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*Improving Ohio's future by habilitating youth
and empowering families and communities*



Transforming Ohio's Juvenile Justice System

Background

Over the last five years, the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) has been reforming to more effectively serve youthful offenders and help them change their lives. At one time, facilities were crowded, options for serving youth were limited, and treatment was questionable. In many cases, youth left the system in worse shape than when they entered it.

Reform

The solution has been widespread reform efforts that are impacting every aspect of the department, including youth assessment and placement, treatment within the facilities, processes for release and reentry, and parole supervision. Reducing admissions to large facilities, consistent with public safety, and building community capacity are the foundation of reform. With a smarter, not tougher, approach, DHS works to divert low to moderate risk youth to community options when appropriate and serve higher risk youth in larger DHS facilities with a focus on expanded programming and increased youth accountability.

DYS Today

DYS is a leaner, more efficient agency striving to keep Ohio safe by helping the most aggressive youth receive effective treatment and rehabilitation during an average one-year stay. The agency is serving youth closer to home when appropriate and engaging DHS Interdisciplinary Teams, families and communities to foster a safer, more positive environment. While this work is challenging, recidivism rates are trending downward, and these young Ohioans are succeeding in the community.

Next Steps

While we celebrate the transformation that has taken place, we also acknowledge that there is still more to do. As we roll out our Back-to-Basics initiative at all of our sites, our focus is on creating safe and constructive settings where youth can change their lives. Together we are targeting the challenges that come with managing difficult youth:

- **Violence reduction:** assaults on youth and staff are unacceptable, and youth will be held accountable
- **Zero tolerance for sexual exposure:** we will improve youth's pro-social skills by making it clear that sexual exposure is inappropriate and intolerable
- **Reduction of gang activity:** since many of the youth in our care admit to gang involvement, we will increase our gang interventions to reduce active and disruptive gang activity

All of our work is aimed at helping our young people. By maintaining the reforms that are in place and focusing on secure environments, we support **successful youth reentry** and will continue to see **recidivism trend downward**. In the end, we are building a safer Ohio.

Appreciation

All of our staff are appreciated for their dedication and persistence in improving our system over the past five years. In the coming months, we will be making **staff recognition** a higher priority. We also extend our gratitude to our broad base of support from family members, volunteers, courts, community providers, advocates, legislators, sister agencies and consultants.

