

**Office of Ex-Offender Reentry
Welcome One-Stop Reentry Center**

**A BLUEPRINT FOR REDUCING RECIDIVISM
IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, OHIO**

November 2010



MONTGOMERY
C O U N T Y

"A Report to the Community and a Call to Action."



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dear Reader,

When we promised a comprehensive and dynamic report about the issue of Ex-Offender Reentry in Montgomery County, we never anticipated the amount of public interest it would generate. We started with a task force of around 60 people. Over the subsequent weeks and months, that number grew and grew. In the end, we had over 200 people participate in the process. Each and every one of these people contributed to this report. We would like to offer a special thanks to the members of the Executive Committee who led their work groups and formed the basis for this report.

Another group of individuals that were essential to the success of the Task Force was the participation of ex-offenders. Without their input, the report could not possibly have the grassroots and street level impact that it will now. We would like to personally thank the Ex-Offender Caucus Chairs, Tamico Pullium and Sterling Titus for the leadership they provided to the Task Force and report.

We would like to personally thank several individuals who helped staff the Reentry Task Force and write this report: Gayle Ingram, the person who kept us organized and on task; Joyce Gerren, who played devil's advocate and kept us on our toes; John Theobald, who was always there to fill in when we needed him; and Andrea Hoff, the person with the writing talent and drive to get the final report completed.

We could not have done this without all of you. Thank you!

Judge Walter Rice
Commissioner Debbie A. Lieberman



To the Citizens of Montgomery County:

The Montgomery County Ex-Offender Reentry Task Force is pleased to present this *Blueprint for Reducing Recidivism in Montgomery County, Ohio*. This report outlines a strategy for a county-wide initiative that has been endorsed by a broad cross-section of community stakeholders who have diligently studied this issue for the last two years. The primary objective of this work is to *reduce recidivism in Montgomery County by 50% within five years*.

Most individuals returning from incarceration have no intention of ever returning to prison. However, for many ex-offenders, the return home is nothing but a revolving door – from prison to home and back to prison again. Barraged with numerous challenges and barriers related to employment and housing (among others), estranged from family and friends, and confronted with numerous unjust collateral sanctions, becoming productive, taxpaying citizens often seems virtually unattainable.

To address this issue, the Reentry Task Force assembled an extensive collaborative of over 200 community leaders from a variety of professions, including ex-offenders for their valuable insight into this issue. This dedicated group was charged with developing a set of recommendations to decrease Montgomery County's recidivism rate, and as a result, improve overall public safety and restore family stability.

Reducing recidivism has the benefit of unleashing the economic and human potential of ex-offenders throughout Montgomery County. Albeit indirectly, it also has the potential to positively impact other community issues such as poverty and unemployment, substance addiction, mental health issues, and family stability. The compilation of these benefits contributes to the overall well-being and satisfaction of all Montgomery County residents.

High recidivism rates impact each and every neighborhood of our community, both in human costs and economic costs. Montgomery County devotes a significant sum of money to the criminal justice system to protect the public by enforcing laws, incarcerating criminals, and attempting to rehabilitate offenders. The recommended strategy outlined in this report is intended to halt the escalating costs of recidivism, at all levels of government and in the private sector, freeing these monies to fund other essential services in our community.

This community initiative is one that engages the attributes of faith, compassion, and belief in rehabilitation and service. Indeed, this initiative cannot succeed without the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and the need for economic and social justice, equity, and compassion in human relationships. In the following pages, you will read the results of this two-year effort. Please join us as we embark on this new initiative and strive to increase public safety, save lives, and revive families, schools, and communities.

Sincerely,



Walter H. Rice, Co-Chair
Community-Wide Reentry Task Force



Deborah A. Lieberman, Co-Chair
Community-Wide Reentry Task Force

A NOTE TO VICTIMS

Ex-offenders come in many different shapes and sizes. In fact, there is great variety in the nature of the crimes they've committed. These crimes often produce profound wounds in their victims, who are our parents, spouses, siblings, children, friends, and neighbors. The Montgomery County Community-Wide Ex-Offender Reentry Task Force members spent significant time contemplating the impact of these crimes, and the glaring fact that they were committed by the very people we aim to serve through this initiative.

The Reentry Task Force wishes to formally acknowledge the impact that these crimes have had on not just the victims themselves, but their families, and sometimes their entire communities. Some of these crimes have created unpleasant, and sometimes atrocious, situations that the victims had to succumb to and endure at the hands of the offenders. And for this, *the Reentry Task Force wishes to express their sincere compassion and empathy to all people who have been victimized. The recommendations in this report are in no way meant to minimize the impact these crimes have had on the victims.* We simply choose to put forth efforts that will make our homes, neighborhoods, and communities a safer place to live for future generations and to assure that these crimes will significantly decrease over the coming years.



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**Montgomery County Community-Wide Reentry Task Force
Executive Committee Roster
2009-2010**

Co-Chairs:

Debbie Lieberman, Montgomery County Commissioner
Walter H. Rice, U.S. District Court Judge

Children and Family Work Group:

Gayle Bullard, Director, Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services
Rev. Robert Bishop, Dayton Christian Center

Continuum of Care Work Group:

Christy Norvell, Director, Montgomery County Dept. of Job and Family Services, Retired
Dr. John Boggess, Superintendent, Miami Valley Career Technology Center

Employment Work Group:

Heath MacAlpine, Assistant Director, Montgomery County Dept. of Job and Family Services
Cheryl Bennett, Federal Public Defender

Housing Work Group:

Greg Johnson, Director, Dayton Metropolitan Housing Authority
Quincy Pope, Sr., Chief, Trotwood Police Department

Legal Issues and Advocacy Work Group:

John White, Coordinator, Dayton Circles Campaign
Connie Price, Judge, Montgomery County Common Pleas Court

Pre/Post-Release Services Group:

Angela Lee, Office of Reentry, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
Brigid Slaton, Adult Parole Authority, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

Technical Work Group:

Amy Wiedeman, Assistant Administrator, Montgomery County
Joe Spitler, Montgomery County Criminal Justice Council

Ex-Offender Caucus:

Tamico Pulliam, Community Volunteer
Sterling Titus, Community Volunteer

Faith-Based Caucus:

Rev. Jesse Watson, Community Volunteer

Law Enforcement Caucus:

Mathias H. Heck, Jr., Prosecuting Attorney, Montgomery County
John Sedlak, Chief, Miamisburg Police Department

At-Large:

Nan Whaley, Commissioner, City of Dayton

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Individuals returning from incarceration live in virtually every zip code within Montgomery County. Most ex-offenders have every intention of becoming productive, tax-paying citizens, and no intention of returning to the penal system. However, ex-offenders are largely on their own when returning to our community. They are often estranged from family and friends, and are increasingly faced with tremendous challenges upon their release. Most are simply unprepared for the challenges they will encounter in their attempt to restore normalcy to their lives – finding a home, becoming employed, paying bills, and reconciling family ties, among others. With their lives in an upheaval, many ex-offenders unfortunately feel compelled to return to their criminal behavior. *Recidivism* – the return of an ex-offender to prison – often occurs and the entire community pays for it, both financially and through the sacrifice of personal security.

In response to this community issue, the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council, through its Economic Self-Sufficiency Outcome Team, began to foster community-wide action in 2005. Subsequently, the Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners established the **Montgomery County Community-Wide Ex-Offender Reentry Task Force** (referred to as the “Reentry Task Force”) by resolution on February 26, 2008. Appointed as Co-Chairs were Judge Walter H. Rice, United States District Court, and Montgomery County Commissioner Deborah Lieberman. Participating in the process were over 200 community leaders, comprised of elected officials, service providers, law enforcement, court personnel and judges, public defenders, probation and parole officers, faith-based providers, business leaders, media representatives, and ex-offenders. This set of dedicated leaders studied the reentry issue for over two years and this report is its culminating product.

Much is currently being done to divert individuals from incarceration and reduce rates of recidivism, both in Montgomery County and across the state of Ohio. The Reentry Task Force studied these programs to determine what has been successful, what has not been successful, and their applicability to Montgomery County’s reentry efforts. Lessons learned from this

analysis have generated an evidence-base that has been incorporated into the recommendations outlined in this report.

The reasons for which people become involved in criminal behavior, and the complex barriers they face upon release, vary significantly. Thus, the multitude of services that are required necessitates a collaborative and multi-system response. All barriers to self-sufficiency must be taken into consideration, such as mental health issues, alcohol and substance dependency, a history of trauma, and family instability, among others. Furthermore, reentry services must be provided in a coordinated fashion; the system itself must ensure that gaps in services do not allow ex-offenders to fall through the cracks.

The Reentry Task Force accomplished their work via seven Work Groups: Children and Families, Continuum of Care, Employment, Housing, Legal Issues and Advocacy, Pre/Post-Release Services, and Technical. Each Work Group was charged with developing a set of recommendations respective to their content area. In addition to the seven Work Groups were three special interest caucuses: Ex-Offenders, Faith-Based Leaders, and Law Enforcement. The Ex-Offender Caucus provided a critically important role by ensuring that the recommendations were practical and that they addressed the actual needs of the very people the initiative aims to serve. The Work Group recommendations were synthesized into a set of prioritized Task Force recommendations that establish goals for successfully rehabilitating and reintegrating ex-offenders within Montgomery County.

In the process of developing these recommendations, the Reentry Task Force utilized the following guiding key principles as a foundation:

- Reducing recidivism is a county-wide issue, not just an issue for the City of Dayton.
- Prevailing stigmas hinder ex-offenders’ ability to successfully transition back into society.
- Ex-offenders are less likely to recidivate if they can secure and maintain employment.
- Successful reentry planning must begin at the point of sentencing and continue throughout the period of incarceration and release.
- The important role of having a supportive mentor cannot be overstated.
- A comprehensive continuum of care and services



should exist so that ex-offenders do not have the opportunity to fall through the cracks.

- Cooperative community partnerships, with a shared vision, will enhance our county's reentry efforts.
- Establishing and tracking reentry outcomes and indicators are vital to ensuring our reentry efforts are fruitful and worthy of continuation.
- Employment preparation and retention services must be designed to meet both the needs of the ex-offender and the employer.
- There is a direct link between reducing recidivism through successful reentry and improving public safety.
- Reducing the rate of recidivism will have a direct impact on cost savings for the community.
- Awareness of victim issues, rights, and concerns are essential to successful reentry.
- Legislative advocacy is required in order to change the present paradigm of reentry.
- Formal local, state, and federal governmental partnerships are necessary for successful reentry planning and implementation.
- Government alone cannot successfully address the issues of crime reduction, successful reentry, and public safety.
- Successful reentry requires the engagement of ex-offenders' support systems, prior to release.

These guiding principles were developed from best practices and served as the driving force for the remainder of the Reentry Task Force process.



Montgomery County Administration Building

The following recommendations were developed, endorsed, and prioritized by the Reentry Task Force to provide an actionable plan for Montgomery County to reduce recidivism:

Recommendations:

1. Develop a One Stop Center as a single point of entry, assessment, and linkage to comprehensive services for all ex-offenders in Montgomery County.
2. Conduct a community-wide outreach, engagement and advocacy campaign to create awareness of the community-wide benefits of successful reentry, generate acceptance of ex-offenders, inspire community action, and advocate for necessary legislation and legislative changes.
3. Through the Montgomery County Commissioners, establish a Reentry Policy Board and a Montgomery County Office of Ex-Offender Reentry.
4. Create a county-wide collaborate that includes government and private sector service providers as well as other community stakeholders in order to effectively serve the ex-offender population.
5. Establish a Memorandum of Understanding with the Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services/Child Support Enforcement Agency to develop consistent policies applicable to incarcerated individuals and ex-offenders with active support orders.
6. Engage with the Homeless Solutions Policy Board, Dayton Metropolitan Housing Authority, and private local property owners to partner in the development of additional transitional and supportive housing options in Montgomery County.
7. Create a variety of opportunities for each Montgomery County offender sentenced to an Ohio prison to work with reentry professionals and staff from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC).
8. Publish a comprehensive resource guide so that incarcerated offenders and ex-offenders can access up-to-date reentry information and resources.
9. Utilize the multi-part universal assessment tool unveiled by ODRC for use in all Ohio prisons.
10. Partner with education and training resources within the community to provide comprehensive skill building and educational opportunities for the reentering population.
11. Clearly define relationships between service providers, county agencies, state partners, and

the Office of Reentry through the utilization of Memoranda of Understanding.

12. Identify and utilize transitional jobs so ex-offenders can re-establish their work history.
13. Remove barriers to the Ohio Drivers License reinstatement for ex-offenders.
14. Provide access to legal services for ex-offenders.
15. Conduct appropriate lobbying that will advance and support successful reentry for ex-offenders.
16. Remove barriers to visitation to promote ongoing connection to family, friends, and the community.
17. Conduct a concerted education and lobbying campaign for a systematic review and response from the Ohio legislature regarding unjust collateral sanctions.

It is crucial that persons convicted of a felony begin thinking about their return to the community as early as possible. The goal of the Reentry Task Force is that each individual sentenced to ODRC begin planning for reentry immediately upon sentencing. Other components of reentry planning will include the following: mentoring, continuum-of-care or services, reentry plan coordination, education and training, data collection and analysis, and the utilization of evidence-based practices.

The successful implementation of these recommendations will have a significant economic and human impact on this community, increase public safety, and provide a second chance for many deserving individuals. Implementation will begin with the creation of the Montgomery County Office of Ex-Offender Reentry and appointment of a permanent Montgomery County Ex-Offender Reentry Policy Board. The Office of Reentry commits to the creation and development of partnership initiatives in an effort to increase community awareness, expand services, and provide access to community resources needed to assist ex-offenders who have the desire to help themselves to become contributing members of the community.

The Reentry Task Force is excited to present this report to the community. Its members have worked diligently for over two years to create a comprehensive plan that will positively impact the lives of ex-offenders who are returning to our community after incarceration. And ex-offenders returning to Montgomery County believe that the deliberations of this Task Force will make a difference in their lives – and rightly so because

this report was written to be a Call to Action. These recommendations cannot be accomplished single-handedly; we must all work together for a safer, more humane, more just, and more economically viable community.

The primary objective of this work is to ***reduce recidivism in Montgomery County by 50% within five years.*** While a lofty goal, the Task Force sincerely believes that with an effective and aggressive community response, Montgomery County is well-positioned to strive for and achieve this goal. Please join us as we embark on this new initiative to increase public safety, save lives, and revive families, schools, and communities.



(top): Co-Chair Federal Judge Walter Rice with presenter Stephanie Tubbs-Jones(deceased) and former ODRC Director Terry Collins. (bottom): ODRC Deputy Director Dr. Edward Rhine with Co-Chair Debbie Lieberman.



INTRODUCTION

Individuals returning from incarceration live in virtually every zip code within Montgomery County. Most of these returning citizens (hereafter referred to as “ex-offenders”) have every intention of becoming productive, taxpaying citizens, and no intention of returning to the penal system. Good intentions, however, are only half the battle. Most ex-offenders are faced with tremendous challenges upon their release and are simply unprepared for the challenges they will encounter in their attempt to restore normalcy to their lives – finding a home, becoming employed, paying bills, and reconciling family ties, among others.



Currently many, if not most, ex-offenders are largely on their own when returning to our community. They are often estranged from family and friends, and are increasingly left to their own devices to discover how to fill the many voids in their lives. Unable to secure either employment or adequate housing, aggravated by numerous other self-sufficiency barriers, what options remain? With their lives in an upheaval, many ex-offenders unfortunately feel compelled to return to their criminal behavior. *Recidivism* – the return of an ex-offender to prison – often occurs and the entire community pays for it, both financially and through the sacrifice of personal security. Recidivism results in a return to prison for a technical violation of parole, a prison sanction, and incarceration for committing a new crime.

This scenario is best exemplified by the Jimmy Cagney character in the movie *White Heat* (1949). Cagney’s character returns to the community from prison, arrives at his hometown’s bus station wearing a thread-bare, ill-fitting suit, carrying \$10 in his pocket, and exclaims, “Now what?” All too often, that return home has been nothing but a revolving door – a brief interlude between prison, the commission of a new criminal offense, and a sentence to prison once again. Accordingly, the question for many communities is, “How do we close the revolving door?”

Task Force Formation & History

Realizing that we can no longer build prisons fast enough to reduce our crime problem, especially when factoring in the high percentage committed by recidivists, a new paradigm began to emerge nationally in 2002. This effort began fashioning a strategy to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety, as well as improve services for the formerly incarcerated. Shortly thereafter, in 2005, efforts began here in the local Dayton-Montgomery County community. The Montgomery County Family and Children First Council (FCFC), through its Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS) Outcome Team, began to foster community-wide action, initially focusing its energy on a review of employment services and opportunities for ex-offenders.

In November 2006, the FCFC established the Montgomery County Ex-Offender Reentry Employment Work Group as a subcommittee of the ESS Outcome Team. That Work Group focused its attention on two areas: 1) examining national best practice models that increase employability and self-sufficiency for ex-offenders, and 2) identifying the current efforts and challenges of local providers in Montgomery County that assist ex-offenders in becoming employed.

The Work Group became actively engaged in understanding the challenges, barriers, and successes regarding reentry initiatives. In order to get a complete grasp of the reentry landscape, the following actions were taken:

- In November 2006, an Ex-Offender Reentry Symposium entitled “*Reentry and its Impact on Montgomery County*” was conducted. This event researched and analyzed ex-offender reentry best practice models locally and nationally.

- Telephone conferences were convened with reentry employment-focused programs in Richmond (Indiana), Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), and Cleveland (Ohio), as well as with the National Transitional Jobs Network¹.
- The Work Group met with a delegation from the Singapore Prison Service which was in Dayton for a reentry conference. The Singapore Prison Service focuses on encouraging their citizens to accept and support ex-offenders back into their communities.
- Staff surveyed local service providers to identify the services and supports currently being provided, as well as the challenges encountered in serving ex-offenders.

In October 2007, the Work Group published its findings in a report entitled “*Montgomery County Ex-Offender Reentry Employment Final Report.*” The report made recommendations for program development and systemic changes to improve employment opportunities for ex-offenders returning to the community. The first recommendation was to establish a designated group responsible for implementing the recommendations and to expand the scope of the effort to include all aspects of reentry. The FCFC supported this recommendation by allocating the necessary funding to establish such a group.



Subsequently, the Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) established the **Montgomery County Community-Wide Ex-Offender Reentry Task Force** (referred to as “Reentry Task Force”) by resolution on February 26, 2008.

¹ The National Transitional Jobs Network (<http://www.heartlandalliance.org/ntjn/>) is a national clearinghouse developed to support employment solutions for people who have difficulty obtaining and succeeding in work.

Appointed as Co-Chairs were Judge Walter H. Rice, United States District Court, and Montgomery County Commissioner Deborah Lieberman. The Reentry Task Force started with a membership of over 75 community leaders, comprised of elected officials (state, county, and city), service providers, law enforcement, court personnel and judges, public defenders, probation and parole officers (federal, state, county, and city), clergy and other faith-based providers, business leaders, media representatives, and ex-offenders. By mid 2008, the Reentry Task Force had grown to over 200 members through interest generated by various media coverage. A full list of individuals who participated in the Reentry Task Force process can be found in the Appendices of this report.

The BCC resolution assigned the following charges to the Reentry Task Force:

- Implement the recommendations of the Reentry Employment Work Group;
- Develop a comprehensive plan that sets goals for successfully rehabilitating and reintegrating ex-offenders within Montgomery County;
- Address reentry issues such as employment, stable housing, legal, and the restoration of family support;
- Develop a Continuum of Care/Continuum of Services model through informal support networks and Pre/Post-trial release services;
- Develop and maintain a strong liaison and collaborative partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC);
- Develop and carry out a community outreach, engagement, and advocacy campaign that creates awareness of the benefits of successful reentry, generates acceptance of ex-offenders, and inspires community action;
- Advocate on behalf of successful reentry to all branches of government;
- Send the message of *hope* to all ex-offenders returning to Montgomery County;
- Develop a marketing and educational community awareness campaign;
- Provide oversight to all Work Group activities; and
- Report all Reentry Task Force recommendations and outcomes to the BCC.

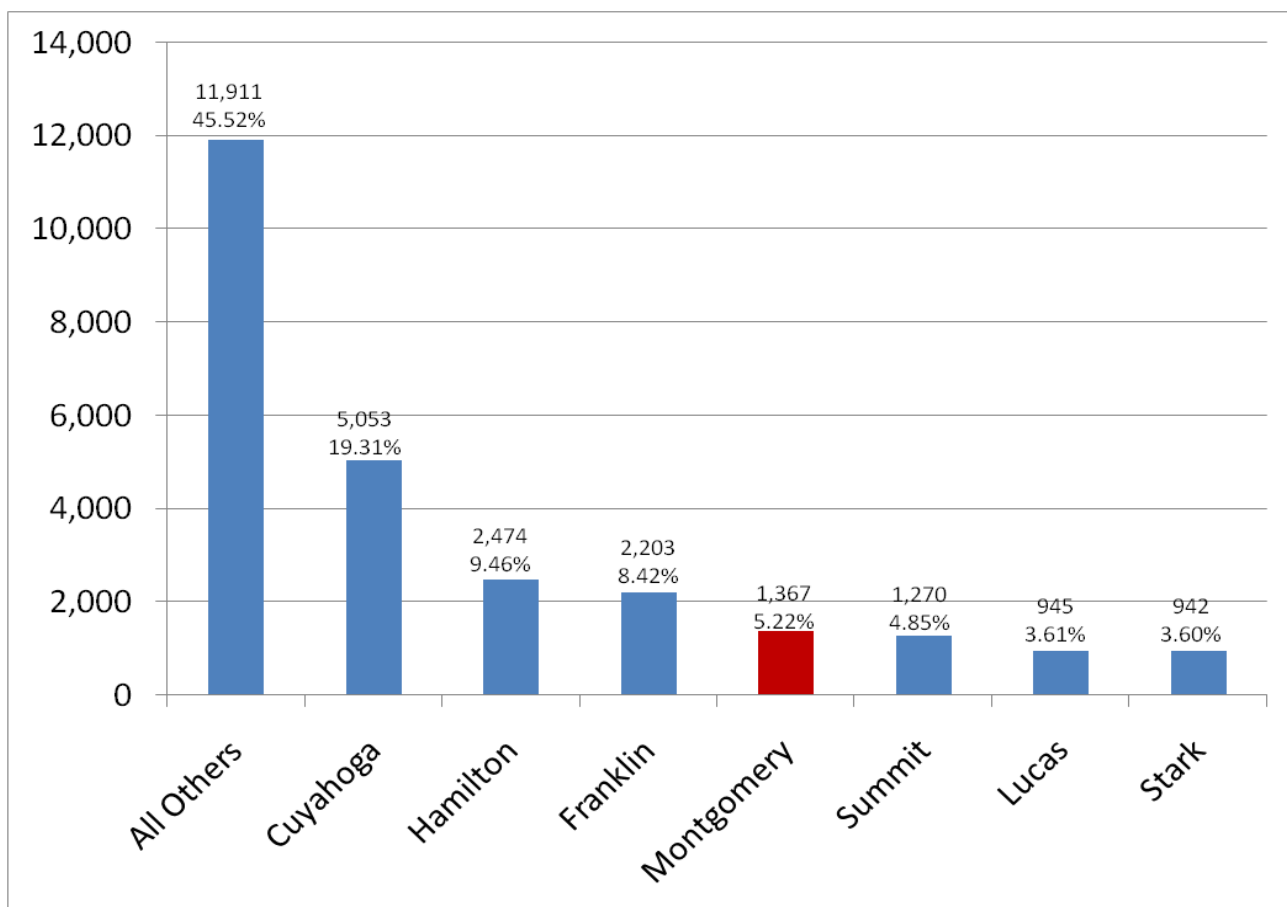
The Reentry Task Force was, thus, responsible for overseeing all reentry activities in Montgomery County. Since its inception, this dedicated group of community leaders has studied the reentry issue for over two years; with this report its culminating product.

Who Is An Ex-Offender?

For the purposes of this report, the term “ex-offender” is defined as a person who has previously been convicted of a felony (federal or state), has satisfied their sentencing, and has been released from incarceration. Approximately 97% of those incarcerated in prisons will ultimately return to society². The following information provides a brief overview of the ex-offender population in Ohio and Montgomery County.

In Ohio, one in 25 adults is in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole, ranking behind only Georgia, Idaho, the District of Columbia, Texas and Massachusetts; in 1982, this figure was one in 116³. Montgomery County constitutes approximately 5.22% of all commitments to an Ohio prison, as identified in Figure 1⁴. At the time of incarceration, 42% of inmates from Montgomery County lacked a high school diploma or a General Education Degree (GED), 54% were unemployed, 40% abused alcohol, and 75% abused other drugs⁵. It is safe to assume that these challenges create continuing barriers post-incarceration. Even those who do not return to prison are often condemned to live life on the margins of society. Given the significant obstacles faced by these individuals, most ex-offenders returning to Montgomery County are in need of assistance in order to re-establish themselves as productive citizens of our community.

Figure 1. Commitments by County, FY 2009



² Anne Piehl (January 2002). *From Cell to Street: A Plan to Supervise Inmates After Release*, Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth

³ *One in 31, the Long Reach of American Corrections* (March 2009) Washington D.C.: The PEW Center on the States

⁴ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correct, “Pieces of the Puzzle,” 2009 Annual Report

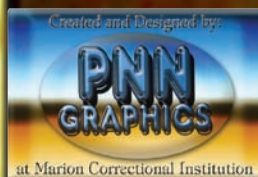
⁵ *One in 31, the Long Reach of American Corrections* (March 2009) Washington D.C.: The PEW Center on the States

Helping Those Who are Willing to Help Themselves

While there is great variety in the nature of the crimes committed by ex-offenders, there is also tremendous variety in the ex-offenders' willingness to put their pasts behind them and play an active role in shaping their futures. This decision must be a conscious one that includes the realization that, while a life of crime may be an easier path in life, it is not the right path. The road to reengineering a person's path in life, despite the struggles and barriers before them, requires perseverance and honest, hard work.

The recommendations in this report seek to help ex-offenders who are willing to help themselves – specifically, those ex-offenders who make the conscious decision to become productive, functional, successful members of Montgomery County. The recommendations in this report are intended to be the vehicle that will provide the necessary resources and supports for ex-offenders to successfully make the transition from incarceration into the community. The Reentry Task Force acknowledges and accepts the fact that those ex-offenders who are unwilling to turn their lives around will inevitably return to the criminal justice system.





**A Product of the Montgomery County
Community-Wide Ex-Offender Reentry Task Force**