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Responsible Public Policy

The Department of Youth Services (DYS) touches the lives of thousands of youth in Ohio. Beyond youth in DHS facilities and those on parole, DHS funds and supports over 610 direct service programs throughout the state offering nearly 110,000 youth (based on annual program admissions) opportunities and services to effect positive change.



Buckeye Reach

Every-other-Saturday, approximately 30 student volunteers from The Ohio State University load into vans, some headed to Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility (SJCF) and others headed to Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility (CJCF). The students, who major in fields including pre-med, social work, engineering and law, spend three hours providing peer-to-peer mentoring, critical thinking and educational programming to youth through a partnership called Buckeye Reach.

Buckeye Reach, (Relationships and Education in Action through Community and Hope), kicked off in the fall of 2012 with development and design input from the "Wise Men" Student Council at CJCF and OSU students. Book clubs, movie reviews, debates, games and meaningful discussions in small groups provide the opportunity for youth to build critical thinking skills. The Buckeye Reach volunteers are regarded as peer mentors who encourage educational goals and serve as positive role models for a total of 40 youth. Many of the OSU students also serve as pen pals, encouraging literacy and writing skills and further developing relationships with youth.

As with all DHS volunteers, a training and screening process is in place for Buckeye Reach volunteers. All students are at least 18 years old and are not currently under probation or parole. DHS provided volunteer training to all of the students, and faculty at OSU has provided additional education and support, including debriefing with students following the Saturday visits.

Youth have shared that the interaction with Buckeye Reach provides them with an opportunity "to matter" and belong to a positive group. One observer shared, "Buckeye Reach transforms the facility into a college classroom. It looks like college kids having a discussion." The OSU students, mostly undergraduate, provide educational inspiration by sharing their life experiences and journey through higher education. Volunteers from OSU have stated that Buckeye Reach gives them the opportunity to give back while enhancing their learning about social issues, especially juvenile justice, beyond the classroom.



Pictured: Volunteers from Buckeye Reach

I would like to thank all of the OSU student volunteers for their commitment to our youth and for giving of their time on Saturdays. Special thanks to Dr. Patricia Cunningham, Director of Social Change for the Office of Student Life, who leads this endeavor. Finally, I would like to

extend my congratulations to Sophie Tullier, recently named OSU's Outstanding Graduate Student. Sophie, along with fellow volunteer Katie Dean Williams, assists Dr. Cunningham in coordinating the logistical aspects of Buckeye Reach.

