

# Features

## LENDING A HELPING HAND

# GWU students reach out to community youth

Meg Elliot  
Pilot staff

As college students, it is easy to get so caught up in our own lives that we forget about others with problems far worse than ours. But there are a few concerned Bulldogs who remember and volunteer with the Youth Assistance Program in Shelby.

The Youth Assistance Program, or YAP, was founded in 1982 by Cleveland County Governor Jim Hunt as his "One-on-One" program for at-risk youths in the community. The program grew in 1988 when local businessmen saw the need for guidance for youth in Cleveland County.

A youth is determined to be "at-risk" when they have been seen by the court for misdemeanors such as truancy, vandalism, theft and other petty crimes. Each youth is paired up with a mentor who spends about a year of quality time with them. They meet for at least two hours of 'quality time' a week. Mentors are adults 18 years old or older who have gone through an application and training process and are matched up with an at-risk youth.

Rhonda Janes is in charge of recruiting people who want to be mentors. According to Janes, juvenile crime is declining because of the mentoring program.

"It is crazy how two hours a week helps," Janes said.

In addition to the mentoring program, YAP offers parenting and communication classes for families. Many of the students in the parenting classes are parents who have had their children taken away. The communication classes teach families of at-risk children how to communicate better to improve life for the family as a whole.

There are currently six Gardner-Webb students matched up as mentors, and nine others are in the application process. If you are interested in being a mentor, please contact Janes at (704) 482-2315.



Shannon Sheppard (left), a senior at GWU, is a volunteer with the Youth Assistance Program. Shannon meets with her 'little sister,' Tonya Lovelace, several times a month throughout the second year. Last weekend, Tonya spent Friday evening at Shannon's apartment.

Photo courtesy of Shannon Sheppard




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