

# Community Linkage Program



**John R. Kasich**, Governor  
**Tracy J. Plouck**, Director, ODMH  
**Harvey J. Reed**, Director, DYS



The Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) and the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) share the belief that youth offenders with behavioral health needs require community supports to promote their successful return into society. To help these youth achieve successful reentry into the community, the departments have developed a Community Linkage Program for juveniles leaving DYS facilities. The target population is youth in the DYS facilities who have mental health issues and will benefit from linkage to community behavioral health services and other supports. The number of youth to be linked each year is estimated to be about 200.

Goals for the Community Linkage program include securing appropriate linkage to services and supports for the youth, establishing relationships with stakeholders, collecting data, analyzing outcomes and maintaining timely and quality information dissemination to the community. Community Linkage staff will coordinate additional referrals to resources, supports and other programs to promote community success for the youth.

To enhance the effectiveness of this project, representatives from ODMH, DYS, the Ohio Departments of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS) and Job and Family Services (ODJFS), Ohio Family and Children First (OFCF), the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities (OACBHA) and the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Service Providers have collaborated to create a program outline that supports cross-systems planning. An interagency agreement governs the roles, responsibilities and expectations of staff from ODMH and DYS, and provides the guiding principles for the program.

DYS currently operates four juvenile correctional facilities throughout the state. Within these facilities, youth with behavioral health issues may be placed on the mental health caseload based on their diagnosis and the degree of services that may be required. Some youth diagnosed with mental health issues who have more serious behavioral health needs may be placed on a Mental Health Unit to support their clinical stabilization. The Mental Health Unit is a housing unit that provides a safe, therapeutic

environment where the youth receives behavioral health and additional services. DYS operates two Mental Health Units within their correctional facilities. For all youth receiving behavioral health services, Interdisciplinary Teams (IDT) monitor the youth's clinical status, determine necessary services and coordinate the youth's treatment. The IDT assures that services recommended by the team are provided, manages the youth treatment plan and supports discharge planning prior to release.

The Community Linkage program for youth in DYS facilities is similar in design to the program offered in the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) facilities. The priorities will include ensuring continuity of care for the youth on the mental health caseload/Mental Health Unit, collaborating with community behavioral health boards and providers, connecting the youth to community/peer supports, providing appropriate public benefit application assistance, supporting reconnection with family members and referring the youth to other support networks to foster successful community reentry. ODMH Community Linkage staff work closely with DYS facility staff, DYS parole officers, local/county education systems, community behavioral health providers, OACBHA, and Family and Children First Councils, to address the reentry needs of the youth for this program. In cases where youth are transferred to another facility, linkage will occur in the form of information sharing with the new facility.

ODMH, DYS, ODJFS, and the Social Security Administration are in discussions to develop effective pre-release supports for these youth so that benefits can be available upon release for those deemed eligible.

