



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner

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DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

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GOOD NEWS @ DJJ:

New Year's Resolution at DJJ Sets New Volunteer Record at Project Open Hand

(ATLANTA – GA) It's a quarterly custom for Staff at the DJJ Office of Health Services (OHS). Each quarter they pick an Atlanta area community service and sign up for an office outing. But this New Year's the OHS Staff made a resolution to select a volunteer service that would benefit a broader community and it brought them to the kitchens at Open Hand Atlanta as volunteers.

For more than 27 years the Open Hand Project has made a community commitment to provide healthy food and dietary education to help our Atlanta neighbors prevent or better manage critical and chronic disease. Open Hand describes their project as more than preparing meals. They express their goal as 'doing the right thing' because many Atlantans cannot afford proper nutrition and because some are too sick to prepare good food on their own.

When DJJ's Health Service Staff members volunteered to help prepare packed lunches and dinners for the meal delivery service, Administrative Operations Coordinator Alik Turner was one of those DJJ volunteers who put on a hair net, gloves and apron and pitched in on the lunch time assembly line.

"I am a huge advocate for giving back to my community," Alik said. "So volunteering at Open Hand fell right in line with my belief to serve. Knowing I was able to help get fresh and healthy meals to those in need was very empowering."

Lauren Gean is DJJ's Food Service Administrator. Like Alik Turner, she has worked at the Department of Juvenile Justice for two years. Lauren found this outlet for her volunteer work making a tangible difference in her community and building a new cohesiveness among her colleagues on Staff.

"Volunteering at Open Hand reminded me that it's fun and fulfilling to volunteer and provide public service. I enjoyed our work at Open Hand tremendously," Lauren said.

Over the years, with dedicated help from thousands of local volunteers like Alik and Lauren, Project Open Hand Atlanta has supplied more than 25-million nutritious home-delivered meals for thousands of Atlanta's most vulnerable men, women and children who might otherwise go without.

(MORE MORE MORE)

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

(PAGE TWO TWO TWO)

Now the DDJ team counts themselves in good company along with Open Hand's most notable volunteer, Sir Elton John, who recently lined up with other volunteers to help deliver the project's milestone 25-millionth meal.

DJJ's Health Service Staff Director Ben Harvill says he observed the OHS volunteer team build camaraderie and a sense of civic pride as his six staff members packed more than 700 cups of sweet potatoes, 350 pounds of Brussel sprouts and 1,400 fillets of fish for an Open Hand same day delivery.

"The Health Services team helped the staff at Open Hand actually exceed their production quota by preparing 1,400 meals in just three and a half hours from 9-AM to 1230-PM," said Director Harvill. "This hands-on experience was even more gratifying for the team than our usual projects collecting charitable gifts or funds. Working together for a selfless cause brought all of us closer and also helped with team unity back at the office."

Administrative Operations Coordinator DeShawn Henderson also teamed-up with DJJ's Health Service volunteers. ***"Volunteering gave me a greater respect not only for the people in need but also for the individuals that volunteer full time because it shows how selfless they are,"*** DeShawn said. ***"I thoroughly enjoyed the experience because we got to give back and enjoy time with our co-workers outside the office."***

Part time staff member Andrea Stroud just joined the DJJ team in December, in time to help her six colleagues set a new volunteer record in the Open Hand kitchen. ***"It was wonderful that our short 3 hours of service touched over 1600 people in the metro Atlanta area,"*** she said proudly. ***"Our team set a record for the number of meals prepared before lunch!"***

For Alike Turner, that record-setting commitment provided an uncommon sense of personal accomplishment. ***"Knowing that I achieved that with my fellow co-workers showed me that I'm working for an amazing organization."***

She was so impressed, Alike plans to bring along her son next volunteer visit. Now Director Harvill and the OHS team are challenging other divisions at the Department of Juvenile Justice to sign-up as volunteer partners to touch and nourish as many lives as possible and try to break the new DJJ volunteer meal preparation record.

DJJ Commissioner Avery D. Niles commended the department Health Services staff for sending their volunteer team on a mission to nurture the community. Commissioner Niles said volunteerism forms the cornerstone of a special Georgia volunteer project launched by Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal to give back to the communities they love. The Deal family believes community outreach and involvement are the foundation of their volunteer project called, 'With a Servant's Heart'.

The Commissioner said he has adopted the First Lady's goal that every Georgian, no matter what their background or circumstance, should commit to creating awareness for the importance of volunteerism by allowing one's actions to speak louder than words and give 'with a servant's heart'. Commissioner Niles quoted First Lady Sandra Deal saying, ***"When we reach out to become involved in helping mold a new beginning for another person, we bring hope for that individual and we in turn receive joy."***

For more information about "With a Servant's Heart" please visit <https://gov.georgia.gov/initiatives> or go to <http://nathandeal.org/servantsheart/>.

To learn more about Open Hand Atlanta, visit them on the web at www.projectopenhand.org. To volunteer, contact them at <http://openhandatlanta.volunteerhub.com/events/index> or call 404-872-6947.

To view a short article and photos of the DJJ Office of Health Services volunteer team, visit our Project Open Hand Atlanta kitchen News & Views story on the web. DJJ Photos may be used for news stories with photo credit to the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice.

(MORE MORE MORE)

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Shown here are the DJJ - OHS Staff who volunteered.. Stephanie Vera, Lauren Gean, Nicholas Woods, Alikea Turner, Deshawn Henderson, Andrea Stroud, and Director Ben Harvill.

(END RELEASE)

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