

[https://fredericksburg.com/news/local/fredericksburg-area-criminal-justice-reform-task-force-seeks-mentors-for-youth/article\\_7e233bfd-c1a5-5b75-ba06-788f78ea1f63.html](https://fredericksburg.com/news/local/fredericksburg-area-criminal-justice-reform-task-force-seeks-mentors-for-youth/article_7e233bfd-c1a5-5b75-ba06-788f78ea1f63.html)

ALERT TOP STORY

# Fredericksburg-area criminal justice reform task force seeks mentors for youth

AdeleUphaus  
Oct 20, 2021



Members of the Criminal Justice Reform Task Force for Planning District 16 meet virtually April 5.

Submitted

AdeleUphaus

**T**he regional criminal justice reform task force is seeking 10 mentors from the community to offer guidance and support to the children of incarcerated parents.

The task force’s prevention and education committee has identified 10 local children to be the first beneficiaries of the mentoring program, which it hopes to launch this winter.

“We’ve got to catch our kids now,” said Juanita Shanks, founder and CEO of Failsafe ERA, a nonprofit that helps families affected by incarceration.

Shanks worked to build a coalition dedicated to criminal justice reform in Planning District 16—Fredericksburg and the counties of Stafford, Spotsylvania, Caroline and King George.

The task force, which has been meeting monthly since November 2020, is made up of representatives from the Spotsylvania Sheriff’s Office; the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania Commonwealth’s Attorney offices; Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania government; the Rappahannock Regional Jail; Germanna Community College; the Thurman Brisben Center; the Spotsylvania NAACP; and others.

The task force is working on restorative justice, sentencing reform and successful reentry into the community following incarceration—but another of its goals is preventing incarceration before it happens.

The mentoring program will be the first initiative of the task force’s prevention and education committee.

“If we don’t help [these children] now, it will affect the community in the long run,” Shanks said.

Having an incarcerated parent is one of the adverse childhood experiences—or ACEs—that have been shown to increase the risk of chronic health problems, mental illness and substance use in adulthood.

The risk can be reduced with **protective factors** that counteract the ACEs, and a caring adult outside the family to serve as a mentor and role model is one of these protective factors.

Children who have been identified for the task force’s mentoring program will complete an eight-week resiliency course—**Bounce Back**—with facilitator Lori Gregory before beginning their mentorship.

“We talk about present trauma and any future trauma,” Gregory said. “Kids learn relaxation techniques so they don’t go immediately to reacting. And just knowing there are others like them helps them feel connected with each other.”

Following the course, which consists of individual and group sessions, the children, who are in grades K–6, will begin meeting with their mentors.

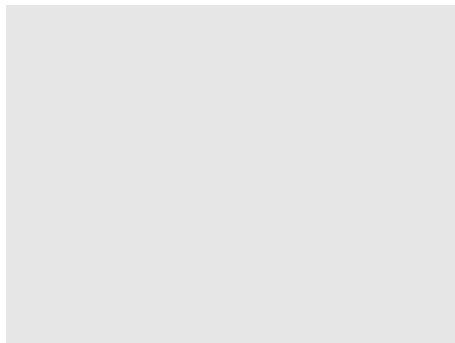
Shanks said the expectation is for the commitment to last for at least one year, several hours per week.

Mentors will be trained and go through a background check with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Fredericksburg.

Big Brothers was founded 100 years ago out of the need to offer an alternative path to youth facing the criminal justice system, according to the organization’s website.

Shanks said that aside from passing the background check, there are few requirements for mentors other than willingness, time and “being supportive of second chances.”

Those interested in becoming a mentor should contact FailSafe at 540/479-3021 or **[failsafe-era.org](https://failsafe-era.org)**.



Shanks

---

Adele Uphaus–Conner:

540/735-1973

**[auphaus@freelancestar.com](mailto:auphaus@freelancestar.com)**

**[@flsadele](#)**

## AdeleUphaus

I have covered education, local government and social services for the Free Lance-Star since 2016.

---

---