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COMMUNITY

Program helps educate Oak Hill youth

By Ethan Rothstein
Special to The Eclipse

Every Sunday, about 25 University of Maryland students voyage to Laurel, Md. to tutor youths who don't experience the luxuries many know: a home-cooked meal, wearing their own clothes, going outside.

All three encompass freedom.

These youths are residents of the Oak Hill Youth Center, a juvenile detention facility for young men, and these volunteers view themselves as tickets back to the "real world."

The Prison to College Pipeline Program only became an official student group this semester, but already is gaining momentum as an organization with a purpose – to end the cycle of minorities in prison.

"One hundred percent of the young people at the center are of African or Latin

descent," said Kenny Bridgers, a University of Maryland alumnus and the youth organizer for Justice 4 D.C.

Youth, the pipeline's parent organization.

"We try to come in with a culturally relevant curriculum that helps young people improve their literacy while at the same time gives them a little history."

History, like an easy-to-read biography of Malcolm X, according to Bridgers, or a book about the Black Panthers - all people who have been incarcerated but still have gone on to do big things.

Amanda Richardson, a senior criminol-

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ogy and criminal justice major, volunteers with the program and enjoys helping those at the center accomplish their goals. For the volunteers, every small moment begets big ambition.

"My favorite part of the program is being with the scholars and learning about their lives," she said. "Since my scholar is planning on taking the GED, I am going to base my lessons on preparation for the exam."

However, just as important as the education the scholars receive is their emotional progress.

"At the end of the session, we get into a

circle and we go around and say one thing we learned and a number or word describing how we feel," Richardson said. "Not all of the scholars participate, but when they offer a serious response it makes me feel like the program really is helping to educate the young men at the center."

On April 15, Stamp Student Union will host a talent showcase called "The Pipeline of Possibility" to raise awareness about the D.C. justice system. A panel discussion will be on April 22.

Now that the program is an official student group, Richardson expects it to continue to grow. "We will have more people to educate the public on issues concerning at-risk/incarcerated youth and their families," she said.