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At Arlington facility, two detox counselors have been there from the beginning

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Posted: Monday, April 21, 2014 11:45 am | Updated: 12:42 pm, Mon Apr 21, 2014.

by **SCOTT McCAFFREY, Staff Writer** | [0 comments](#)



Simon Sampson and Lee Johnson are celebrating 20 years of service at the Residential Program Center in Arlington.

Simon Sampson and Lee Johnson have been fixtures at the Residential Program Center, an Arlington facility operated by Volunteers of America Chesapeake, for the entire 20 years the facility has been in operation. And their collaborative efforts in addiction treatment go back even further.

Located on Columbia Pike, the facility is the only comprehensive substance-abuse program based in Arlington. It includes a 12-bed detoxification unit and a 10-bed early-recovery unit, as well as a 44-bed facility to house the homeless, along with educational and employment services. All told, more than 400 local residents per year receive support at the facility.

But that is today. Twenty years ago, the program was just getting started.

Sampson and Johnson were working as counselors at the Second Genesis program in 1994 when they came to interview for positions in the soon-to-open Residential Program Center, or RPC.

"The building was probably almost finished, but we didn't have one client," Johnson recalled in a recent interview.

Perhaps the lack of clients was just as well, as there wasn't really even a treatment program in place yet. But Sampson and Johnson soon rectified that.

"We created the syllabus – we put the meat on the bone," Sampson said.

"On the one hand, it was a great experience; on the other, it was a frustrating experience at times," Johnson added. "It was like having a brand-new house but no

furniture in it."

Much has changed in the world of addiction treatment over the past two decades, Johnson noted.

"We're seeing a lot of mental-health clients as well as addiction," he said. "It's a real challenge."

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It's that challenge that continues to motivate them, Sampson said, to help clients get "reconnected to family and society as a whole."

Treatment has evolved, too – there is even the use of acupuncture to support the nervous system. Writing-therapy, garden-planting and yoga are all part of the RPC mix.

And having two staff members who have been on hand from the very beginning also has been a benefit.

"Part of recovery is stability, so the fact that we've been here so long helps provide that stability and consistency for the clients," Sampson said. "Sometimes we're the only ones they have."

As part of its 20th anniversary, the RPC was honored by a General Assembly resolution patroned by state Sen. Barbara Favola, noting the legislature's "respect and admiration for its unwavering commitment to helping less fortunate residents of Northern Virginia aspire to a better life."

Tours of the Residential Program Center are offered monthly, with the next one slated for Thursday, May 1 from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. For information and to register, e-mail Joe Onyebuchi at jonyebuchi@arlingtonva.us.

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