

Discussant Comments
“Coming Home from Prison: Family Matters”
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Kim Hettel, Family Reentry Project Manager
Ohio Governor’s Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today about the investment Ohio is making in Family Reentry. The Family Reentry programs, funded by the Ohio Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, represent an unprecedented partnership and commitment to a pragmatic application of theory. The long-term goals of this investment are to reduce recidivism rates for ex-offenders, to strengthen and reunite families following a period of separation due to incarceration, and to reduce the likelihood of an ex-offender’s children themselves being incarcerated. Further, the investment seeks to capture intermediate measures of reintegration such as those of attachment, or reattachment, to the social institutions that are traditionally associated with desistance from crime. (Travis 2003)

The initial and ongoing Ohio investment in Family Reentry is grounded in research including:

- Dr. Hairston’s analysis that reports two consistent findings: Male prisoners who maintain strong family ties during imprisonment have higher rates of post-release success than those who do not maintain such ties, and men who assume responsible husband and parenting roles upon release have higher rates of success than those who do not assume such roles;
- the *Coming Home* series of longitudinal studies conducted by the Urban Institute which demonstrate that offenders, when asked pre-release what support would be necessary for

them to remain out of prison once they are released, identified housing and employment as the most critical but when they were asked the same questions post-release, the same offenders identified family as the number one support that kept them out of prison. These findings indicate that offenders generally don't know how crucial the role of family will be until they have been released and need the support from family members and;

- an April 2002 evaluation of the La Bodega model entitled, *"Families as a Resource in Recovery from Drug Abuse: An Evaluation of the La Bodega de La Familia"* which found that family case management was successful at Family Justice and that La Bodega had led to real improvements in the lives of drug users and their family members. The tools of the Bodega model provide family case managers with practical guidance and skills that help them to rethink their clients' needs in the context of family and community.

Given all that we know about the effect of their relationships with family on offenders and the importance of family in post-release success – it only seems logical that testing approaches to service delivery would follow. Ohio's Family Reentry involves eleven community-based demonstration projects, and is designed to be the testing ground to inform practitioners about promising program models for engaging families in offender reentry.

The partnership between the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction began in 2004 with the *Children of Incarcerated Parents: Breaking the Cycle* Program and was expanded in 2006 to include the *Returning Home Demonstration Projects and the Strengthening Ohio Families Initiative Ex-Offender Demonstration Projects*, also known

as *SOFI*. In total, there are 10 agencies offering 11 programs in 7 Ohio counties. I would be remiss if I did not identify these 10 agency partners who include:

- **The three Children of Incarcerated Parents program:**
 - The Center for Families and Children (Cuyahoga County)
 - Talbert House (Hamilton County)
 - Alvis House (Franklin County)

- **The four Returning Home programs:**
 - Opening Doors and Community Connection in Franklin County
 - Lucas County TASC (Lucas County)
 - Center for Families and Children (Cuyahoga County)

- **The four Strengthening Ohio Families Initiative programs:**
 - Economic and Community Development Institute (Franklin County)
 - OIC of Clark County (Clark County)
 - Spirit of Peace (Montgomery County)
 - Youngstown UMADAOP (Mahoning County)

This year alone the eleven programs have provided pre-release, post-release, and family case management services to 2,927 people; including 848 offenders, 667 adult family members, and 1,411 children. *The Children of Incarcerated Parents (CIP) and Returning Home Programs* are currently being evaluated by Brian Lovins at the University of Cincinnati – Division of Criminal Justice under the guidance of Dr. Ed Latessa. The evaluation will be expanded in the next state fiscal year to include all eleven programs.

Briefly I would like to share the common elements of the program models and conclude with an overview of the current evaluation. Each of the eleven programs use strengths based family case management along with various curricula delivered to the incarcerated family member pre-release and provides multiple supports to the other family members who reside in the community. Family case management differs from traditional case management in several fundamental ways. Case management is a mode of service delivery to an individual that identifies links, coordinates and monitors assistance from formal service providers and informal resources like local churches and schools. In contrast,

family case management is an innovative approach that brings together the individuals needing services with their family members, family mentor (if they have one), the supervising officer (if applicable), and treatment providers to identify and build upon the family's assets. Family case management assists families to build a network of healthy relationships with both formal and informal community resources. It consists of a person or team who organizes, coordinates and sustains a network of formal and informal supports and activities designed to enhance the well being of the family. The goal of family case management is to move the family from formal social support to informal supports. The functions of family case management include assessment, planning, intervention, monitoring, and evaluation. The Family Case Management Action Plan is a product of an assessment that provides direction for the family, continuity and the ability to monitor progress.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a brief overview of the current evaluations being conducted by the University of Cincinnati. The *Returning Home Programs* which are in their second year of operation were the subject of a process evaluation last year and the first year of outcome data is currently being collected. An initial outcome evaluation report for each of the 4 projects is expected late this summer. *The Children of Incarcerated Parents: Breaking the Cycle Program* has been evaluated for 3 years but data are still not conclusive because the program has undergone modifications that have made it difficult to evaluate, including a changes in the target population, the length of services being provided, and the goals of the program. In addition, the program has experienced high staff turnover, a change in program direction, and the disruption of continued funding. However, for those fathers that successfully completed the program, the recidivism rates were appreciably lower at the 12 month and 24 month follow-up; 4% and 32% respectively when compared to those who were terminated from the program and to the comparison group. The program participants

and control group recidivism rate at the 12 month follow-up was 19% and at the 24 month follow-up it was 46% and 48% respectively. For the purposes of this study, recidivism was measured as a return to the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction by either a new crime or technical violation. Although the results of the analysis indicate that there were no significant differences between the treatment group and the comparison group some of the results are encouraging. First, the number of successful completers has increased each year, second, successful completers of the CIP program returned to prison at a lower rate than the comparison group. If the program can increase the number of successful completers while maintaining similar success rates it is possible that the program could show significant reductions in recidivism over those fathers who did not receive the program. Finally, the satisfaction surveys completed by the fathers in the program suggest that the program is serving the needs of families. In fact, 95% of those fathers that responded reported that they had a strong relationship with the CIP staff. Moreover, 75% of the families in phase II (post-release) reported that the program was helpful and their relationships were strengthened by participating in the program. These findings should be viewed with cautious optimism since the number of fathers successfully completing the program was only 14% of the population served. Since the trend is moving in the right direction, and we are hopeful about the impact of these programs, the eleven are being funded for another year of service delivery with the anticipation that Ohio will make significant contributions to the body of knowledge that will inform policy makers and practitioners about family engagement in offender reentry.