

Ohio Department of Youth Services

Bureau of Parole Reentry Continuum

Action Plan - January 2011

Background

On August 20, 2009, a group of Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS) staff, court personnel, researchers and various community stakeholders met to discuss the future of the ODYS Bureau of Parole (BOP). The BOP was in the midst of its second layoff within six months, resulting in a 35% reduction in staff, and facing an uncertain future. At the same time, the settlement of the S. H. vs. Stickrath federal court case resulted in an ongoing major reform effort of the ODYS Juvenile Correctional Facilities and its Release Authority that was expected to last several years. Despite the fact that the BOP was not included in the litigation, it was evident that it would also be affected in light of a provision requiring ODYS to develop a new reentry master plan for the offenders within its care. Further, one of the major provisions of the litigation was that youth would be released from their DYS facility placement if they had served their minimum time in good standing and programming was available in the community. This effort was expected to result in youth returning more quickly to their communities; quite often with significant programming needs.

In an effort to be as proactive as possible in helping the other divisions within ODYS meet these challenges, the BOP has dedicated itself to improving its practices and collaborating with ODYS facilities and the Release Authority in their response to the litigation. The meeting on August 20, 2009 proved to be the starting point of a parole reform effort that has led to a shift in the philosophy behind and delivery of parole services. This shift reflects the intent of ORC 5139.18, which states in part that Parole is to provide services and supports "...in a manner that insures as nearly as possible the children's rehabilitation and that provides maximum protection to the general public." This provision also highlights the potentially short-term nature of the parole function, one intended to support the transition back to the community and the stabilization of youth under ODYS supervision.

Undertaking a reform effort of this magnitude is a huge task and an effort that will require significant commitment from all staff. Working in BOP's favor is the fact that the ODYS facility population has declined 46.2% from January 2009 through December 2010, with a concurrent 28.4% reduction in the parole population. Whereas normally the budget cuts referenced above would make the system improvements BOP is working toward unachievable, this drastic decline in population is allowing the reforms being undertaken. It was once feared that parole caseloads would nearly double. However caseloads are actually lower than before the layoff. The BOP has taken this opportunity to completely examine all facets of its business and reinvent itself in the best manner possible to serve the youth and families of Ohio.

As staff from the BOP met to formulate this reform effort, several distinct tenets began to develop: decisions made regarding the parole function should be research based; every effort possible should be made to identify appropriate alternatives to ODYS commitment and divert youth accordingly; meaningful contact between the Juvenile Parole Officers (JPOs) and the youth under their supervision must begin at the time of placement; community connections must be maintained as much as possible during the period of incarceration, helping to facilitate community reentry; families must be engaged in a strength based manner as part of the planning for reentry, including the time during which the youth is incarcerated; and parole officers must bolster their efforts in support of a youth both while on parole and in setting the stage for the youth's transition from parole to a law abiding life after the termination of their BOP supervision. This document provides further information about each of these tenets and the action being taken by ODYS, and BOP in particular, to support their adoption.

Research Informed System Improvement

ODYS and BOP have partnered with the University of Cincinnati (UC) to determine how to best serve youth committed to ODYS. The Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model was identified as an evidence based framework for interacting with youth on parole. ODYS was already committed to the Ohio Youth Assessment System (OYAS), a validated instrument that would work hand in hand with EPICS in allowing parole officers to identify high risk areas and better plan to address them in the community. Further, since the EPICS model is a cognitive based approach it fit well with the plan for all ODYS facilities to adopt a cognitive based treatment orientation. As a result, programming support for the youth in the DYS facilities would help transition them more easily to community supervision.

In addition, it was decided that the Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool (JRIT) and "family finding" technology would be integrated into the parole continuum based on research results that indicate their use is beneficial in establishing pro-social support systems and achieving more positive outcomes. Family engagement has been identified as one of the most important areas for the BOP to improve in order to better serve the youth and families who come in contact with ODYS. This was based on the belief that gaining support from the families, working to improve family conditions while the youth is incarcerated, and preparing the family to be as supportive as possible upon the return of the youth to the community would be extremely beneficial in reducing recidivism and achieving other positive outcomes. In order to build BOP capacity in this area all Juvenile Parole Officers (JPOs) will be trained in skill building techniques that will not only benefit the family but also allow the JPOs to gain trust from family members, which has been a longstanding need and challenge.

JPOs are also able to utilize video technology to allow families to "visit" more often with their children. JPOs are also currently using technology to access databases that allow them to screen youth and families for government entitlements (food stamps, heating assistance, etc). By presenting themselves as a helping agent for the youth and family, it is hoped families will unite with JPOs in working in the best interests of the youth. Finally this technology will allow JPOs to complete paperwork from the field, which is both cost effective and frees up more time to work with families. As explained below, BOP is committed to strengthening this capacity.

The BOP has also committed to reducing the length of stay for youth on parole as research indicates keeping low and moderate risk youth on parole for lengthy timeframes actually increases recidivism rates. This new policy, in addition to the fact that there are no life sentences to the Ohio Department of Youth Services, means that nearly every committed youth will be returning to the community and in an expedited manner. Further, most will return to the same community in which they lived prior to commitment. It is important, therefore, that JPOs find mechanisms to keep community service agencies connected to and, as much as possible, involved with the youth during the period of incarceration. Entities such as Family and Children First Councils, Reentry Coalitions and Reentry Courts (all discussed below) are being explored as vehicles that will support these community connections and the reintegration of youth back into their home communities.

As referenced earlier, two huge components of the parole reform effort are the use of the OYAS to drive the focus of aftercare planning and the use of the Effective Practices in Community Supervision model of supervision to provide a cognitive based orientation to how BOP interacts with youth. The use of these two tools has so transformed the way that parole does its work that they bear discussion as a prologue to the reentry continuum as a whole.

Ohio Youth Assessment System

The OYAS has become the driving force in assessing risk, identifying need and targeting treatment programming for all youth on parole. The OYAS is a five-stage uniform risk/needs assessment process that provides the juvenile justice system with a standardized process to evaluate the risk and criminogenic needs of the youth it serves. All ODYS parole officers have been trained in its use through a two-day course that includes written and video tests and certified to complete the reentry assessment component of the OYAS. The five OYAS components used to assess youth throughout the juvenile justice system are:

Diversion – designed to assist juvenile courts in identifying youth who can be safely diverted from further contact with the juvenile justice system.

Detention – geared for use with youth being considered for placement in a detention facility.

Disposition – used by the court for adjudicated youth to assess the risk of reoffending, identify important criminogenic needs as well as barriers to treatment, and provide case planning capabilities.

Residential – used by residential programs during the period of stay to accurately assess a youth's level of risk and areas of criminogenic needs.

Reentry – designed to reassess youth after being in a residential program, this tool is used in conjunction with post-program supervision to ensure successful transition to the community.

Consistent with this sequential use of the OYAS, all youth are required to be reassessed with the OYAS every six months or after any significant incident occurs in their lives. The JPO is responsible for completing the release plan 90 days prior to the youth's actual release date. The JPO references the

most recent OYAS in preparing this plan, using it to identify and rank order the criminogenic areas of need. With the assistance of research staff from the University of Cincinnati, the JPOs are identifying and promoting the use of effective interventions that address the criminogenic risk/need factors identified through the assessment process. Based on available services in the community the JPO can identify specific service agencies and make referrals prior to release. This effort eliminates or drastically reduces waiting periods that youth often face when attempting to gain access to community service agencies back in their home communities. Additionally, the JPO works with the family to identify familiar services and/or preferred agencies (i.e. providers that will accept Medicaid or the family's insurance coverage), thereby creating a more seamless transition to aftercare and the connection to needed services. This is a critically important part of the JPO's work with the youth and requires very close coordination with the ODYS facility staff, ensuring completion and documentation of the OYAS and other case management activities at the appropriate time intervals.

This level of engagement also provides the opportunity to strengthen the involvement of the JPO in the work of the Inter Disciplinary Teams (discussed later in this document). All youth are required to have an Inter Disciplinary Team Worksheet completed 10 days prior to their Release Review Panel conducted by the Release Authority Board. The worksheet contains information from the JPO germane to placement and reentry planning which allows the Board Member to consider issues such as the availability of services in the community and the level of support the youth will be receiving during their parole; and consequently, make a more informed decision with respect to a youth's release.

After release to parole, the JPO continues to conduct a reassessment with the Reentry Tool at six month intervals or if the youth experiences a significant or life changing incident. Conducting reassessments allows the JPO to track the youth's progress on parole and identify any change in the likelihood to recidivate. Also, conducting a reassessment assists the JPO in formulating a more informed recommendation regarding discharging the youth from parole.

The implementation of the OYAS has been viewed by the JPOs and local courts as a critically important tool to be used in determining case dispositions, including treatment services and possible placement. It is believed to have contributed to the reduction in the number of committed youth and as an effective tool in planning for reentry. It is for these reasons that the JPOs will continue to promote the wide spread use of the OYAS to all county juvenile courts.

Effective Practices in Community Supervision

The conversion from the traditional, compliance monitor role of a JPO to one of being a helping/teaching source of support has been the most pronounced change in the way the BOP conducts its business. The rationale for this transformation has been largely predicated on two research based premises:

- The relationship between the youth and parole officer and what is discussed is important.

- When the Risk/Need/Responsivity principle is applied, coupled with a cognitive behavioral model, even the highest risk youth can be effectively served.

Research indicates that by moving to a model of this type, we can increase effectiveness of treatment and decrease recidivism rates. As of this writing, more than 95% of DYS JPOs, Juvenile Parole Services Supervisors (JPSS) and Regional Administrators have been trained in the EPICS model. Parole staff is currently utilizing the EPICS model when interacting with youth and audio taping these sessions. Each month JPOs are submitting taped sessions to UC staff as a means of quality assurance. Tapes are being reviewed for effectiveness and adherence to the model. Feedback is being delivered to the JPOs by UC staff. Each JPO is required to submit at least one taped session each month. JPOs are also required to participate in at least three review sessions with UC staff.

JPOs utilize the OYAS to identify a youth's highest risk areas. By concentrating on one or two criminogenic need areas, the JPO is able to focus the content of a session and not barrage/confuse the youth with discussions that often can be overwhelming (and often targets areas that have shown to have little or no effect on recidivism). Recent research in this area indicates that a youth responds better when he/she is able to concentrate on one or two areas of need.

All Juvenile Parole Services Supervisors have now received additional training from UC for the skills of reviewing and critiquing tapes. During the next several months, as they are deemed ready by UC staff, JPSSs will take over the role of monitoring and reviewing tapes. Having the JPSSs take over the quality assurance process will allow for quicker response time as well as the opportunity for supervisors to actually accompany the JPO into the field and witness the intervention first hand. Finally, transitioning the quality assurance process will result in ODYS staff taking on more ownership of the process, thus assisting in ensuring its long-term fidelity to the model.

The use of the OYAS assessment tool combined with the EPICS model of supervision has facilitated ODYS JPOs becoming an integral part of a more comprehensive and coherent approach to supporting youth returning to the community and assisting them in becoming productive and law abiding. Both initiatives have been in use now for more than one year and have been implemented by JPOs as an approved way to connect to the youth on their caseloads and determine appropriate services. The combination of the OYAS and EPICS model is clearly driving the supervision level of youth as well as the supervision targets as they relate to criminogenic risks/needs. What is most encouraging is that their use has become part of the JPOs' routine, reflecting the fact that the skills associated with their adoption are in place and the BOP is now in position to maintain and refine them.

Alternatives to Commitment and Diversion

Research completed by UC has shown that many low and moderate risk youth are better served in their communities and outside of ODYS facilities.

After conducting a comprehensive review of parole operations, one of our more surprising findings was the identification of the potentially vital role played by parole staff in the area of diverting youth from

entering the ODYS front door. Although outside of their traditional role, parole staff currently participate in various initiatives with juvenile courts across the State of Ohio that are designed to identify community based, non-secure, and/or less restrictive options as alternative case dispositions.

Regional Administrators have been instrumental in working with six counties: Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lucas, Montgomery and Summit -- the "Big Six," involved in the Targeted Reclaim initiative in assisting courts with identifying and creating alternatives to incarceration. The success of this effort is a major contributing factor in the pronounced decline in ODYS admissions during the last two years and has resulted in fewer commitments of low and moderate risk youth. To a smaller degree, parole staff also works with juvenile courts, post commitment, to identify and plan for youth who may be good candidates for early release or step down to a less restrictive environment. Moving forward, parole staff will continue to promote these efforts and expand into more counties. By becoming more of a helping agent at all levels of the continuum, parole has positioned itself to increase its overall effectiveness and cease becoming only a "last stop" in the continuum.

When considering additional ways to support the diversion of youth from ODYS commitment, it became clear that there are opportunities to enhance the state-wide structure of these efforts. In an effort to expand and bolster work in this area, BOP staff members from central administration are currently working at the state level to consider the role ODYS plays in the local Family and Children First Councils (FCFC). The Ohio Revised Code mandates ODYS as a member of all Family and Children First Councils. Most county level agencies (drug and alcohol, mental health, child welfare, juvenile courts, education, etc.) are also mandated members, which provides an opportunity to mobilize local services in support of youth prior to commitment to ODYS. In their current form, many of the FCFCs operate as an oversight body or in an administrative capacity, as opposed to a service coordination mechanism where BOP staff, along with staff from other county agencies, could provide valuable input and coordinate services for youth before entering care or upon returning home. Meetings are ongoing with the Executive Director of the Office of Family and Children First and the Family and Children First Council Coordinators Association to better define ODYS's role as a member and fully engaged participant. ODYS's goal is to ensure that the FCFC service coordination mechanism includes meeting the needs of all youth involved in the juvenile justice system. This effort will strengthen not only the youth's return home but also ensure that all local alternatives have been exhausted prior to commitment. It is our expectation that by strengthening the reentry experience and soliciting participation from all service providers we will help to further reduce the number of youth committed or recommitted to ODYS.

Commitment to ODYS and Preparing for Reentry

An examination of recent ODYS data indicates that 79% of the youth committed to DYS are scheduled to serve less than one year. It is likely that these time frames will be further reduced as a result of the introduction of the new Cognitive Behavioral Treatment modality and Release Authority guidelines. In light of this relatively short time period and in order to achieve successful reentry, BOP is working to maximize the extent to which parole staff will be involved with youth committed to ODYS and their families during and after their DYS facility placement; and the effectiveness of the interventions being utilized. Pre-release, parole staff will also utilize this enhanced level of involvement to better inform the

Unified Case Plan and the plan for reentry. This work will also contribute to a more positive DYS facility experience and a strong plan for programming in the community.

Research is clear that youth benefit from having pro-social parents and other relatives involved in their lives. Clinical models such as Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Multisystemic Therapy (MST) have demonstrated that recidivism rates can be reduced by strengthening the capacity of families to care for their children, particularly improving familial relationships and communication within the family. For youth and their families participating in these or similar cognitive behavior models, re-arrest rates have declined between 35 and 70 percent. Unfortunately, a significant number of youth entering into the ODYS system enter without strong connections to their parents or without significant family involvement. Consistent with this research, family engagement has become an essential component of the ODYS reform efforts and one targeted for significant improvements. As a key part of this change in practice, BOP is beginning to plan for the youth's release back to the community from the time of ODYS intake and enlist the assistance of both immediate and extended family in this effort. A number of tools will be utilized in this regard.

Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool

The Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool (JRIT), a list of eight carefully crafted questions, was developed by the Vera Institute of Justice, Family Justice Program. The tool was created for use by corrections staff in providing day-to-day case management and developing reentry plans -- and as a complement to standard risk and needs assessments. Supported by a training module, the tool helps staff gather important information and family and social network "resources" that will assist in successful reentry.

The goals of the JRIT are:

- To provide staff with a user-friendly method of recognizing and reinforcing positive connections to family and social networks during and after incarceration
- To build rapport between the professional using the tool and the incarcerated individual

The JRIT was developed with support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and in partnership with juvenile justice departments in Arizona, Michigan, and Ohio. By emphasizing the positive aspects of a youth's life and creating goals with the youth's input, the tool has shown promise for developing a positive support system.

In September 2010, members of the BOP met with Ryan Shanahan, Senior Program Associate of the Vera Institute of Justice, and Margaret diZerega, Program Director, to solidify plans to implement the JRIT in ODYS. As part of these plans, a select number of JPOs were trained in the use of the JRIT. The tool is being implemented in two ODYS facilities on a pilot basis in FY 2011. All JRITs completed by DYS facility staff will be scanned and emailed to the youth's JPO in an effort to identify positive connections to family and social networks during and after incarceration. Additionally, the BOP has begun discussions with Vera about the possibility of adapting and/or adding questions to the Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool that would be more specific for reentry planning as well as assisting in identifying

transitional services for the youth upon release. It is expected that the information learned through the JRIT will be incorporated into the JPOs planning for release, the work of the IDTs, and the development of the Unified Case Plan by ODYS facility staff. As the use of the JRIT is expanded to all DYS facilities, all Juvenile Parole Officers will attend and complete the training.

Family Locator Tools

ODYS will also work to increase the number of family members involved in the rehabilitation of committed youth, involvement that can lead to lifelong pro-social connections. One tool that will potentially be utilized in this regard is “family finding.” The use of this technology would allow DYS staff to identify and locate previously unknown family members of youth in DYS custody. These family members, if suitable, may be able to serve as alternative placements after discharge, or during the adjudicatory process at the point of detention or at disposition. They can also serve as supports for the youth as part of their case plans. ODYS hopes to create a partnership with other social service agencies in the use of this technology and share in the benefits it provides in case management.

Family Intervention Training

While JPOs have already begun the process of enhancing their engagement with the families of youth who will be in their care while on parole, the BOP has also contracted with UC to provide Family Intervention Training for a pilot site (regional office) in the spring of 2011. The training is designed to strengthen how JPOs facilitate family skill building sessions. The Family Intervention Training will support how JPOs work with families while the youth is incarcerated and assist them in identifying and improving problem areas. Once the youth is released, the JPO will be better prepared to continue working with the family as a whole, with the added benefit of incorporating the youth into the sessions. As part of the training, UC staff will accompany JPOs into the field and into the homes to demonstrate techniques, observe sessions and provide feedback. The Family Intervention Training will complement the EPICS training already completed by all JPOs and allow them to expand its use to family situations.

Consistent with this greater focus on family engagement, JPOs will also increase efforts to assist families in visiting youth during their incarceration. Research has indicated that family contact during incarceration can result in improved behavior while incarcerated and better parole outcomes (Holt 1972). If families lack transportation, JPOs will make every effort to coordinate DYS facility visits so the family can travel with the JPOs. In addition, regional offices have been provided funds that can be awarded to needy families. These awards may be provided in the form of gift cards that can be used to purchase gasoline; thereby lessening the hardship of traveling long distances back and forth to DYS facilities. Parole will reapply for the allocation of these funds each year and hopes to continue these efforts.

Video Communicator/Video Conferencing

BOP is also committed to using video technology in an effort to better serve youth and their families during the period of incarceration. In October 2010, the Toledo Regional Office began a video communicator pilot project with the Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility (IRJCF). Laptops with

cameras were distributed to the Regional Administrator, Juvenile Parole Services Supervisor and all JPOs in the Toledo regional office. Webcams were also installed on desk top computers for DYS facility social workers and social work supervisors at IRJCF. Utilizing this technology will allow the Department to keep families engaged in their youth's treatment and programming and will also assist in transitioning the youth back into the community. The Video Communicator project will also increase efficiency and sharing of information between the DYS facility and the region in an effort to strengthen case management and reentry planning, including the work of the Release Authority. Additional applications of this project are virtually limitless, and may include:

- Conducting IEP meetings with incarcerated youth and their community schools as part of planning for reentry
- Facilitating "distance" reentry planning sessions between a youth and their family that will also inform the work of the IDTs and the development of the Unified Case Plan.
- Conducting job interviews between a youth and a potential employer

At the very least, the Video Communicator project will vastly improve the number of contacts between youth and their families during incarceration. The Bureau of Parole has set a goal to have all parole officers trained and equipped with video communicator ability by December 2011 and to maximize the use of Wi-Fi capacity so as to allow even greater use of this technology and connectivity.

The precursor to the Video Communicator project has been the video conferencing project. Video conferencing equipment is available in all DYS regional offices as well as all DYS facilities. Parents and family members are encouraged to come to the regional office where they can be connected with youth and engage in reentry planning. Additionally, grant funds were used to place video conferencing equipment into twenty-five county juvenile courts and Community Corrections Facilities (CCF). This endeavor allows courts to connect to regions or DYS facilities for the purpose of reentry planning and early release hearings. Allowing courts, CCFs, DYS facilities, regional offices and JPOs to be connected in this manner to the youth in their care has potential to be both an effective case management tool and a cost savings measure. Work hours saved by the JPO not traveling to courts or DYS facilities can be allocated to working in the communities assisting youth and families, particularly those youth who are high risk and require more frequent intervention. All twenty-five courts and CCFs are expected to be operational with video conferencing equipment by January, 2011.

These enhanced connections are also expected to strengthen case management within the DYS facility. For example, each month during a youth's incarceration, he/she meets with an Inter Disciplinary Team (IDT). The IDT involves participation from all areas of programming within the DYS facility (education, psychology, mental health, recreation, etc.) and is designed to discuss and revise a youth's treatment plan. All JPOs will make every effort possible to be a participant in these meetings, either in person or via technology, thereby bringing a community perspective directly into the youth's reentry planning. The IDT can also be an ideal arena to build upon the JRIT, to discuss family finding efforts or to introduce mentors from the community. The JPO also has the option to utilize video technology in order to include participation from the family, from the court or from various community resources. It will be

the JPO's intent to strengthen the role of the IDT in improving the youth's outcomes, both while in the DYS facility and during parole. This will also serve to better inform the work of the Release Authority, providing it with a deeper understanding of the family and community context within which it is considering a youth's release and the programming identified in the community as part of the plan for reentry.

Parole Officers have also begun handing out the "How Did I Get Here?" pamphlet, a document that explains the role and expectations of the ODYS Release Authority. This allows the JPO to share information regarding the youth's release conditions and expectations while the youth is incarcerated. Enlisting the support of family in encouraging the youth to complete programming requirements will be beneficial in both the short and long term, supporting the role of the family as a protective factor in the life of a child.

Mentors and Volunteers

DYS will build on its history of identifying mentors and volunteer services in the community. Each regional office has been given a goal to connect youth to mentors in the community. As part of this effort, each regional office has also been required to identify faith based groups that are willing to volunteer time assisting youth on parole. Additionally, in September 2010, ODYS created an Office of Reentry Services, charged with a goal of assisting the BOP in locating, recruiting and training mentors and volunteers.

Ohio Benefit Bank

As indicated above, it is the intention of ODYS that BOP staff actively work with the families of the youth in its care. One way of doing this is through the Ohio Benefit Bank (OBB), a web based system that allows juvenile parole officers to assist families in applying for public benefits such as Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), food stamps, cash assistance, Medicaid/Medicare and assistance with utility bills. Each Regional Office is a registered OBB site. Thirty-six regional staff members have been trained as OBB counselors and the regional offices are working towards having the remaining staff trained. At this time the ability to connect to the internet wirelessly is the biggest barrier to completing OBB assessments. To address this obstacle, the Bureau of Parole is working on equipping juvenile parole officers with wireless internet capacity (see video communicator above) that will allow them to conduct OBB assessments in a family's home, instead of requiring them to travel to the regional office to complete the assessment. All JPOs and JPSSs will be trained as OBB counselors by July, 2011.

Beyond the benefits inherently associated with the advances described above, it is BOP's hope that this enhanced engagement of the family will strengthen their relationship with the JPOs and other ODYS staff, decreasing the level of distrust that often exists.

Release to Aftercare

As mentioned previously, when combined with the OYAS instrument, EPICS will allow parole officers to identify high risk areas, structure interventions based on need, determine dosage required, measure

outcomes and, as needed, adjust case management. In addition, however, ODYS is in the process of implementing several other reform efforts designed to better serve youth on parole and keep communities safe.

Reducing Length of Stay on Parole

A review of data by UC and ODYS indicated that low and moderate risk youth do not benefit from lengthy periods of parole. In fact, recidivism rates increase the longer low and moderate risk youth remain on parole. Based on this information, DYS has implemented a policy intended to limit the length of stay on parole in accordance with the following timeframes for youth demonstrating appropriate behavior and progress:

- Low Risk 30 to 60 days (1 – 2 months)
- Moderate Risk 120 to 180 days (4 – 6 months)
- High Risk 240 to 270 days (8 – 9 months)

In December 2009 and January 2010, DYS conducted a thorough review of all youth on parole. Youth who were identified as having performed satisfactorily and exceeded the above timeframes were discharged. An exception was made for youth who owed restitution and their cases were reviewed individually with particular consideration given to the victim. The average length of stay on parole for youth granted a Regular (Successful) Discharge during CY 2009 was 10.3 months. For CY 2010 the average length of stay has decreased to 9.7 months. It is expected that this reduction will continue as this policy is applied to additional youth.

Pre-Qualified Vendors initiative

The Bureau of Parole is working to create a Pre-Qualified Vendors' list for contracting for non-residential services. Over the course of the past several years, nearly all non-residential contracts have been eliminated due to budgetary constraints. This new effort will not only reinstate these resources, but will improve how the BOP can target them, providing a mechanism to purchase services for youth on a case-by-case basis. ODYS will create and release a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) packet that will allow any vendor in Ohio to qualify as a potential service provider. The RFQ packet will be posted on the DYS website for a specific amount of time for vendors across the state to reply. The replies will be reviewed by the Bureau of Parole to determine if respondents meet all mandatory qualifiers. Those meeting the criteria will be placed on a Master Vendor List. Any time a youth is identified as needing a specific non-residential service, the region may choose any vendor on the list that is located in the area the youth will reside to provide the service. This new effort will provide resources that are desperately needed and allow them to be effectively allocated and targeted in the regions -- to be parceled out depending on need and location. The regions will also have more services to choose from and the ability to choose more specialized services, which will result in better services for youth and their families during reentry. It is expected this initiative will be fully implemented by July 2011. A Justification for Selection form has also been developed which will track information such as which vendors are being utilized and the justification for choosing a particular vendor.

Providing services for youth via the Pre Qualified Vendors initiative will primarily target indigent youth. BOP staff continues to work with families and youth who have access to insurance or Medicaid benefits in order to access available resources. In December of 2009, ODYS entered into a groundbreaking agreement with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services that allows youth committed to DYS to have Medicaid benefits suspended rather than terminated. Upon release, if release occurs within one year of commitment, Medicaid benefits can be reinstated within 72 hours, which greatly increases the youth's ability to access medical and behavioral health services. Since the inception of this agreement, nearly 56% of all youth committed to ODYS have been identified as receiving Medicaid benefits upon commitment.

Judicial Collaboration

As a result of the August 20, 2009 meeting referenced above, Regional Administrators met with a number of judges and juvenile court staff to build on their expressed desire to be more involved in the decision making process for discharging youth from parole. As a result, DYS has been able to put into place a process wherein when the judge and Regional Administrator agree that a youth has received the maximum benefit of parole they would request a Special Discharge from the Release Authority . During CY 2010, fifteen youth have been approved for discharge via a Special Discharge. Regional Administrators will continue to identify youth who may be appropriate for such a discharge and review their cases with the juvenile court judge.

Reentry Courts

The BOP will also continue to support and encourage the use of reentry courts with counties that are interested in this option. The term "reentry court" has a variety of meanings. In fact, their use and structure differ from county to county, with each being influenced by its particular vision of what it should be designed to accomplish. Traditional models typically include increased surveillance and additional treatment, providing a mechanism to keep the court and community involved in the treatment and programming of youth before, during and after incarceration. ODYS supports this approach and will work with courts to further encourage its more holistic use. This would include greater interaction between ODYS and the courts, government agencies, private providers, the community, family and the individual.

Worthy of note is the fact that the Ohio Supreme Court is currently reexamining its reentry court requirements and structure as part of a larger Specialty Dockets review. DYS has been and will remain involved in these conversations.

Reentry Coalitions

In December 2008, the Ohio General Assembly passed a historic piece of reentry legislation, House Bill 130. HB130 offers a framework for a long-term investment in the state's economy by addressing legal and other barriers to employment for people released from prison. A key component of the bill is the removal of non-relevant prohibitions or collateral sanctions to employment. The legislation states that a felony conviction does not by itself constitute grounds for denying employment. Other important

provisions include the authorization for reentry courts and procedures for facilitating access to obtaining valid forms of identification upon release. Finally, the legislation calls for the formation of an Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition that serves as a guiding hub for expanding and improving reentry efforts across state and local agencies and communities. These provisions apply to both juvenile and adult offenders.

The Coalition's overriding goals are to:

- reintegrate offenders into society
- reduce recidivism and
- maintain public safety

The coalitions have been formed to support efforts to better prepare offenders for their return to the community using a fundamentally different paradigm, one that recognizes that correctional systems alone are not sufficient to change offender behavior. This evolving framework emphasizes preparation for reentry, and targets the barriers offenders face in reestablishing themselves in the community. When the reentry process is successful there are benefits for the community in terms of improved public safety. Correctional and criminal justice costs are reduced in the long run as offenders are directed away from reoffending to more productive work and civic contributions. Successful reentry is important not only to the futures of offenders and their families, but also to the well-being and quality of life of families and neighborhoods throughout Ohio.

Currently there are more than 30 local reentry coalitions that operate at the county level. BOP staff is represented in nearly every local coalition and is attempting to have reentry coalitions enhance funding and community task force development for juvenile services. The Office of Reentry Services is also working hand in hand with the BOP to encourage local reentry coalitions and task forces to include a focus on juvenile reentry services.

Discharge and Post Discharge

If the true intent of parole is to support the expeditious transition and stabilization of the youth back to the community, parole officers need to strengthen their efforts to help create a local system of support for the youth in their care. New developments such as the Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool and the expansion of its applicability to parole, increasing the focus of the Reentry Coalitions on juvenile offenders, and increasing the practice of involving extended family members in the lives of youth on parole, will greatly assist in this effort. The goal, however, will be to leave youth with a sense of permanency in their lives, a strong set of connections to pro-social adults and peers, and a feeling of being part of their community.

Discharge Agreement

During CY 2011, the Bureau of Parole will create a document to serve as a 'Discharge Agreement' between the youth, youth's family and parole officer. A copy of the agreement will be provided to each

youth upon discharge. The document will serve both as a final checklist to ensure all discharged youth have been connected to long term services and as a resource list of significant supports for the youth post discharge. The final checklist portion will serve to make sure all youth have been screened for such services as the Benefit Bank and Medicaid. The second half of the document will build on work previously done with the Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool and through family finding technology to assist in identifying appropriate adults in the youth's life who agree to serve as long term supports for the youth. The 'support' may come in many forms, such as serving as a mentor or the provision of a specific support or service. The Juvenile Parole Officer will be responsible for completing the form and will also assist the youth in getting commitments from appropriate adults.

Finally, a comprehensive list of community services, with contact information, will also accompany the 'Discharge Agreement'. Part of the JPOs' responsibilities will be to work with the youth and family to take full advantage of these supports and services while on parole and after discharge.

Conclusion

The Bureau of Parole has made tremendous strides in the past year and a half in enhancing the supports and services it provides to the youth in its care. Much work, however, remains to be done. Many of the new initiatives require a greater time commitment (engaging families early and often, increasing facility visits, transporting families, etc.) on the part of Juvenile Parole Officers. The success of these efforts will be dependent, therefore, on appropriate training and supervision, as well as caseloads remaining low and at manageable levels.

The BOP is proud of these efforts and is extremely thankful to the large number of professionals who have assisted in this effort. While BOP's reform efforts are currently changing the way it does business, the ultimate goal of the Bureau remains unchanged: ensuring public safety and competency development of the youth on parole through effective supervision and enhanced collaboration and partnership with the courts, the community, and families.