

# Community-Wide Ex-Offender Reentry Task Force Final Report

## Children and Families Work Group Summary of Findings and Recommendations May 2009

**Co-Chairs: Gayle Bullard, Assistant Director, MCDJFS Children Services Division  
Rev. Robert Bishop, Dayton Christian Center**

### Charge

- Research and assess the challenges facing families and children of the formerly incarcerated individuals reentering Montgomery County;
- Conduct analysis of local/national programs and “best practice” models;
- Identify and review effective local and national programs and “best practice” models that have overcome barriers and led to stable families and children;
- Make program recommendations to Task Force;
- Identify and recommend sustainable funding to support stable families/children programming;
- Establish programs/services focused on connecting children/families to the incarcerated person prior to release; and
- Work to establish process and appropriate protocols for identifying the ‘family’ of each offender that will return from the State or Federal prison system to Montgomery County.

### Work Group Membership

Name	Organization
Gayle Bullard, Co-Chair	MCDJFS, Children Services Division
Rev. Robert Bishop, Co-Chair	Dayton Christian Center
PamelaJune Banks-Anderson, D.Min	National Restoration Team
Dr. Jerrie Bascome McGill	PowerNet of Dayton
Judge Anthony Capizzi	Montgomery County Juvenile Court
Sandra deWeaver	MCDJFS, Children Services Division
Commissioner Judy Dodge	Montgomery County
Angeline Goodwine	SCLC
Maribeth Graham	Iddings Foundation
Lesley Keown	MCDJFS, Children Services Division
Tamica London	MCDJFS, Child Support Enforcement Division
Chris Olinsky	OSU Extension
Craig Powell	PowerNet of Dayton
Phylliss Robinson-Ralph	Girl Scouts
Rev. Jesse J. Watson	Bethsaida M. B. Church

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### Overarching Themes of the Group's Recommendations

- **Families need a central resource or guide to reentry services and programs.**
- **The female population entering prisons is increasing.**
- **Visitation should be a priority. Children and families are impacted by separation caused by incarceration.**
- **Transportation should not be a barrier to maintaining family relationships and involvement in services.**

### Part I: What We Know and What We've Learned

This has been a very interesting journey for our committee. We have come to learn the following in our preparation for this presentation:

1. **Women who are Incarcerated** – We discovered that a large percentage of people entering institutions are female. Most of these women are also mothers, making it especially difficult to maintain healthy family dynamics. We discovered that some of the reasons behind an increase in female incarcerations is the fact that more equality between men and women is being considered in sentencing.
2. **Average sentencing time in Ohio Institutions** – Our committee became aware that the majority of sentences in the State of Ohio are 2 years or less. Our follow-up insight into this discovery was that many people incarcerated in Ohio will have to create a totally new life and lifestyle after a relatively brief time in prison. We also discovered that because of collateral sanctions, significant changes would need to be made in housing, employment and other directions in life; again for a relatively small amount of time incarcerated.
3. **Visitation** – Many barriers exist to visitation, including scheduling, resourcing, transportation and the desire to see or not see the person incarcerated. Often times, visitation is limited either by circumstance or the personalities and dynamics of all involved parties.
4. **Transportation** – We discovered that transportation and access are huge barriers to healthy family development when a loved one is incarcerated. The cost and availability of quality transportation limits many from staying connected to their family member. Part of our recommendation involves some creative methods and ideas in the area of healthy access to visitation and future family development.
5. **Community Programs** – There are many programs going on in the County, but these programs are not centrally coordinated, i.e. churches, community centers and PowerNet to name a few. We need a central resource to identify what services are being provided.

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### Part II: Team's Recommendations

#### Recommendation # 1

**Target Population:** Families, Incarcerated Individuals ready to be released and Recently Released Individuals.

**Problem Statement:** Families, Incarcerated Individuals and Recently Released Persons do not have a central source of information or guide to critical re-entry services and programs.

**Desired Outcomes:** The identified target population will have an accessible, understandable, comprehensive guide to re-entry services.

**Goal:** Development of a Resource Guide for Families and Restored Citizens:

#### Strategies:

- **1-A** Develop a hard copy of the resource guide
- **1-B** Develop an on-line resource guide and/or support a clearing house or database of effective practices, programs and service delivery strategies.
- **1-C** Include links to other agencies as part of the on-line resource.
- **1-D** Focus on resources in Montgomery County but identify agencies that serve surrounding counties and rural communities.
- **1-E** Include information about exploring and accessing benefits including health care.
- **1-F** Identify any "1<sup>st</sup> stop" post-release service programs.

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## Children and Families Work Group Summary of Findings and Recommendations May 2009

### Part II: Team's Recommendations (continued)

#### Recommendation # 2

**Target Population:** Women Pre- and Post- Release.

**Problem Statement:** Our group recommends an increased focus on women as the number of women in state prisons has grown exponentially in the past 3 decades, growing at more than twice the rate of the male population. The female prison population has grown 757% between 1977 and 2004 based on national statistics. In Ohio, the female prison population increased by 800 or 25% between 2005 and 2007.

**Desired Outcome:** Ensure that Women have access to services to meet the specific needs of a female population.

**Goal:** Increase services to Women Pre- and Post- Release.

#### Strategies:

- **2-A** Develop a mentoring program/group for women.
- **2-B** Identify programs already occurring in the facilities.
- **2-C** Address a variety of education issues including:  
Skill Development, Conflict Resolution, Domestic Violence, Esteem Building, Employment and Education.
- **2-D** Access to Legal Services.
- **2-E** Access to Cognitive Behavioral Counseling.

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## Children and Families Work Group Summary of Findings and Recommendations May 2009

### Part II: Team's Recommendations (continued)

#### Recommendation #3

**Target Population:** Children, Families, Support Persons and Incarcerated and Recently Released Persons.

**Problem Statement:** Children, Families and Support systems are impacted by the separation caused by the incarceration of any member of the family system. The incarcerated parent often experiences strained relationships with their children, communities and society. It is important to focus on the entire family as children do best when their families do well.

**Desired Outcomes:** Children, Families, Support Systems and Incarcerated and Recently Released Individuals will have the assistance and support they need to develop strategies that reduce tension and conflict in their relationships and help them develop positive healthy ways of relating to one another.

**Goal:** To build/re-build/maintain healthy relationships and supports while incarcerated and post-release: Family Members need support to reconcile their feelings about the incarceration, heal the loss, hurt, confusion and damage.

#### Strategies:

- **3-A** Develop programs to maintain visitation and communication between the child and his or her incarcerated parent to strengthen the parent-child relationship.
- **3-B** Identify programs already occurring in the facilities.
- **3-C** Provide services before, during and after incarceration to help build stronger family relationships, manage conflict and strengthen parenting skills.
- **3-D** Identify children with incarcerated parents and provide services and support to reduce the stigma, shame and trauma of separation from a parent due to incarceration.
- **3-E** Develop public policies and systems to reduce the many barriers to visitation and contact.
- **3-F** Develop a program that helps train the professionals and others who interact with the children and families of incarcerated parents i.e., Juvenile Court, PowerNet, Mental Health, Education, Corrections, Child Welfare, and School Systems
- **3-G** Establish some type of Family Liaison that completes an assessment of the family and the incarcerated parent. This person would help the family understand prison policies and barriers and link them to service providers for transportation to the prison, counseling, mentoring, support groups, economic support, etc.

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### Part II: Team's Recommendations (continued)

#### Recommendation #4

**Target Population:** Children, Families, Support Persons and Incarcerated and Recently Released Persons.

**Problem Statement:** Transportation is a major barrier to accessing and maintaining involvement in services.

**Desired Outcome:** Families, Support Persons and Incarcerated and Recently Released Persons will be able to participate in services, visitation, education and employment, increasing the level of successful transition back to their families and the community.

**Goal:** Eliminate transportation as a barrier to maintaining relationships and involvement in services.

#### Strategies:

- **4-A** Resolve issues of access, availability, and affordability regarding transportation.
- **4-B** Develop programs for children and families which allow and encourage visitation and various facilities

**Possible Solutions:** Video Conferencing, Ride Share Program, specifically for transportation to prisons, Stipends to assist with the cost of transportation, including maintaining personal vehicles.

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### Appendices & References

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Ohio Prison Population Projections and Intake Estimates FY2008- FY2016. Bureau of Research Office of Policy and Offender Reentry, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction