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Ohio Department of Youth Services

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.



Supporting Families

Recognizing that family involvement is an important key for youth turning their lives around, our agency is committed to a family-oriented approach. DHS links youth to family support while youth are in facilities and when they return to the community.

Family Transportation

Fifty percent of the youth in the custody of the DHS do not receive family visits during the average 12-month stay. This year DHS established the C.L.O.S.E. (Connecting Loved Ones Sooner than Expected) to Home Project, a free bus service, to help families. Mother's Day and Father's Day weekends marked the first bus trips from Columbus, Akron, Cleveland, Dayton and Cincinnati. The program, which is currently funded from a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, has been up and running for a total of 6 months, and trips are planned for this month, October and November.

Video Communicator/Video Conferencing

DYS is committed to using video technology in an effort to better serve youth and their families during a youth's stay at DHS. This project promotes family involvement, strengthens case management and helps with reentry planning by utilizing webcam technology and wireless internet to connect youth with their families and community while still in a DHS facility. Utilizing this technology helps DHS to keep families engaged in their youth's treatment and programming and also assists in transitioning the youth back into the community.

Baby Elmo Parenting Program

The Baby Elmo Parenting Program at Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correctional Facility provides parenting education for incarcerated teen fathers through the use of media and experiential learning to develop and strengthen relationships between young parents and their babies. The program consists of ten seminars, each of which is followed by a visit between the teen parent and his child. After the visits, the youth journals about his reactions or experiences. The goals of the program are developing a connection between the youth and his child, strengthening the parenting relationship, increasing chances of rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Partnership with the Vera Institute of Justice

DYS has partnered with the Vera Institute of Justice to expand

the agency's focus on family. Vera staff have trained personnel in DHS facilities to use the Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool (JRIT)—a series of questions inviting young people to talk about family members who can motivate them positively when they return to the community. Parole staff use this information to help develop positive support systems in the youth's parole case plan. Through interviews and surveys with DHS staff, youth and families, Vera has found that the JRIT improves staff and youth perspectives about one another and fosters a climate in which youth and family members can stay connected.

Family Finding

DYS is using a Family Finding program, which is a process to identify and locate previously unknown family members of youth. It is used to establish a lifetime network for previously disconnected youth with the ultimate goal of creating a network of people to provide permanency, meaningful relationships and support through the transition to adulthood and beyond. Training is paid for by a grant from the Office of Criminal Justice Services.

Family Training

The Bureau of Parole has expanded the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model to include work with families while the youth is still in a DHS facility. This allows Juvenile Parole Officers to facilitate skill building sessions with the family/placement to address ongoing issues in the home as well as to empower the family to hold youth more accountable.

Ohio Family and Children First

DYS is an active member of Ohio Family and Children First, which is a partnership of state and local government, communities and families that enhances the well-being of Ohio's children and families by building community capacity, coordinating systems and services, and engaging and empowering families. DHS serves at the state level and also has representation in all 88 counties.

Online Resources

A variety of resources for families are available on the DHS website at www.dys.ohio.gov. Click on the "family" tab. Also, DHS assisted with the creation and funding of Red Treehouse, which is an online resource with relevant information to empower families. Learn more at www.RedTreehouse.org.

