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Posted: 11:00 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 15, 2012

State offers free rides for families of incarcerated juveniles

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By **Kelli Wynn**
Staff Writer

COLUMBUS — The state's initiative to offer free bus rides to families of incarcerated youth plays a role in family interaction that is key for the rehabilitation of these youth, according to the director of the Ohio Department of Youth Services.

The state keeps track of who visits incarcerated juvenile offenders and Harvey Reed, DYS director, said that officials have found that "of those youth that we get who are with us for a year or longer, 50 percent of these youth don't receive visitors."

Some families have difficulties visiting their loved ones due to a lack of transportation options or the distance between their homes and state facilities. This can leave incarcerated juveniles feeling abandoned or isolated, feelings that could lead to juveniles being less motivated to change their behavior, according to Reed.

The incarcerated youth can be as young as 10 and be held in DYS facilities until age 21. As of Dec. 11, the youngest incarcerated juvenile was 12. As of Dec. 13, there were 26 juveniles from Montgomery County who are in the custody of DYS.

Even though adolescent youth identify markedly with peers, their families still remain their most direct supportive network, according to Dr. Edward A. Dachowski, administrative psychiatric officer for DYS.

"They will want to seek love, support and validation from the family, especially in the stressful environment of being incarcerated," Dachowski said. "Youth not having any visits during their stay in DYS custody could be seen as a signal of unimportance or rejection and may promote any number of difficult behaviors in response to that signal. In addition, youth who receive regular visits from family members do better upon release and are less likely to recidivate."

Darlene Powell, director of Probation Services for Montgomery County Juvenile Court, added, "they will be transitioning out into the community and they need that communication with their family to make better choices."

Chartered buses and vans provided by DYS departed Saturday from Dayton, Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland filled with family members and friends of juveniles incarcerated at two of the state's four juvenile correctional facilities - Circleville and Cuyahoga Hills near Cleveland.

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The passengers will have a round trip funded by a \$40,000 Juvenile Accountability Block Grant. This is a Department of Justice entitlement grant for the DYS Family Engagement Initiative called *C.L.O.S.E. to Home (Connecting Loved Ones Sooner than Expected Project)*. The grant, which covers the chartered transportation services, driver and gasoline, expires in October 2013. DYS officials expect the program to continue to be funded with grant dollars.

The bus trips started on Mother's Day weekend. Prior to Saturday's trips, the state had provided 26 trips serving 390 family members.

Tracy Shunk said the free bus trips have allowed her family to visit her 19-year-old son, who is incarcerated at Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correctional Facility, more often and saves on travel expenses. She said the nearly four-hour trip to Highland Hills would cost her approximately \$100.

"Now, with them helping with transportation, we've been able to see him every month," Shunk said. "We would not have been able to do it had they not have helped us. It is the most wonderful thing to not have to worry about whether or not you are going to be able to see your child."

Shunk said if she were not able to visit her son, it would be hard on him.

"There is a couple of kids in there who haven't seen their parents in a year. Most of it is lack of transportation," Shunk said. "These families really want to see these children. A lot of them don't really have the ability to make that four-hour trip."

Shunk recalled meeting a mother on one trip who had not seen her son in eight months.

"When these kids haven't been able to see their families in six-to-eight months, to a year, they feel abandoned and isolated."

Visitations can also help the families because they can receive support from facility staff, Powell said.

"It's a positive step in the right direction," Powell said of the visits. "Whatever that child or the family may need, it's a beginning step in making that family whole."

DYS tries to place the juveniles as close to home as possible, but their placement depends on their offense and the treatment they are scheduled to receive, Reed said.

"We will do whatever we can to keep them in contact because ultimately they must return home and to their community," Reed said.

Incarcerated youth in Ohio

The number of juveniles incarcerated changes daily to due court orders and scheduled release dates. As of Dec. 12, there were 483 juveniles incarcerated in four correctional facilities operated by the Ohio Department of Youth Services, including 23 females. As of Dec.12, there were 509 juveniles on parole.

- Cuyahoga Hills (157 juveniles)
- Indian River (142)
- Circleville (111)
- Scioto (73)

For more information, contact DYS at (614) 466-4314 or visit <http://www.dys.ohio.gov>

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Posted by brack at 1:31 p.m. Dec. 16, 2012

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Posted by kigiin at 3:52 p.m. Dec. 16, 2012

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Posted by samjones at 4:50 p.m. Dec. 16, 2012

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SAAAAAWWWEEEEETTTTTTTT road trip to see the convict a charter bus full at a time



Posted by factsarestubbornthings at 6:23 a.m. Dec. 17, 2012

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Great idea. A win/win for the families, juveniles and society. Hope the families take advantage of the offer..

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