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CJCF part of award-winning mentoring program

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SERVE OHIO
Ohio Commission on Service and Volunteerism

ServeOhio Award

The Buckeye REACH program through The Ohio State University was honored with a ServeOhio Award on Tuesday. The program has been implemented at Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility as a way for OSU students to mentor juvenile offenders.

Posted: Wednesday, October 23, 2013 6:30 pm | Updated: 12:18 am, Thu Oct 24, 2013.

By Steven Collins Staff Reporter

COLUMBUS — Buckeye REACH, an Ohio State University program enacted at Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility (CJCF), was awarded the ServeOhio Award for outstanding volunteer group on Tuesday in Columbus.

The award honors an outstanding group whose volunteer service has been instrumental in designing or sponsoring a program or project to benefit the community and individual needs, demonstrated extraordinary initiative and commitment, the ability to leverage volunteers in service to their organization and demonstrable impact and unwavering commitment to their community.

Patricia Cunningham, director of social change for the Office of Student Life, said about 100 OSU students participate in the mentoring program designed as a way to help kids who are incarcerated at state juvenile facilities get a better education and not go back to prison once they are adults.

"It was really important for me to not be a talking head but to also be in the weeds taking chances and helping to move the needle on issues like this in the U.S.," she said. "With a lot of these students, they see a lack of opportunity and resources, but by having students there that aren't too different from them, we can show them there are plenty of opportunities and resources for them."

The program came out of a need to help stop young people from repeating mistakes and going to prison, Cunningham said. REACH stands for Relationships and Education in Action through Community and Hope.

"We have a lot of people going through the corrections system," she said. "Who better to deliver an education

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and message to these kids? We're using youth as the thing that closes the gap between them to start the conversation."

Kim Parsell, communications chief for the Ohio Department of Youth Services, said Buckeye REACH was definitely helping the kids at the facility.

"The volunteers are not so much older than our youth, and what better role model for them than someone who is a little bit older and on the right path?" she said. "The students are keeping the kids busy and inspiring them. It's wonderful."

Parsell said having someone around their own age helps the message get through more easily than if it came from one of the staff members.

"The biggest thing is that they're role models for these kids who haven't thought about college," she said. "It's one thing for a staff member to talk about it, but it's another thing to hear it from a mentor that's going through it."

Cunningham said the REACH program is having a positive outcome on the students.

"A lot of the kids are taking ownership of what they've done and their choices," she said. "That is the most rewarding part."

Cunningham also praised the character of the Ohio State students involved.

"This is almost a thankless job because a lot of the kids they are visiting are forgotten about," she said. "I think it says something about their character when they would rather visit the prison than go to the Penn State game."

The Buckeye REACH program also has been implemented in the Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility.

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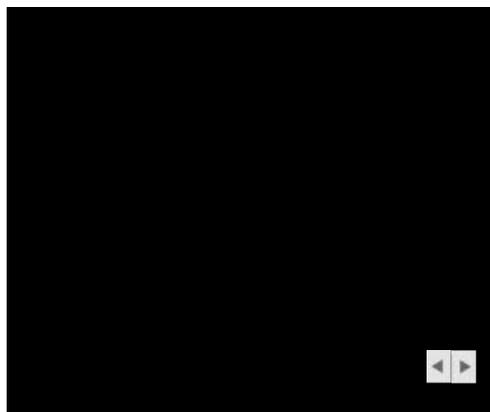
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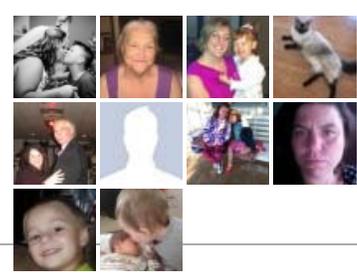
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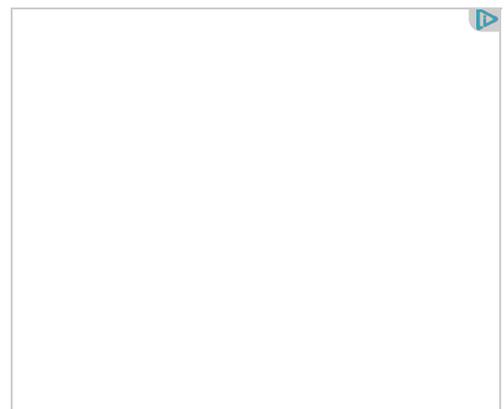
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