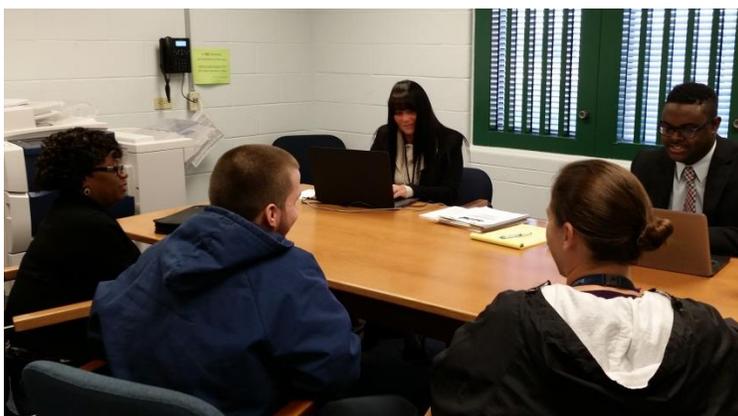


November 2015 Releasing Prepared Youth Safely



From left to right: Juvenile Parole Officer Sonya Wade, a youth, Release Authority Board Member Elizabeth Myers, Social Worker Sabrina Kearns, and Release Authority Chair Cedric Collins meet at Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility

Returning youth safely to their communities is an important process at DYS. We want all youth at DYS to return home well-prepared to live meaningful and crime-free lives as soon as safely possible. Committed to our [Path to Safer Communities](#), our work begins as soon as youth enter our facilities. Beginning day one, we help youth think about their future and together build plans for success. Along with family members and community partners, we identify the barriers that youth returning home from a DYS facility face, as well as the best ways to remove those barriers.

The [Release Authority](#) (RA) at DYS makes release and discharge decisions for youth committed to DYS. While the committing court determines a youth's minimum sentence, the RA determines if the youth is prepared to go home after serving that time. Typically, two RA members meet with the youth for reviews, which may also include behavioral health staff, unit staff, the youth's parole officer, family members, and other supportive individuals such as the youth's mentor, chaplain, and significant other. While face-to-face interaction is preferred, video conferencing is made available to those unable to meet in person. In Fiscal Year 2015, youth were present at 97% of release review panels.

Release decisions prioritize public safety, consider the impact to victims and their needs, and regard the best interests of the youth. The total picture of the youth is considered and includes a review of the history that led to the youth's commitment to DYS, progress meeting achievement of treatment goals and growth in other vulnerable areas, educational achievement, behavior in the facility, future goals, support systems in the community, and anticipated barriers.

Since receiving an overhaul several years ago, the release process has clearly defined parameters for a youth's release or continuance. Once youth reach the Minimum Sentence Expiration Date (MSED), they are not continued except when considered a risk to public safety, time has been added for serious misconduct while in custody, additional treatment is needed and documented by the treatment team and cannot be safely provided in the community, or special circumstances that are determined by the full RA

Board. The process also includes an appeal process for youth. More than 60% of all youth are released on or before their Minimum Sentence Expiration Date, up 25% since 2008.

The [Office of Victims Services](#) (OVS), an important part of the Release Authority, provides a wide-range of information and support to crime victims. This office is also committed to reducing the impact of crime on victims' lives by promoting victims' rights, especially to our youth. OVS offers victims the opportunity to provide input through a Victim Impact Statement, which is shared and reflected on during release review panels. The Victim Awareness Program, administered by OVS, is a 13-module curriculum conducted in the facilities to help youth understand the full impact their crime has had on others, including the victim, his or her family, and the community. Recently, a total of 16 staff from all three facilities participated in Victim Awareness Program facilitator training.



Trainers and Participants of Victim Awareness Program Facilitator Training

From left to right: Karin Ho, Louis Barrett, Chaplain Keith Neal, Sabrina Kearns, Marquetta Dudley-Truss, Christopher Head, Byron Hall, Cassandra Satterwhite, Corey Sharkey, Chad Rhodes, Theresa Myers, Darrin Gates, Lorie Lee, Rick Hull, Josie Smith, John Halle, Director Reed, and Kate Foulke

We will continue to raise the bar and challenge ourselves to expand our efforts to prepare youth for a successful return to the community. By doing so, we are not only making a difference for the youth we serve, but also for the victims impacted by their crimes, family members, and communities throughout the state.