



VIRGINIA JUVENILE JUSTICE ASSOCIATION

Bringing together the professionals who touch the lives of court-involved children since 1966.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Virginia Juvenile Justice Association (VJJA)
Beth Stinnett, President
804.786.0486; president@vija.org or
Colleen French, Director of Public Relations
540.381.0097; publicrelations@vija.org

CAREER PUBLIC SERVANT HONORED FOR WORK IN JUVENILE JUSTICE FIELD

On November 5, 2009, career public servant, Claudette Overton, was honored for her many contributions to the juvenile justice field. While attending the 33rd Fall Juvenile Justice Training Institute, Overton was presented the Virginia Juvenile Justice Association's *2009 Meritorious Award in the Area of Administration*. The following biography was read:

"Our next award recipient, in the area of Administration, is a career public servant of more than 33 years who rose through the ranks, starting as a Probation Officer, working for many years as a Probation Supervisor and Deputy Director and now employed as a Court Service Unit Director.

Words to describe this individual are said to be loyal, God fearing, kind-hearted, humble, caring, tough, patient, optimistic, forgiving, creative, innovative, hardworking, thorough, detail-oriented, dedicated, principled, disciplined, determined, committed and flexible.

Anyone who has ever worked with or for this individual knows that she is a tireless advocate for court involved juveniles and as a result her expectations on staff performance are high.

Those expectations consistently include these:

- Our job is one of the most important jobs one can have because we work with children.
- Always apply the "My Child" rule -- make every decision as if you are making a decision for your own child
- Every child and family is worthy of our best effort -- give your best every day
- Care about what you are doing / Care about who you are serving
- Consistently strive to expand your knowledge and skills
- Whatever it takes! We must be innovative and creative in our work
- If you don't have something you need, create or build it
- Never settle for mediocrity

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As a manager this individual is said to lead by example and set a pace for others to follow. She is also said to demonstrate leadership in the most basic and simplistic ways. She is accessible to her staff and she listens. She consistently seeks out opportunities to expand her own knowledge and improve her own skill set and in doing so demonstrates to staff that we should always be open to new ideas and we always have room to grow professionally.

One former colleague said ... Working along side this person I learned to work hard for families and to always access quality services and interventions to help juveniles become productive and law abiding citizens and to never give up on families.

Another said, "She is always willing to share her time, energy and talents to help others and whether she realizes it or not I've adopted her as my unofficial mentor. We've never really discussed it, but I always seek out her guidance and run my major concerns by her. She always has words of wisdom and encouragement to share and I can always count on her to give honest feedback. She has helped me stay true to my beliefs while continuing to strive to make a difference in the lives of the families we serve. Her influence and expertise extend beyond the Court Service Unit. With her advice and encouragement, I've been able to stay focused, challenge "the way we've always done business" and introduce new concepts. I do not know how she does all she does in the same 24 hours I have, but she does, and she does it extremely well".

Under this person's leadership, in 1995 her court service unit began participating in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (or JDAI) and began to focus their efforts on safely reducing an overreliance on secure confinement. Like everything in which this person has been involved, the efforts proved to be successful and detention admissions in this jurisdiction have decreased by more than 35%. Despite those impressive numbers, never satisfied that our work with children and families is done, this person continues to forge ahead and is using that success as a catalyst for broader system reform, particularly in the area of racial disparities. Efforts in this area have included community-wide, DMC focused town hall meetings to engage community stakeholders.

This individual has not only demonstrated significant leadership right here in Virginia, but has also provided leadership at the national level, presenting at national conferences and being selected to participate as a member of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Applied Leadership Network.

When this person retires one day, she will leave behind a legacy. She has been intentional in recognizing and cultivating leaders. She has groomed a generation of young employees, given them opportunities to grow as professionals, and prepared them well to be future leaders.

In addition to all of the passion and extra time this award winner gives to her profession she is also actively involved in the community. She serves on numerous task forces and work groups and participates in many church activities.

It is my privilege to present VJJA's 2009 Meritorious Service Award in the category of Administration to Norfolk Court Service Unit Director **CLAUDETTE OVERTON**".

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AWARD RECIPIENT CONTACT INFORMATION:

The award recipient can be reached at: Claudette Overton, VA Dept of Juvenile Justice, 4th District Court Service Unit, 800 East City Hall Avenue, 3rd Floor, Norfolk, VA 23510, 757.664.7601, Claudette.Overton@djj.virginia.gov

AWARD SPONSOR CONTACT INFORMATION:

Virginia Juvenile Justice Association (VJJA), Beth Mohler Stinnett, President, 804.786.0486; president@vja.org

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PHOTOS:

(see attached and embedded photos)

Background: Each year the Virginia Juvenile Justice Association recognizes professionals who have made extraordinary contributions in the juvenile justice field. Meritorious awards are presented in the areas of: Administration, Court Services, Residential Care and Community Service. Recipients are recognized before their peers at VJJA's Fall Juvenile Justice Training Institute, held annually in November.

About VJJA: Founded in 1966, the Virginia Juvenile Justice Association (VJJA) is an organization comprised of professionals representing court services, the judiciary, indigent defense, detention homes, juvenile correctional facilities, halfway houses, group homes, mental health, education, law enforcement, social work, and others with an interest in youth and family services. The organization is administered by an elected board of directors and is committed to child advocacy and advancing the professional interests and competencies of its members. State and local training events are held, with a statewide conference held annually in November. Learn more at www.VJJA.org.