

# UPDATES

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE UP CENTER

SUMMER 2016

## Don't Judge a Book By Its Cover

Juanita Rivera-Gordon may be petite, but she's made a mighty impact in Norfolk. Over the last 10 years the 58-year-old Up Center Books supervisor has guided over 400 men, women, and youth beyond past incarceration, substance abuse, and even homelessness to not only become job-ready but to also reconnect with their family and community.

One reason she's been so successful is because she has walked in their shoes.

When Juanita first came to Up Center Books, it was to enter the bookstore's workforce development program. Her criminal record, combined with the battle to stay clean after a 17-year drug addiction, made it nearly impossible to get her life back. "I wanted to get back everything I lost," recalls Juanita. "To do that, I needed a place to live, something to eat, I needed a job. But I refused to give up."

For four months Juanita worked hard learning organization, data entry and customer service skills. "I didn't know a thing about computers, but they stuck with me," she said. She was hired as an internet sales specialist after graduation and promoted to supervisor a year later.

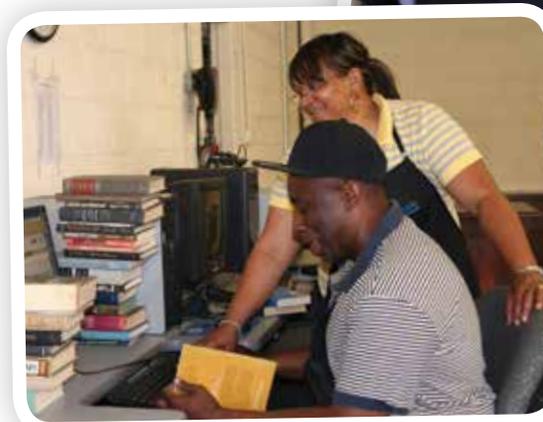
Darfeis Williams, a fellow Up Center Books employee, credits Juanita with helping him complete the Responsible Fatherhood program. "She's been more than a supervisor; she's been like a mentor." Darfeis learned life skills in the training program as well, and now the 39-year-old enjoys a happier, stronger relationship with his wife and children. He paid it forward by committing to the Up Center Books' Face Forward program, helping nearly 130 at-risk young people touched by the Juvenile Justice System. They learned job skills and set life goals that steer them toward a future of economic stability and healthy relationships.

The impact of programs like Responsible Fatherhood and Face Forward go beyond program numbers. Men, women, and young people who struggled with life are now better spouses, parents and employees. Families are financially stable. For them, the cycle of crime and poverty has been broken.

While the federal funding for the Responsible Fatherhood program has ended, The Up Center is committed to providing the training and support that helps to change lives. A series of skills workshops based on the program models will soon begin at Huntersville Community Center in support of the Norfolk Nighthawks program. Partnerships like this will allow the programs to evolve and grow, offering opportunities for many more to find stability and strengthening our community.



*Left: Juanita helping a Responsible Fatherhood participant on the computer, Top: Darfeis enjoying spending time with his daughter.*



# Congratulations Face Forward: Cycle 8 Graduates

The Up Center's Face Forward program is a 10-week Juvenile Diversion Program. Participants learn job readiness skills and participate in on-the-job training. Cycle 8 participants were able to obtain certifications in Food Handling or Forklift Driving. Each one received case management and adult mentoring. They were actively involved in community service and attended outings at Norfolk State University and Youth Career Services. They successfully graduated from the program on June 13, 2016. Congratulations, Cycle 8!



*Marquis Epps, Armani McCaskill, DeAsia Spruill, Dion McElroy, Cyei Carter, Not Pictured: Laquan Caffee*

## Thank YOU for Stepping Up!

**Thank you** to all of the sponsors, volunteers, participants and spectators who came out on April 30th to make Step Up for The Up Center the best one yet! Without you, we would not have been able to raise tens of thousands of dollars to provide vital services to anyone in Hampton Roads looking for resources and tools to help their family live happy and healthy lives.

We would also like to thank Step Up Board Chair, Sara Salter, The Westin Virginia Beach Town Center, The Westin Residences, and Lululemon for making the event such a success.

**We hope to see you in 2017!**



*Team Red Hot Chili Steppers celebrating at the top!*



*Thanks Mike Yabba and Team My Ride for being such huge supporters of Step Up!*

# Mattress Firm Supports Virginia's Foster Kids

In June there were 5,326 children and teens living in foster care in Virginia. 982 are right here in Hampton Roads.\* Many have suffered the effects of poverty, neglect and abuse. Studies show that for many foster children, the challenges are just beginning — they face mental and physical challenges, lack stability at home and at school, and struggle to keep pace academically with their peers.

Mattress Firm has joined forces exclusively with The Up Center in Virginia in an effort to help foster kids beat the odds.

With your help, we can provide foster children with the little things that often make a big difference — school supplies and sports shoes, properly fitting clothing, comfy new pajamas, or a gift during the holidays.

Donations can be dropped off at all Mattress Firm locations throughout Hampton Roads.

**MATTRESS FIRM**<sup>®</sup>  
**Foster Kids**  
**2016 Drives**

**SCHOOL SUPPLY DRIVE**  
**JULY 11 - SEPTEMBER 4**

**SHOE DRIVE**  
**SEPTEMBER 12 - OCTOBER 31**

**SECRET SANTA TOY DRIVE**  
**NOVEMBER 1 - DECEMBER 18**

\*According to Virginia Department of Social Services



*"What do you mean they don't make bowling balls for paws?"*



*Lifeguard Agent is on duty while campers swim at Camp Horizon*

The Up Center would like to welcome its newest furry employee, Agent, to the team! His summer project is to provide smiles and cheer to our youth and young adults with disabilities enjoying time at Camp

Interested in learning how you can make an impact in our community?  
Visit us online at [www.TheUpCenter.org](http://www.TheUpCenter.org), or call 757.965.8650.

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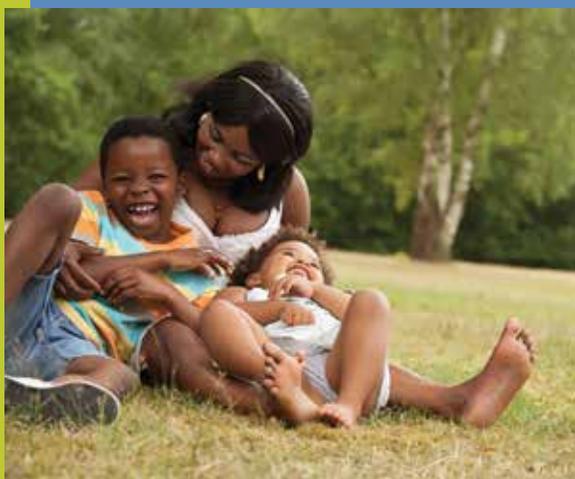


Community Partner



## SUMMER ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

From The Up Center's Parents as Teachers Program



The weather is warm and designed for summer fun! Parents As Teachers reminds parents to get out and enjoy the outdoor fun with their children.

- Play catch
- Swing a bat
- Catch a butterfly
- Enjoy some water fun at the beach or pool
- Create a masterpiece on the sidewalk using chalk
- Build a sandcastle at the beach.
- Blow bubbles

*Want to learn more about The Up Center's Parents as Teachers Program?  
Visit [TheUpCenter.org](http://TheUpCenter.org) or call (757)-397-2121*