

Columbus Dispatch: Delaware County gets \$1 million to help inmates stay sober, free

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DELAWARE, Ohio — More than \$1 million will go toward programs to help treat mental illness and stop drug use among inmates at the Delaware County jail during the next two years.

The two grants were awarded to the Delaware County sheriff's office through the federal Second Chance Act and will pay for four new staff positions, plus drug testing, counseling and re-entry planning at the 286-bed facility.

One grant, of more than \$580,000, focuses on men and women with both substance abuse and mental-health disorders, from schizophrenia to depression. About 100 inmates will receive therapy and substance-abuse treatment in the jail, plus help in transitioning back into the community and post-incarceration care.

A second grant, for \$420,000, will pay for family-based substance-abuse counseling, targeting 24 moderate- to high-risk offenders with addictions who also are parents of young children. They will be housed apart from the general jail population and receive specific treatment, including help from family members.

"If we can keep even one inmate from returning to jail, the program will be a success," Sheriff Walter L. Davis III said in a statement.

This funding is especially important as county jails prepare to see more inmates because of changes in state sentencing guidelines for low-level felonies. Those changes went into effect last month.

Maryhaven will provide much of the treatment under the new programs, which will help not only the inmate but the community, said President and CEO Paul H. Coleman.

"People need to be held accountable for their criminal acts, but we also need to work with them," Coleman said. "If alcohol or other drugs or mental illness is a factor in those acts, we reduce those factors and protect the public safety."

Delaware County already has a re-entry task force, and while the grants were sought by and awarded to the sheriff's office, the resources will go toward the greater goal of reducing recidivism.

Several other counties have similar task forces, including Franklin, Marion and Clark. Tri-County Regional Jail in Mechanicsburg, which serves Madison, Union and Champaign counties, is working to organize a similar effort.

Steve Hedge, vice chairman of the Delaware County task force and executive director of the Delaware-Morrow Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, said the programs funded by the federal grants create a seamless system for the inmate. Often, inmates don't have a way to get home from jail when they are released, let alone counseling services.

Of 1,000 applications nationwide for the grants, 118 were awarded, including 16 in Ohio. Other state recipients included the Native American Indian Center of Central Ohio, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and the Ohio Department of Youth Services. The sheriff's office was the second-largest single recipient behind DYS.