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Ohio Department of Youth Services Partners with Vera Institute of Justice to Increase Family Engagement and Improve Reentry Outcomes

Columbus, Ohio — The Department of Youth Services (DYS) is working with the [Vera Institute of Justice](#) to boost family and neighborhood support to the young people in the system.

Beginning in September, DYS staff will receive training on using tools that emphasize a family-focused approach to juvenile corrections and reentry. “We recognize the importance of family and community involvement in rehabilitation,” said Interim Director Christine Money. “Our partnership with Vera will focus on building staff rapport with youth and identifying people who can provide support to them while they are in DYS facilities and when they return to the community.”

Through a project called [Family as Partners](#), Vera’s Family Justice Program is providing training and technical assistance to DYS facility and parole staff. Over the course of this 12-month initiative, Vera staff will simultaneously collect data to create a blueprint for supporting family connections with youthful offenders in other states. “We’re excited about working with the Ohio Department of Youth Services on this project,” said Michael Jacobson, Vera’s director. “Research shows that a family-systems approach to behavior change can reduce recidivism rates among juveniles—and can also reduce their siblings’ rates of involvement in the justice system. This type of work can have a tremendous impact on young people and their families.”

“Although the juvenile justice field increasingly recognizes the critical role that family engagement plays, there are few models of effective practice nationally,” said Katayoon Majd, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Program Officer at the Public Welfare Foundation, which supports the Family as Partners project. “The collaboration between Vera and DYS is a promising innovation for promoting positive outcomes for individual youth and ultimately improving the overall functioning of the system.”

The Vera Institute of Justice combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety. Vera is an independent, non-partisan, nonprofit center for justice policy and practice.

DYS is the juvenile corrections system for the state of Ohio and is statutorily mandated to confine felony offenders, ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts. DYS operates five correctional and rehabilitation facilities and provides parole services from five regional sites.