

Extraordinary Reform in Ohio's Juvenile Justice System: *Providing Reliable Conditions for Helping Youth Change Their Lives*

The Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) has undergone extraordinary reform to more effectively serve youthful offenders and help them change their lives. When two class action lawsuits were settled in 2008, facilities were crowded, options for serving youth were limited, and treatment was questionable. The solution has been widespread reform efforts that have impacted every aspect of the department, including youth assessment and placement, treatment within the facilities, processes for release and reentry, and parole supervision. Along with juvenile courts, the agency now relies on a continuum of programs and interventions to serve youth closer to their families and in the least restrictive setting. The intensity of treatment and community supervision is now matched with a youth's risk to reoffend. As a result, the DYS average daily population has decreased from 1,555 youth in 2008 to an average of 460 today.

Improving Safety: The Path to Safer Facilities has increased preventative measures, enhanced meaningful activities for youth, revised intervention strategies to hold youth accountable, and eliminated the use of seclusion as a punishment. As a result, the rate of seclusion dropped 89% while the rate of violent acts decreased by 22% when comparing January-November 2014 to January-November 2015.

Boosting Education and Workforce Training: High-quality education, apprenticeships, career technical programs, and opportunities for college courses help youth catch up and complete education and prepare for today's workforce.

Providing Quality Medical Care: Youth receive comprehensive medical, dental, and nutritional care to address health problems and prevent issues from occurring. DYS provides continuity of care when youth are released back into the community.

Caring for Youth with Mental Illness: Treatment for high-risk and vulnerable populations, with a greater appreciation for Trauma-Informed Care ;youth are provided individualized treatment plans and evidence-based treatment services by a team of professionals.

Ensuring Youth Rights: Youth have access to counsel and the courts through the Legal Assistance Program and Public Defender's Office. A grievance process, Youth Councils, the Chief Inspector's Office, and a Tip Line provide youth with the opportunity to express concerns and make suggestions.

Encouraging Family and Community Partnerships: Family members, volunteers, and community partners are encouraged to participate in all aspects of treatment. DYS provides video conferencing and free transportation to the facilities to keep loved ones connected.

Focusing on Reentry: The release process prioritizes releasing youth when they are first legally eligible for release consideration. Youth and their families are active participants in individual reentry meetings, progress reviews, and transitional services to ensure continuity of services and programming.

Prioritizing Quality Assurance: DYS created an Office of Quality Assurance and Improvement to ensure that DYS offers a positive culture for youth and staff by improving processes, procedures and outcomes through transparency, data reporting, accountability and continuous improvement.

Bottom Line

Substantial improvements have been made, but there is always more work to do to further improve safety for youth and staff and strengthen programming. DYS is committed to not only sustain the progress that has been made, but also to build on effective strategies for youth to transform their lives and ultimately make a safer Ohio.