in juvenile justice and I've never regretted my choice. I found that serving the youth and families of the Commonwealth and my locality helps to fulfill my passion for helping others. Each time I experience seeing a young person embracing the idea that there is hope and unlimited possibilities for their future, it motivates me to keep investing in the lives of those we serve. I also cherish and am proud of the dedication that is displayed and shared amongst my fellow co-workers in serving our clients/customers and in supporting one another.

In the early years of my employment, I did briefly consider returning to DOC. But as the youth and parents that I had served came back to share with me their successful journeys and express their gratitude, it solidified for me that DJJ and more specifically the CSU was where I would remain for the tenure of my employment. And almost 42 years later, I'm still here!

Michele Banalett 41.7 Years
Senior Intake Officer, CSU 12-Chesterfield

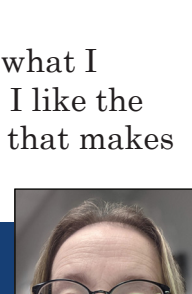


I came to DJJ right after graduating from the school of social work at VCU. I did a student internship at RDC and was hired within a month of graduating. George Wakefield was my first supervisor and by far one of the best I had in all my years at DJJ. I learned a great deal from him. I enjoyed the work, the kids, the connections, the people I met along the way. Coming to work has never been a burden.

I feel that I have made a difference to many, many people. I try to treat everyone with kindness and treat them the way I would want to be treated. I know a young man who is now in his 40s who maintains regular contact with me. I was his probation officer when he was 15 or 16. He wrote this to me recently: "There are some people in your life who affect you in ways that can never be measured. I hope you know that you are one of those people; I have nothing but respect and adoration for you and am so glad I had the opportunity to visit with you! I know I am only one of the many people you have touched along the way." Sentiments like this keep me fresh and invested in the job. I train new intake officers and one of the greatest compliments I received from a recent trainee was her statement: "Now what would Michele do?"

I expected to be in my job for at least 30 years, to earn full retirement. I still like what I do, I am good at what I do, and (on most days, anyway) I don't mind coming to work. I like the direction the department is going. I care about what I do and the people I serve, and that makes all the difference in the world.

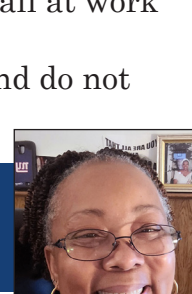
Sherrie Pecsek 41.3 Years
Office Services Specialist, CSU 2-Virginia Beach



I have been in the clerical field since high school. All of the places I have worked, the staff have always been very supportive especially at the 2nd District Court Service Unit in Virginia Beach. Since I have been at the CSU I have lost a sister and both parents and my son was injured during deployment. I received the call at work and everyone was very supportive and made sure that I was OK.

I didn't expect to work this long, but life happens. I enjoy my work at the CSU and do not have plans to retire yet.

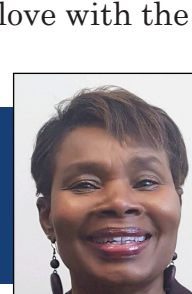
Ellen Madison 41.3 Years
Director, CSU 8-Hampton



I have a love for people, and especially wanted to work with children. I wanted to help them in some way, and to keep them out of the adult system. They don't always know that they have options. It is exciting to see them grow and flourish, and painful when they keep moving in the wrong direction. Yet the work is still very rewarding. My biggest reward is seeing some of the children I have worked with come back to visit me as adults and introduce me to their families.

I thought I would be here five years and move on to something else. But I fell in love with the work and the city of Hampton.

Vanessa Grooms 41.1 Years
Diagnostic Supervisor, MDT and Gang Coordinator, CSU 13-Richmond



My passion for this work stems from my desire to help at-risk youth. My family has been involved with public service which motivated my interest. From a supervisory position I have coached, guided and developed staff that are able to ensure that the right youth receive the right intervention and right dosage at the right time. The biggest reward is being able to guide and see changes as the youth evolves and chooses to become a different person – a productive citizen. It is always their choice.

I expected to stay in this job a long time: I am old school, so work ethic and loyalty is important to me.

Melinda Donahue 40.2 Years
Counselor Supervisor, CAP Unit



I never expected to work in a correctional setting, but I was working two part-time jobs that were not very fulfilling, and so decided to do some volunteer work through United Way. I was assigned to Bon Air School for Girls and worked with the recreation staff doing some art therapy. I will never forget the first day I went to Keller Hall. I was walking down the sidewalk past the building to the front door and a girl was hanging onto the mesh screen with her fingers and toes, and swinging back and forth and screaming. I really wasn't sure I wanted to go in the building. I did anyway and as soon as she got out of time out, she made a beeline for me and asked to sit in my lap. You can't say that I wasn't warned about the challenges that I would face when I accepted a full time job.

The most fulfilling part of the job is the knowledge that you might make a difference in the lives of those that you come into contact with and their families. Although you rarely hear about the impact of your work on others, satisfaction is doing the best you can each and every day to positively impact the world around you, no matter how small the world.

My plan was to be here for five years and then move on. We see how that worked out.

Recent Retirees With 40+ Years Of Service

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|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Dollie Lewis, 52 Years | Patricia Davis, 45 Years | Mary Stewart, 43 Years |
| Adelina Stutts, 52 Years | Evelyn Wiggins, 45 Years | Jean Lane, 42 Years |
| Doris Smith, 47 Years | Angela Christopher, 43 Years | Mary Lavender, 42 Years |
| Imogene Smith, 47 Years | Bobbie Luck, 43 Years | Juanita Hash, 40 Years |
| Marilyn Meggett, 46 Years | Donna Slagle, 43 Years | Theresita Pleasants-Lewis, 40 Years |