DYS recognizes the importance of partnerships and grant opportunities to enhance DYS facilities.

Currently, the agency is working with the Vera Institute of Justice to boost family and neighborhood support of youth. Since September 2010, DYS staff have been receiving training on using tools that emphasize a family-focused approach to juvenile corrections and reentry. Through a project called Family as Partners, Vera’s Family Justice Program is providing training and technical assistance to DYS facility and parole staff. Over the course of this 12-month initiative, Vera staff will simultaneously collect data to create a blueprint for supporting family connections with youthful offenders in other states.

Family and community involvement are important to rehabilitation. The partnership with Vera focuses on building staff rapport with youth and identifying people who can provide support to them while they are in DYS facilities and when they return to the community.

“We’re excited about working with DYS on this project,” said Michael Jacobson, Vera’s director. “Research shows that a family-systems approach to behavior change can reduce recidivism rates among juveniles—and can also reduce their siblings’ rates of involvement in the justice system. This type of work can have a tremendous impact on young people and their families.”

“Although the juvenile justice field increasingly recognizes the critical role that family engagement plays, there are few models of effective practice nationally,” said Katayoon Majd, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program Officer at the Public Welfare Foundation, which supports the Family as Partners project. “The collaboration between Vera and DYS is a promising innovation for promoting positive outcomes for individual youth and ultimately improving the overall functioning of the system.”

Ohio’s youth are also benefiting from grants that allow the expansion of community services.

In collaboration with Nationwide Children’s Hospital and Kent State University, DYS received a two-year grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance to provide services to offenders with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders. The grant will allow 80 youth to receive services from an Integrated Co-Occurring Treatment Team, which will provide intensive, home-based services to meet the needs of families and youth with co-occurring disorders of substance use and serious emotional disability.

Catholic Charities of Cleveland, in partnership with Kent State University’s Center for Innovative Practices, received a three-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to serve youth committed to DYS by the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court. The Offender Reentry Program for Juveniles will allow 192 youth to receive the program’s comprehensive assessments, case management and cognitive behavioral group services. The program will also provide outpatient sessions, family counseling and reentry court participation.

The Ohio Department of Alcohol & Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS) received a four-year grant from SAMHSA to continue the existing Access to Recovery program and provide expansion to serve youthful offenders. The program will now provide services to youth committed to DYS from Cuyahoga, Mahoning, Stark, Summit and Lorain Counties. These services will include 90-day residential treatment, outpatient treatment, family counseling, transitional housing, vocational job skills, educational services, life skills, parenting and family services and peer mentoring.