**Director’s Message**

This month we recognized victims’ rights, and we celebrated the outstanding contributions of our volunteers. These two efforts are notable examples of our effect on the community and, in turn, its effect on us.

We can quantify the value of our volunteers by calculating their hours and multiplying it by a simple hourly wage. Our number: $2.76 million. But we know the value is greater.

Volunteers model empathy, generosity and strength. Volunteers heal lives, and they serve as leaders who call on all of us to be better.

Like our volunteers, our co-workers in the Victim Services Unit provide a vital function to those who might be silenced by their pain, imprisoned by their fear, or otherwise minimized by their negative experience.

VSU helps them to function effectively by providing them with knowledge and information that empowers them and brings comfort. VSU serves as a restorative power, embracing those who have been hurt and helping them regain the strength to rise above their adversities. VSU promotes healing.

Please take a moment to learn about the experience of our own Sara Williams, featured later in this newsletter. Ms. Williams works as a surveillance officer with the voice verification biometrics unit under the Special Operations Unit. She implements home monitoring for returning citizens. She is also a victim of domestic violence. Ms. Williams knows the very real value that VSU provided her in the wake her physical and emotional trauma.

Our efforts to provide victim services have expanded in recent years and now reach deeply in our communities. In turn, our volunteer efforts demonstrate how the community reaches out and comes to us, to serve. Both help us to be better. Both demonstrate how, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “All life is inter-related.”

We are all of one community.

I thank all of our volunteers and congratulate our Victims Services Unit on its continued and expanding success.

Harold Clarke

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**Getting to Know VADOC**

**249 Job Offers at VADOC Job Fair**

This man is smiling because he just got a job offer. His was one of 249 job offers made by the 40 employers who attended the VADOC Richmond Job Fair held April 16 at the Arthur Ashe Athletic Center in Richmond.
Getting to Know VADOC: Sussex I State Prison - Tracey Ricks

Tracey Ricks serves as a Corrections Officer Senior at Sussex 1 State Prison and has been at Sussex I since the facility opened. She is proficient in every post at the facility but currently works as the Support Control Officer.

Recent accolades: Sussex I State Prison’s Employee of the Year

How did you get into corrections?
I’ve always wanted to be in law enforcement since my family has a strong history in it. My father and my brother were strong influences with their knowledge in the field. They taught me the values of hard work and commitment.

Why do you stay in corrections?
Being in corrections makes me feel as I’m achieving a goal every day of keeping my community safe. I truly enjoy my job.

What keeps you coming back?
It is about how much I enjoy the group of people I work with and making a difference in the lives of the offenders. By showing them that just because they are incarcerated does not mean they are done with life. During my time here, it has been an honor stand behind my co-workers and be their eye in the sky. By being there as their second pair of eyes, I am able to help keep everything moving smoothly. We are a team and always have each other’s back.

What does it take to be a good officer?
In my opinion, I’ve become good officer due to my commitment, my willingness to accept changes and my biggest asset is my ability not to take things personally. We are here to do a job.

What they say: “Officer Ricks has been employed with the Department for 23 years. She’s an exceptional officer who is passionate about her job. During my short time here as warden, she has proven herself to be reliable; she models the way for new officers on-boarding, and is willing to help whenever she is needed. Officer Ricks is an excellent mentor to new officers joining the Sussex One family. Her commitment and dedication are invaluable and we are lucky to have her here at Sussex One State Prison.”

Warden Israel Hamilton
Getting to Know VADOC: Marion Correctional Treatment Center - Bill Whittimore

Officer Bill Whittimore works in Marion Correctional Treatment Center’s Master Control. He thrives on the activity, and enjoys the variety that each shift brings.

**Recent accolades:**
- MCTC Employee of the Year
- Western Region Employee of the Year

**How did you get into corrections?**
I started in corrections in July 2006. I served in the United States Air Force 1992 to 1996. After separation from the military, I joined a private security firm. I wanted to work in security long term and have the comradery that I experienced in the military.

**Why do you stay in corrections?**
I love the job of helping others. Seeing the difference you can make in an offender’s life and supporting reentry. I enjoy helping new corrections officers in their role and help making their career more meaningful and successful.

**What keeps you coming back?**
I have worked in master control for over four years. The master control post is a very busy area with lots of demands as it is the central hub of the institution; this aligns with my work ethic. This career is rewarding and challenging; no day is ever the same.

**How does your approach help you to be successful in the Department?**
I always strive for perfection so that when I make a mistake I am still above average. I do my best to lead by example every day.

**What they say:**
“Recently, Officer Whittimore was working master control on nightshift. He recognized a very real problem and thanks to his quick thinking and response, a bad situation kept from getting much worse. He directed immediate help to a fellow officer stopping what could have become a life-and-death situation. Officer Whittimore always displays an extremely professional attitude and appearance. He takes pride in knowing and doing his job to the best of his abilities. Marion Correctional Treatment Center is thankful and fortunate to have Officer Whittimore on our team!”

former MCTC Assistant Warden Kevin Punturi, now Warden at Pocahontas State Correctional Center

Officer Bill Whittimore received recognition in 2018 as the Western Region Employee of the Year.

Marion Correctional Treatment Center Officer Bill Whittimore received recognition in 2018 as the Western Region Employee of the Year.
George Major is a Sergeant at Lunenburg Correctional Center. He provides direction and leadership to staff and offender workers who maintain the facility’s operations and appearance.

**Recent accolades:** Lunenburg’s Employee of the Year

**How did you get into corrections?**
My prior job kept me away from home a lot and I had a family. I applied to the department for stability and benefits. Once I got started and learned my role, I was glad of the decision I made.

**Why do you stay in corrections?**
Corrections is a good and stable job and I love what I do. It has good retirement benefits. It also offers savings for retirement. My co-workers work well as a team.

**What keeps you coming back?**
Stability and pay.

**What motivates you?**
What motivates me is being able to make a difference with staff as well as offenders. I enjoy my job, my health and being able to work.

**What would be your single best advice to a new officer?**
Do 100 percent of your capabilities; no matter what or where you are assigned, make sure that you apply yourself to that job. Be on post every day that you are scheduled to work and make a point not to be late. Get along with your co-workers and work as a team.
More than 1,000 Attend Highly Successful VADOC Job Fair for Ex-Offenders, Others at Ashe Center

249 Employment Offers Given

More than 40 employers made 249 job offers at the VADOC Richmond Job Fair held April 16 at the Arthur Ashe Athletic Center in Richmond. Organizers estimated attendance at more than 1,000. For returning citizens, job opportunities are essential for a successful reentry. Employers that recruit and hire ex-offenders help reduce recidivism, making Virginia’s communities safer. VADOC sponsored the day-long event. Below is the entire VADOC team.
Continued: More than 1,000 Attend Highly Successful VADOC Job Fair for Ex-Offenders, Others

The huge turnout was not what surprised one of the event organizers, VADOC Workforce Development Specialist Dwane Masenburg. “Relative to the size of the Richmond MSA, I’ve seen similar turnouts at previous job fairs recently. What really surprised me was the number of people who were offered jobs,” he said. The event succeeded because many people worked well together, Mr. Massenburg said. “Our committee chairpersons and others really went above and beyond. They include Marion Curry, Kia Parson-White, Rodney White, Diane Wilkins, Cara Mellanson, Monique Murphy, Keenan Allen, Laura Brown and Tammy R. Williams. It was a total team effort,” he said.

Terrence Ravnall, shown above, was released from prison in January 2019 after serving a 10 year sentence. At the VADOC Richmond Job Fair, he was able to meet directly with employers and discuss his training, experience and skills. A major manufacturing company hired him on the spot. He was very upbeat about his new opportunity and the life he is forging for himself. “I am going to continue to change, continue to work on myself and continue to become a better man,” he said. See his brief video on Twitter, click here.
On March 28, District 32 Henrico hosted a Resource and Job Fair, bringing together 36 community stakeholders to provide resources to the men and women reporting to VADOC office for supervision. Community stakeholders included local and state law enforcement, various employers, treatment providers and recovery homes, a local food pantry, Goodwill and Salvation Army, as well as CARITAS, Commonwealth Catholic Charities, Health Brigade, and OAR, to name a few. Almost Home Cafe provided baked goods for the event.

The District 32 staff did a remarkable job bringing this vision to life. The Healing Ambassador Environment Committee and SMS learning teams came together to recommend stakeholders, make telephone calls, hang banners, set up tables, direct traffic, create table placards and certificates, greet and direct guests, and make sure everyone had what they needed.

District 32 staff ensured there were many resources for this event and provided hospitality and direction to our guests and visitors.

The teamwork that went into planning and executing this first ever resource fair at our district was outstanding and speaks volumes about District 32 employees.
The Virginia Department of Corrections Recognizes Crime Victims’ Rights Week

The Virginia Department of Corrections’ Victim Services Unit recognized National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, April 7-13, emphasizing the theme, “Honoring the Past. Creating Hope for the Future.”

“We continue working to expand services, making our efforts more inclusive and more accessible,” said Department of Corrections Director Harold Clarke. “The Victim Services Unit serves to inform, support, and strengthen victims in the Commonwealth. When victims are strengthened, our entire community becomes stronger.”

The Victim Services Unit ensures that crime victims receive information about their offender, including offender transfer, work release, name change, escape, interstate transfers, civil commitment, death, release, and parole events. VSU also assists victims in understanding the criminal justice system and the judicial process. In 2018, more than 2,300 new victims registered to receive VSU’s services. VSU oversees the implementation of the Victim Impact: Listen and Learn program and Victim-Offender Dialogue. The program is currently active in 23 VADOC facilities.

VADOC expanded its VSU in 2017 using grant funds to hire regional advocates who have joined forces with local service providers and other professionals to expand services available to crime victims.

“At left: Accountability: Cognitive Counselor Shikori Hardy, center picks up the award for Brunswick Women’s Work Center.

By recognizing National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, all of us can recommit to ensuring victims’ rights are respected, including their right to trauma-informed services,” said VSU Director Wendy Lohr-Hopp.

As part of the recognition week activities, offenders submitted posters for entry in an annual competition to mark the week. Entries were judged by how well they incorporate this year’s theme, reflect accountability, and encourage victim empathy.

Successful Poster Competition

Offenders submitted posters in an annual competition. Entries were judged by how well they incorporated this year’s theme, reflect accountability, and encourage victim empathy. Victim Services Director Wendy Lohr-Hopp, left, and VADOC Director Harold Clarke flank representatives of the winners.

At left: Accountability: Cognitive Counselor Shikori Hardy, center picks up the award for Brunswick Women’s Work Center.

At right: Empathy: QMHP Elaine Champion receives recognition for the entry from Nottoway Correctional Center.

At left: Victims’ Rights Week Theme, Honoring Our Past. Creating Hope for the Future.: Lunenburg Correctional Center Assistant Warden Kemsty Bowles and Warden Larry Edmonds.

National Crime Victims’ Rights Week • APRIL 7-13 • 2019
Sara Williams’ job monitoring hundreds of low-level probationers for the Special Operations Unit gives her a unique perspective on the criminal justice system.

What many people do not know, however, is that Ms. Williams, an eight-year veteran of VADOC, understands it from an entirely different perspective as well. She understands the criminal justice system as a victim.

Ms. Williams credits the aid she received from Department’s Victim Services Unit as a boost in her overall recovery from a life-threatening event that occurred on her parents’ lawn in April 2017.

On that evening an angry neighbor, upset with his wife, fired several gunshots. Many hit Ms. Williams’ parents’ house. As she tried to move her parents to safety, Ms. Williams suffered a shot to the face. Had the shot been one inch to the right, it would have killed her.

Ms. Williams’ physical and emotional wounds have taken time to heal, she said. She still wears a scar on her face, and she examines it every morning while trying to cover it up with make-up. She also suffers from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Ms. Williams finds relief in knowing her assailant will be in the custody of the Virginia Department of Corrections for the next 57 years or so.

She also finds great comfort in the services provided by the Victim Services Unit.

Not long after the incident, Ms. Williams signed up with Vinelink, a service that kept her updated on the offender’s status before and during the trial. Once the offender entered the prison system, she contacted the Victim Services Unit so that she would know his movement within the Department of Corrections. This greatly enhanced her sense of safety and security.

“This information is very comforting as I move on with my daily life,” she said. This keeps her from being fearful of the unknown. She is free from wondering, and free from fear. She knows where he is and she knows when he will be released.

“Victim Services provides knowledge to the victim and also makes them feel secure long after the trial is over,” she said.

“I would encourage crime victims to contact the Victim Services Unit. It is a very valuable, free service provided by the Department of Corrections. The VSU has helped me to feel safe and secure in my home and in my surrounding environment. One reason I wanted to work for the Department of Corrections was because I wanted to be a part of the greater effort of making sure that the community where I work and live is safe,” she said.
Seventeen Facilities Participate in VSU Poster Contest Emphasizing Accountability, Empathy, Theme

Submitted by Wendy Lohr-Hopp
The Victim Services Unit would like to thank everyone for making the 2019 National Crime Victims’ Rights Week a great success.
The VSU would like to recognize its Statewide Victim Impact Advocate, Emily Sattie, and our team of Regional Victim Advocates who have spent several months traveling the state raising awareness, facilitating learning teams, presenting to staff and offenders, and promoting participation in this week’s national commemoration. Those staff include Cheryl Moody (Eastern Region), Morgan Corpe (Northern Region), Cheryle Parrish (Central Region), Cristianne Potter (Western Region), and Deirdre Hasty-Martin (Southwestern Region).
VSU hosted a statewide poster competition for offenders and probationers to submit entries. The posters were judged in three categories: Accountability, Victim Empathy, and Best Representation of the 2019 Theme (“Honoring Our Past. Creating Hope for the Future”).

Voting this year took place via an online poll sent to the entire Department via email. IDOC users: To see poster finalists and honorable mentions, click here.

And the winners are:

CATEGORY: EMPATHY
Nottoway Correctional Center

CATEGORY: OVERALL THEME
Lunenburg Correctional Center

CATEGORY: ACCOUNTABILITY
Brunswick Women’s Pre-Release

And the winners are:

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And the winners are:
VSU is proud to announce awards for National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. We are highlighting hard work and dedication to victims in the Commonwealth.

The recipients are pictured with the Director of Victim Services Wendy Lohr-Hopp, left, and VADOC Director Harold Clarke, right:

**Tracey Jenkins:** Tracey was instrumental in the winning of a federal grant to allow the hiring of six additional staff to join the VSU in 2017. She also worked with the VSU on various grants to explore the development of domestic violence services/programming for VADOC. In 2018, Tracey joined us as a statewide Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) Facilitator.

**District 24:** Farmville P&P provides office space for our Central Region Victim Advocate, has been a huge benefit for VSU and has opened the door to great collaborations to occur over the last two years. Farmville P&P assisted VSU in creating a new learning team template to spread awareness of the regional victim advocates’ role in corrections. District 24 also created the first victim sensitive home plan checklist used by their surveillance officers.

**District 31:** In 2018, Chesapeake P&P became the first probation office to implement the Victim Impact Program (VIP) to individuals under supervision. They collaborate with VSU to provide information, statistics, and first-hand accounts of victim journeys in hopes of increasing empathy and awareness of the impact of crime.

**District 20:** Bedford P&P has collaborated with the VSU and implemented a process to contact the regional victim advocate on home plans or transfer investigations that may be victim sensitive. They also request input with travel permissions for offenders. District 20 has collaborated with local judges, commonwealth attorneys, and local victim witness to create clearer and more consistent court orders that will benefit victims in matters such as court ordered restitution.

**Green Rock CC:** In 2016, GROC became the first on-site Victim Impact facilitator training and included several treatment and mental health staff as trainee facilitators. Since that time, over 130 offenders have completed the Victim Impact Program (VIP) and they are a statewide leader in VIP completion every year. GROC have exceptional staff facilitators who support each other and the VSU.

**Pocahontas CC:** PSCC is the statewide leader in celebrating National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. For the last three years, PSCC offenders have collectively raised thousands of dollars for crime victim organizations. Offenders routinely create awareness ribbons and hold awareness groups. Staff are involved in various activities and promotion of local events. PSCC created a learning team template to spread awareness for victims’ rights that now serves as a statewide template. Congratulations to all of the 2019 winners.
The Virginia Department of Corrections Recognizes Its Volunteers

The Department of Corrections thanked its volunteers during National Volunteer Week, April 7 to 13, for assisting the agency in numerous ways. From helping offenders create art to offering tips on financial management, thousands of volunteers offer their time and energy to incarcerated offenders every year. Statewide volunteer efforts are valued at about $2.76 million a year.

“Volunteers make invaluable contributions to the Department. Their generosity of spirit lifts offenders and propels the agency forward in its efforts to help people be better,” said Director Harold Clarke.

VADOC’s volunteer efforts cover a wide spectrum including religion, health, education, military benefits and reentry efforts.

Teaching others the joy of painting with oils has brought a special satisfaction to Richmond-area artist Bev Perdue Jennings. Her students, offenders incarcerated at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women, find the class transformative. Ms. Jennings was one of approximately 4,800 people who contributed a collective 108,000 hours to the Department of Corrections in fiscal 2018. Including approximately $61,000 in donations, the VADOC volunteer program’s total value in FY 2018 is an estimated $2.76 million.

“It empowers them,” Ms. Jennings said. Her volunteer efforts under the auspices of the non-profit Art for the Journey have an added benefit for her. “Anytime you give back, you get as much as you give.”

This story is familiar to Melissa Welch, the VADOC’s volunteer coordinator. “People often find that in helping others, the person they help the most is themselves,” she said.

Art for the Journey is just one volunteer effort working to help incarcerated people successfully transform their lives. Other examples include:

Kairos Prison Ministry of Virginia, whose volunteers seek to address the spiritual needs of offenders.

St. Brides Correctional Center in Chesapeake hosts a non-religious reentry-focused Prison Fellowship Academy, a one-year program.

The God Behind Bars initiative at Nottoway Correctional Center is an effort by the Passion Community Church in Powhatan to create a congregation that holds regular, weekly services.

Drive-to-Work, a non-profit organization, sends volunteer attorneys into many prisons around Virginia helping offenders restore their driving privileges.

The Virginia Department of Veteran Services initiated a statewide program to ensure that incarcerated veterans and their family members utilize their military benefits. Often their representatives are volunteers who work to aid reentry and workforce development.

The State Farm Correctional Center in Powhatan houses one of the VADOC’s thriving volunteer efforts. One recent week, State Farm brought in a representative from the Virginia Credit Union who spent two hours talking to 140 men about better managing their finances. The next day the facility hosted a resource fair attended by 200 men who heard from several local employers about employment opportunities available to them upon release. State Farm regularly hosts graduate students from the Virginia Commonwealth University who teach a popular parenting class.

“You name it, we’ve got it covered,” said State Farm’s Institutional Program Manager Adam Booker. “It’s all about finding the space and time to do it.”
Art Volunteers Among the Hundreds Who Help the Agency Promote Healing

Art for the Journey, a Richmond-area non-profit, got its start in 2013 as an organization intent on serving women incarcerated at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women. Artists Bev Perdue Jennings and Joan Bennett are two of approximately 4,800 volunteers who contributed 108,000 hours to VADOC in the last fiscal year. VADOC volunteers promote the agency’s mission and are involved in religion, health, education, military benefits and reentry efforts. The value of volunteer contributions in FY 2018 is an estimated $2.76 million.
More than 150 people gathered at State Farm Work Center on Saturday, April 13 to enjoy the Spring Open Barn. At left, Instructor and Barn Manager C.J. Weldon leads a leaping horse. The horse is marked with white chalk to demonstrate its skeletal structure. The wall of ribbons shown immediately below will soon add a new honor, as VADOC received recognition for its partnership with the thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF). TRF members, bottom right, tracked the event’s success.
Continued: Annual Spring Open Barn Day Draws Big Crowd

Members of Girl Scout Troop 366 in Henrico County, shown left, took great pleasure in getting to know the horses who live at State Farm Work Center in Goochland; below, another horse enjoyed his morning preparations for his day on display.
The Virginia Department of Corrections on April 11 received a Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs 2019 Excellence in Government Award recognizing two public-private partnerships that help offenders return successfully to society.

For the awards ceremony, VCU produced a YouTube video available [here](#).

To learn more about the award, click [here](#).
Secure Diversionary Treatment Program Showing Positive Results

Little more than one year ago, the Department pioneered a program to address the unique needs of seriously mentally ill offenders. Today, the Secure Diversionary Treatment Program (SDTP) is beginning to see some positive results.

Of the 22 offenders who have completed the program since its launch in January 2018, only one has relapsed back into the SDTP.

“This program has, and will continue to change the culture of the Agency in an innovative manner,” said the Coordinator of Serious Mental Illness Chris Armes. “The data suggests we’re moving in a positive direction, that our research, planning, the tireless hard work of our site staff, and our numerous collaborative efforts are paying off,” Mr. Armes said.

SDTP launched at River North, Wallens Ridge and Marion. Each location addressed slightly different mental health needs. The three offer a combined 119 beds while emphasizing safe, secure housing, highly specialized programming and frequent assessment.

SDTP works, Mr. Armes said, because it encourages self-control and appropriate behaviors while offering structured evidence-based therapeutic

“Hard work and diligent effort by WRSP staff created a positive environment for the offenders to make prosocial change.”

CHaP Dennis Collins, Wallens Ridge State Prison

“Without the SDTP Staff here at River North, this program would not have run as smooth and efficiently as it has over the past year. River North is doing great!”

Counselor Allie Lovell, River North Correctional Center

“Hard work and diligent effort by WRSP staff created a positive environment for the offenders to make prosocial change.”

CHaP Dennis Collins, Wallens Ridge State Prison

“A collaborative effort of dedication and persistence by all departments at PSCC has created an engaging and adaptive SAM Unit for offenders to safely and positively remain in a general population setting.”

Counselor Savanna Burton, Pocahontas State Correctional Center

Continued on Next Page
activities and unstructured recreational activities to include out-of-cell activities for SMI offenders in safe and secure settings.

The Department has also expanded alternative, mission-driven general population units appealing to a mental health or vulnerable population in the form of Shared Allied Management (SAM) Pods. These pods promote safety and stability within the institution while avoiding the unnecessary use of Restrictive Housing (RHU), and reducing unnecessarily high demand on security, mental health, and/or medical staff. The Department now has SAM pods at 11 facilities covering all but the lowest levels of security and offering 772 beds.

“The IDTP has provided offenders an opportunity to transition from long-term segregation to less restrictive environments. This is accomplished through intensive programming that addresses their mental health needs and provides positive socialization with others. We have already seen great results with the graduation of seven offenders! This success has only been possible through teamwork and commitment from all departments at MCTC.”

CHaP Vickie Williams, Marion Correctional Treatment Center

Continued on Next Page

Restrictive Housing Placement, Incidents, Emergency Transports: Before and After SDTP

90 Days Before

- 71 spent an average of 56 days in restrictive housing (median 57 days)
- 32 were involved in Incident Reports (IR), 50 were in involved in Internal Incident Reports (IIR)
- 18 emergency medical transports

90 Days After

- 22 spent an average of 18 days in restrictive housing (median 10 days)
- 21 were involved in IR, 32 were in involved in IIR
- 9 emergency medical transports

69 percent decrease in SDTP offenders in restrictive housing
68 percent decrease in average days in restrictive housing
34 percent decrease in involvement in IR
28 percent decrease in IIR
50 percent decrease in emergency medical transports
Continued: Secure Diversionary Treatment Program Showing Positive Results

This program brings new hope to many offenders who need it, Mr. Armes said. “The Virginia Department of Corrections is committed to leading the way nationally, and without the quality of our staff, initiatives such as this would be impossible. Therefore, to the SDTP staff and SAM staff, we want to collectively say, these innovative, mission-driven, diversionary programs would not succeed without you! A sincere thank you again for all your hard work and dedication to the VADOC, SDTP and SAM programs!” Mr. Armes said.

“What happens when you mix fun, creativity and individual passions of wanting to see others flourish? You get SISP North Star Team! Due to strong leadership skills, integrity and cooperation, SISP is able to cultivate independence but also a sense of community within our SAM pod. As our pod quote states: ‘Building Strength through Unity.”

Sussex I State Prison Director of Mental Health Services, Karmen Story

“By implementing SAM Pods, the VADOC recognizes the needs of a specialized population (vulnerable, medical, and mental health) and the benefit of housing them together while addressing programmatic needs. The pods provide the offenders a secure environment while promoting stability and accountability.”

CHaP Renee Trent, Buckingham Correctional Center

With Corrections Professionals, Step Down Proves Popular

When corrections professionals from Kentucky came to visit Red Onion State Prison recently, it was their second visit in recent years. Visitors are a rather regular feature at Red Onion State Prison and Wallens Ridge since 2011.

That year the two facilities became home to the Restrictive Housing Reduction Step Down Program. The Step Down has received much attention since then.

In 2013, Step Down received the STAR (State Transformation in Action Recognition) from the Southern Legislative Conference.

In 2016, Step Down was one of only five state efforts praised by the U.S. Department of Justice “Report and Recommendations Concerning the Use of Restrictive Housing.”

Most recently, in December 2018, Vera Institute of Justice Report- Safe Initiatives to Segregation (SAS) highlighted “Great Successes” of Virginia’s Restrictive Housing Reforms and offers support for future initiatives.” The program’s success has made it attractive to a wide range of guests including elected and appointed officials in Virginia, and criminal justice research and policy organizations such as Vera Institute and the American Correctional Association.

Top officials from Virginia’s Senate Finance Committee, the Virginia Office of the Inspector General and the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security have also visited.

But the largest number of guests are corrections professionals from other states and countries. Since 2013, visitors from 12 states have stopped in to learn about Virginia’s Step Down program. International guest include representatives of Mexico (September 2016) and Lebanon (June 2017).

Guests from the country of Lebanon took interest in VADOC’s high security facilities.
In December, 2018 and January 2019, participants of Green Rock Correctional Center’s SAM Program signed up for the GROC SAM Pod Finger Knitting/Crochet Group to create scarves for members of the community. Led by Shelby Easome, Psychology Associate I, the group learned how to knit using only their fingers and yarn donated by the community. The act of creating something gave the offenders who participated a sense of accomplishment, and donating the items they made to those in need gave them a feeling of community. The task of finger knitting is an easy one to teach/learn, and there are many different kinds of projects that can be made. Below are the members of the first SAM Pod Finger Knitting/Crochet Group showcasing their completed projects.

On March 21, 2019, advocates from Haven House: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Shelter of Danville came and accepted the donated scarves from Green Rock Correctional Center’s SAM Members. SAM Pod members from the first group, plus some new SAM members, have begun the second SAM Pod Finger Knitting/Crochet Group. They are learning new stitches, again using only their fingers, and the finished product (lap blankets) is going to be donated to a different organization in the community.
On Friday, April 5, Red Onion State Prison provided a facility tour to criminal justice students from Bluefield College. Institutional Operations Manager Jessica King hosted the tour, provided a brief overview of ROSP’s step down program, and discussed career opportunities within the VA-DOC. Mrs. King stated, “The group as a whole responded with appreciation for being allowed to come in and get a firsthand opportunity to view every area of the prison. They all showed interest in our day-to-day operations.”
Loretta Harris recently celebrated the completion of her outpatient treatment with Empire Empowerment Centers (EEC) of Virginia. Her counselors praised her for her openness in talking about her struggles with addictive substances. They also praised her diligence as demonstrated by her 100 percent participation and attendance while in treatment.

Ms. Harris successfully completed her Cognitive Behavioral Intervention curriculum with EEC on April 28. Ms. Harris’ supervising probation officer, EEC group facilitators and group therapy peers were at Richmond’s District 1 building to congratulate and support her in this milestone. Ms. Harris requested the presence of VADOC Substance Abuse Program Director Anna Burton who encouraged Ms. Harris on her road to recovery.
Administrative Professionals Hold Conference at ASD

VADOC’s administrative professionals attended a conference at the Academy for Staff Development April 24-25. The event featured Corrections Administrative Manager Lisa Hernandez as the opening speaker with presentations focused on social media/web training, stress management, Dialogue, Team Building, healthy eating, diversity and professionalism. Conference committee members included Dr. Cherise James-Cobb, Jennifer Bray, Kasey Cosby, Barbara Reyes, Rhonda Langford, Lucritia Davis, Thelma Toone, and TyAna Anderson.
The Virginia Department of Corrections Recognizes Its Volunteers:

The Department of Corrections is thanking its volunteers this week as it celebrates National Volunteer Week. Thousands of volunteers offer their time and energy to incarcerated offenders every year.

Fredericksburg-area organizations launch pilot program to hire released inmates as traffic flaggers: A 31-year-old father of three sleeps in a car he fears might soon be repossessed. A 38-year-old mother lives in a home with her two teenagers, but they soon may be forced out. Both want to work, but it’s difficult.

Law enforcement agencies announce 209 arrests in Roanoke Valley: Law enforcement officials have during the past two months arrested 209 people believed to present the worst risk of violence in the Roanoke Valley, officials said.

Loudoun’s Drug Court Launches Anew: Seven years since the county’s last attempt to offer a specialized program for addicts was dismantled, Loudoun launched a new, improved drug court Wednesday, April 3.

Virginia General Assembly backs some of Northam’s amendments: The General Assembly went along with some of Gov. Ralph Northam’s budget amendments aimed at helping lower-income Virginians. Those amendments end suspensions of drivers licenses when people are late with court lines or fees.

Opinion/Commentary: Public safety initiatives notch wins; Northam administration has further goals: During the 2019 General Assembly session, several significant public safety and criminal justice reform initiatives championed by the Northam administration were advanced, making tremendous progress.

The Virginia Department of Corrections Recognizes Crime Victims’ Rights Week: The Virginia Department of Corrections’ Victim Services Unit is recognizing National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, April 7-13, emphasizing the theme, “Honoring the Past. Creating Hope for the Future.”

The Virginia Department of Corrections Recognizes Its Volunteers: The Department of Corrections is thanking its volunteers this week as it celebrates National Volunteer Week. Thousands of volunteers offer their time and energy to incarcerated offenders every year.

2019 EVGA Public-Private Partnership Award Recipients: The Virginia Department of Corrections received an Excellence in Government Award for two reentry-oriented partnerships with outside entities. See the video VCU produced that explains VA-DOC’s excellence.

Do you have a story idea for the newsletter (or IDOC)? Please contact Win Sisson at george.sisson@vadoc.virginia.gov or call (804) 887-8072.