

**REPORT OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE**

# **Status of the Work/Education Release Program**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



## **HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 7**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND  
2006**

This report provides the status of the Work/Education Release Program as required in Chapter 648 of the 2005 Virginia Acts of Assembly:

***“That the Department of Juvenile Justice shall submit a report on the implementation of the pilot program and this act to the House Committee on Militia, Police and Public Safety, and the Senate Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services by November 15, 2005. The report shall provide an assessment on the implementation of the pilot program permitting a work and educational release program involving the temporary release of juveniles into the community in preparation for their transition from the Department of Juvenile Justice's direct care to their home community.”***

### **Description of the Program**

The purpose of the Work/Education Release Program is to provide select juveniles with opportunities for successful transition back into the community by providing employment skills, educational opportunities, job placement in the community, life skills training, and transitional living while being monitored by staff. Compliance with program rules, curfews, task completion, demonstration of fiscal responsibility, and participation in life skills training are all part of this program.

### **Program Location**

***“The Board of Juvenile Justice is authorized to operate a pilot program in conformity with this act beginning July 1, 2005, and ending July 1, 2006, at one juvenile correctional center site.”*** Chapter 648

The Pilot Work/Educational Release Program was instituted at Natural Bridge Juvenile Correctional Center (JCC). Wards selected for the program are moved into a living unit that is separate from the general ward population.

### **Selection Process**

Once a determination has been made that a ward meets the program selection criteria (defined below), he will meet with his counselor for application review. Upon approval, he will meet with the Treatment Team to verify eligibility and be interviewed prior to consideration by DJJ internal committees. Upon approval from the Central Classification Review Committee (CCRC), the ward is officially in the program and must obtain employment/education through the assistance of the Work Release Coordinator. The wards sign two program agreements that explain program rules as well as living arrangement regulations.

### **Selection Criteria**

1. Must be at least 17 years of age.
2. Must be in direct care for a minimum of 90 days.
3. Must have no Moderate Offense for at least 30 days and no Major Offense for at least 90 days.
4. Must have no escape or AWOL history while confined in a secure setting.
5. Shall not be subject to compulsory school attendance. Residents who are actively attending school may apply to work on weekends only.
6. Must have been at Natural Bridge JCC at least 30 days.
7. Must be at Custody Level I or II, the lowest security classification levels.
8. Residents must have minimal criminal history, generally property crimes. Serious Offenders, Major Offenders, and Sex Offenders are eligible with approval from the appropriate authorities, i.e. committing court judge, Deputy Director for Institutions (CCRC), or DJJ Director.

9. Must have no documented active gang affiliation. Must have no history of STG (security threat group) institutional offenses.
10. Must have completed, or be actively working on Mandatory and Recommended Service Goals.
11. Must have demonstrated appropriate work ethics, for at least 2 weeks, either at Natural Bridge JCC, or his work ethic must have been documented at some other facility, or verified work activity.
12. Must have at least 60 days time remaining at Natural Bridge JCC after CCRC approval in order to allow employers as much opportunity for employment as possible.

Participants of the Work/Educational Release Program will be expected to use their time wisely:

- Attendance at Mandatory Service Plan Objectives activities.
- Participation in weekly meetings with the Coordinator and other staff members.
- Participation in Life Skill classes.
- Participation in Money Management Classes.
- Participation in on campus work projects when not working off campus and when their work schedule allows.
- Participation in other off campus activities when not working and when their work schedule allows.
- Making arrangements to pay court ordered restitution and child support payments.
- Whenever possible, visiting off campus with their families, in preparation for return to their communities.
- Whenever possible, visiting at home with their families, in preparation for return to their communities.

## **Funding**

DJJ acquired grant funding through the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to initiate this program. Funding provided allowed DJJ to hire the staff required to operate the program, to purchase a vehicle to use for transporting wards to their places of employment/education, to purchase electronic monitoring equipment for the wards, and also to provide transitional services upon release.

## **Program Staffing**

In order to provide adequate staff to operate the program the DOL grant funded three positions:

- Two juvenile correctional officers are dedicated to this program to provide transportation for juveniles to and from their places of employment or education. These officers will also provide supervision and security of youth in the programs and serve as a day-to-day contact for employers.
- Work Release Coordinator to work with colleges, universities, and employers to build a community network and serve as a liaison for all involved parties (DCE, facility staff, transitional services, etc). DJJ is in the process of hiring for this position.

### **Electronic Monitoring**

A contract is being designed that will allow for the purchase of electronic monitoring supplies and services for wards involved in the program. This will provide for the safety of all parties while juveniles are off-site through the use of ankle bracelets and GPS technology. Wards will be able to wear the bracelets under their clothes so as to be undetectable while in the work place/educational site, while still allowing for maintained safety.

### **Transitional Services**

DOL grant funding allowed DJJ to implement community based employment services in targeted localities for parolees. Through a purchase of service contract with G4S Youth Services (formerly named Securicor), DJJ implemented the STREET Smart Program in the Fredericksburg, Tidewater, and Richmond Metropolitan areas. The STREET Smart Program provides crucial reintegration services to ensure success as an employed, law-abiding citizen. Services include intensive case management, employment training programs coordinated with educational opportunities, apprenticeships, job placement and retention, mentoring support, GED preparation, career development, some independent living skills, development of professional and interpersonal skills, transportation and linkages to mental health services, substance abuse services, and other community-based resources.

Parole officers in the Court Service Units will be responsible for case management during and subsequent to incarceration to insure a seamless transition from the JCC to the community. Coordination of services will begin during incarceration and involve regular communication among all relevant parties and the parole officer to monitor and track progress in the program. Upon release to the community, the employment services provider will be responsible for implementing the service plan by assisting youth in enrollment in identified educational programs and or vocational programs, setting up job interviews, accompanying the offender to job interview, and when employed, providing whatever counseling and assistance is necessary to ensure that he or she follows through with the requirements of the work program.

For wards released to areas other than the STREET Smart target area, similar transition services will be provided through other departmental funding streams. Assistance will be given to all wards seeking continuing education by means of tuition assistance as well.

According to the RFP DJJ 04-002 Community Based Intervention (Employment Services), Securicor is required to submit monthly progress reports to the parole officers (section B7a) and statistical reports to the contract monitor (section B7d). These reports are required within ten days following the end of each month. DJJ will be acquiring copies of these reports in order to track the juveniles released into the community.

## **Program Termination**

Residents may be terminated from the Program under the following conditions:

- The resident quits his job/school without following proper procedures.
- The resident is found guilty of any type of security violation. Residents found guilty of a Major Offense must be reviewed by the Institutional Classification Review Committee to determine if they should continue work/school.
- The resident is terminated from two jobs by the employer or dropped from the school or class roles by the educator or training authority.
- The resident continues to refuse to uphold any part of his Program Agreements.

Residents may also volunteer to resign by seeing their counselor, appearing before their Treatment Team, and being approved for removal by the Institutional Classification Review Committee. Once removed at their own request, residents will not likely be reconsidered for admittance at a later date.

## **Wards in the Program**

To date, there have been nine wards who have taken part in the program and four who have since been released on parole. At present, there are two wards who have been approved for the program and are awaiting placement. All juveniles currently in the program are taking part in the work aspects, while another who is expected to enter the program in the next few weeks will be attending college courses. Juveniles have been employed at: Country Cooking, Advance Auto, and Burger King to date (highlights presented below).

## **Program Highlights**

- One of the first residents to enter the program earned his first paycheck July 19, 2005. Over the course of the past few months, he was able to pay his restitution in full. On August 23, he appeared for a court hearing with a check in hand. The judge was so impressed by his ability to pay his fines and restitution as well as his demeanor, that further fines were dismissed. He will be able to leave the program debt free.
- One ward recently left Natural Bridge JCC and is currently participating in the STREET Smart Program in Newport News. He is enrolled as a full time college student at Thomas Nelson Community College and has interviewed with UPS and Trader Joe's Grocery Store.
- One ward is a current participant in the work release program and has submitted a check to the Harrisonburg J&DR court in the amount of \$704.48 to pay victim restitution in full.
- One ward, currently in the program, has been promoted to Assistant Parts Manager while employed at Advance Auto. His manager reports that he is very knowledgeable, eager to learn, and is a pleasure to work with. Advance Auto has offered him a position in his hometown of Danville, VA once released from Natural Bridge JCC. They have also offered to pay for any and all certifications required to help him continually grow with the company.
- One ward from the program was released into the Apartment Living Program. He is currently employed at Target and Gold Key Cleaners. He has obtained his driver's license, purchased a vehicle, and acquired his own insurance.
- One ward left Natural Bridge and returned to the Fairfax area. He is currently enrolled in Northern Virginia Community College and is also working part-time at AMF Bowling.
- The residents have paid \$1,663.82 in restitution since July 1, 2005.

When asked about their thoughts on the program, wards said:

- “Before I got on work release... I had a very bad outlook on life and had no hope for when I returned to the community. I had no family, no money, and no job... then after I got on work release the puzzle pieces of my life started to fit together. While I’ve been on work release I’ve learned discipline, hard work ethics, and responsibility.”
- “Not only do I have the chance to make some money which will add up and help me a lot, but I also have the chance to add this to my work history so it would look good when I go back home and try to get a job.”
- “(having) money saved up gives me motivation and self-confidence to keep on saving when I get out.”
- “Since I have been in the program it has helped me to not only stay busy but to learn how to be an independent and productive individual... it’s put me in a great position to go home, stay busy and get out on my own eventually.”
- “If it continues I believe that everybody that comes through the program will most likely not fall back into their old ways and continue to do good – I’m a perfect example.”

## Summary

The Pilot Work/Education Release Program has been successfully implemented in Natural Bridge JCC. The businesses involved thus far have been satisfied with this endeavor and are looking forward to its continuation and expansion. DJJ is maintaining its effort to identify potential participants and to track the progress of juveniles currently in the program.