



August 2014 Reflecting on a Year of Accomplishments

This is the time of year for reflecting on the year gone by, the fiscal year that is.

Our agency took its mission to new heights during 2013-2014. There's no doubt our work is having a profound and positive impact on our youth, families and communities.

There have been many hurdles that have come before us over the last 12 months, but we worked together and overcame the challenges. It's important for me to recognize every one of our 1,064 DYS employees. Our success is the result of your hard work and dedication.

During the last year, we developed new partnerships, expanded current programs, introduced new ones, streamlined a process, testified before a panel, closed a facility and opened a new office. We are not the same agency we were a year ago. So much has changed.

One of the toughest decisions I had to make was to close Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility (SJCF) in May. As you may know, successful reforms to treat more youth in community settings led to a 29% drop in population from 2011 to 2013. Presently, we are collaborating with the Department of Administrative Services to sell the Delaware County property.

Also in May, DYS and plaintiffs for two court cases entered into an agreement regarding seclusion and the youth on the mental health caseload. This settlement will pave the way for juvenile justice reform and reduce the amount of time a youth spends in seclusion. Let me make it clear, though, that we are not eliminating seclusion but shifting away from using it as a punishment.

This brings me to our Path to Safer Facilities. Even before the legal settlement, we were creating a plan that would reduce violence in our facilities, engage youth in more meaningful activities and promote more family engagement. The data indicates the plan is working. Youth are spending less time in seclusion and more time involved in activities, such as gardening, community service projects and media club. We'll share more with you in the months ahead.

During 2013-2014, the Interagency Task Force on Sexual Misconduct was organized as a result of the report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The task force rolled up their sleeves and got to work to enhance strategies and practices to prevent sexual misconduct in our facilities while providing a safe and secure environment for both youth and staff. In January, I traveled to Washington D.C. to testify before the U.S. Department of Justice Prison Rape Elimination Act Panel to talk about the additional safeguards that we weaved into our daily operations.

As you have heard me say time and time again, our employees are our greatest asset. During the last year, we made wellness a priority. Staff have undergone many hours of training to help colleagues with all sorts of situations from traumatic events at work to personal issues like divorce or dealing with the day-to-day stress of the job called corrections fatigue. Critical Incidence Stress Management and Peer Assistance are readily available to anyone who needs them. Corrections fatigue training is rolling out at Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility (CJCF) and then moving to Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility (IRJCF) in the weeks ahead.

Other significant accomplishments of 2013-2014:

- Established the Office of Quality Assurance and Improvement to ensure that we improve processes, procedures and outcomes through transparency, data reporting and accountability.
- Offered a new reading program at Circleville called Project M.O.R.E (Mentoring in Ohio for Reading Excellence) Volunteers, many of them senior citizens, tutor youth on a weekly basis.
- Launched the Youth Apprenticeship Program giving youth an opportunity to get hands-on experiences in our cafeterias.
- Earned reaccreditation from the American Correctional Association. This was the first time in DYS history that all reaccredited sites - Bureau of Parole, Training Academy and Central Office -received 100% scores in mandatory and non-mandatory standards.
- Streamlined the youth-intake process from 273 to 53 steps. The new process provides a better experience for youth, increases the utilization of technology and includes accurate and timely information from courts while saving the agency \$376,000 per year.
- Expanded the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) to Mahoning, Marion and Trumbull counties, bringing the total counties served to eight.
- Served 673 family members by providing 66 bus trips through the CLOSE to home Project (Connecting Love Ones Sooner than Expected). This free service keeps families and youth connected while in DYS custody and on parole.
- Introduced the Baby Elmo Program at Indian River JCF so that teen fathers can build relationships with their children. Later this year, it will be offered at Circleville JCF.
- Presented 26 youth with their high school diplomas, 86 youth with GEDs and 346 youth with their career technical certificates.
- Achieved 20.65% Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) spending by raising awareness at all DYS sites, reaching out to certified vendors and offering training for purchasers.

There are more highlights for you to read. I encourage you to [click here](#) to read the Fiscal Year 2014 DYS Annual Report.

We are just a month into 2014-2015, and there has been much excitement surrounding the launch of the Freedom Schools program. I can tell it's going to be another notable year for DYS.