



**For Immediate Release:** December 21, 2010

**Contact:** Andrea Kruse or Kim Parsell

614-466-9854 / 614-395-2122 / 614-623-2209

[Andrea.Kruse@dys.ohio.gov](mailto:Andrea.Kruse@dys.ohio.gov) / [Kim.Parsell@dys.ohio.gov](mailto:Kim.Parsell@dys.ohio.gov)

## **Ohio Department of Youth Services Uses Technology to Engage Families**

**'Virtual' Visits Link Youth to Home during Holiday Season**

**Columbus, Ohio** — The Department of Youth Services (DYS) is piloting a cost efficient program that allows youth to visit with their family members, virtually, via the intranet.

The DYS Toledo Regional Parole Office and the Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility (IRJCF) in Massillon are now able to provide families the opportunity to remotely visit with youth during their stay at DYS. The Video Communicator pilot uses laptop cameras and webcams to help keep families engaged in a youth's treatment and programming while at DYS. It also assists in transitioning the youth back into the community.

“Allowing a youth to interact with his or her family, who may not have the resources to make an in-person visit, is invaluable, especially during the holiday season. This new opportunity for family involvement helps to maintain relationships while saving time and money,” said DYS Interim Director Chris Money. “The Video Communicator pilot also allows youth to get to know their parole officers before they are released.”

Together, parole officers from the Toledo region and Social Workers at IRCJF work to schedule virtual family engagement meetings between youth and families from the Toledo Regional area, which encompasses 21 counties. Plans are underway to expand the use of the Video Communicator to allow youth to meet the service providers they will be in contact with upon release.

DYS is the juvenile corrections system for the state of Ohio and is statutorily mandated to confine felony offenders, ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts. DYS operates five correctional and rehabilitation facilities and provides parole services from five regional sites.

###