The Department of Youth Services (DYS) touches the lives of thousands of youth in Ohio. Beyond youth in DYS facilities and those on parole, DYS funds and supports over 680 direct service programs throughout the state offering more than 124,000 youth (based on annual program admissions) opportunities and services to effect positive change.

Grant Awarded to DYS to Increase Family Involvement

DYS has been awarded nearly $60 thousand dollars from the Office of Criminal Justice Services to address the critical need of family engagement and reunification for youth within DYS. This money will help DYS fund a new approach to identify and engage a youth’s family members.

New Family Program Motto: Find, Engage and Support

Find: DYS will contract with Hillside Institute for Family Connections to provide training, technical assistance and quality assurance for the implementation of the nationally recognized Family Finding program. Family Finding is a six-step model that establishes a lifetime network for disconnected youth.

1. Discovery: DYS Parole Officers (POs) will identify at least 40 family members for each youth through interviews, case record reviews, mobility mapping and electronic search strategies.

2. Engagement: The PO contacts and engages family members and “fictive kin” (non-related adults who have a close emotional relationship with the youth) and asks them to assist with planning and decision making for the youth’s return to the community.

3. Planning: Family members attend a blended perspectives meeting to share knowledge about the youth, learn why their support is needed and consider becoming part of the youth’s lifetime network.

4. Decision Making: The Lifetime Network makes key decisions to support the youth’s needs for short and long-term permanency, safety and well-being.

5. Evaluation: The Lifetime Network implements the plans to help the youth achieve legal and emotional permanency.

6. Follow-up Supports: The Lifetime Network follows up on plans and assigned tasks to ensure success.

Engage: While youth are still in the facility, DYS will assist families with transportation when they reside far from where their child is housed. During the visit, family members will meet with their child and DYS staff, address reentry obstacles and discuss reentry plans. These efforts will complement the existing Video Communicator Project, which promotes family involvement, strengthens case management and helps with reentry planning by utilizing webcam technology and wireless internet to connect youth, families and both facility and parole staff while youth are still in a DYS facility.

Support: Research indicates that relapse prevention programs, which train both youth and family members in cognitive-behavioral approaches, were three times as effective as programs that did not. With that in mind, the University of Cincinnati has modified the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model used by DYS parole staff to include a Family Intervention component. EPICS has been a successful approach with DYS youth since 2006 and incorporates cognitive-behavioral treatment as well as addresses criminogenic need areas, including antisocial thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. The Family Intervention component of EPICS will be used with parents and guardians of youth on community supervision and is designed to be delivered in the same format as EPICS for youth, with POs conducting structured sessions with the parents and/or guardians that build on the interventions being used with the youth. The Family Intervention component also allows family members to use the same communication and relationship skills being taught to their child.