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State Grants Seek to Strengthen Families Scarred by Substance Abuse, Incarceration

\$2.3M Investment to Help Children of Incarcerated Parents, Families Pick up the Pieces

COLUMBUS – Ohio is taking action to help children cope with the social and emotional consequences often associated with having a parent in jail or prison. The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) today announced a \$2.3 million investment in interventions that help children of incarcerated parents stay on track developmentally by avoiding some of the same behaviors that led to a parent’s involvement with the criminal justice system.

“Growing up with an incarcerated parent is associated with a variety of negative outcomes resulting from financial instability, changes in family structure and societal stigma, said OhioMHAS Director Tracy Plouck. “Children with a parent in prison also may face a number of other challenging circumstances such as witnessing drug abuse or violence in the home or in their community. They also may have experienced trauma relating to their parent’s arrest or from experiences leading up to it.”

Understanding the factors that influence a child’s well-being both positively and negatively during parental incarceration can help service providers intervene appropriately to build on strengths and mitigate risks. That’s why the Mansfield Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Program (UMADAOP), on behalf of the UMADAOPs of Ohio Federation, was selected to receive a one-time award to implement regional programs utilizing the nationally-acclaimed [Creating Lasting Family Connections \(CLFC\) curriculum](#). The curriculum addresses substance abuse and violence prevention through personal, marriage and family strengthening programs. Ohio University’s Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs, meanwhile, has been selected to evaluate the project. The grants are for an 18-month period, ending June 30, 2017.

“The CLFC program teaches valuable social skills, refusal skills, and appropriate alcohol and drug knowledge and healthy beliefs, which provide a strong defense against environmental risk factors that can lead to negative outcomes for youth,” said Plouck. “The curriculum also provides parents and other caring adults with family management, family enhancement, and communications training. Our hope is that, by addressing the needs of at-risk children, we will improve the likelihood that entire family will succeed.”

According to youth.gov, an estimated 2.7 million – roughly 1 in 28 – children live with a parent who has served time in jail or prison. These children are more likely to have faced exposure to traumatic events, violence, alcohol and other drugs and involvement in the child welfare system. These experiences can negatively impact a child’s mental health, social behavioral and educational prospects and place a child at an increased risk for delinquency, violence, poverty and substance abuse, among other pitfalls.

Ohio UMADAOPs provide substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery support services to individuals and families in Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Lima, Lorain, Mansfield, Toledo and Youngstown.

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