



REENTRY TASK FORCE

SEASON OF CELEBRATION



Led by Judge George McCarthy on Tuesday, December 5th, the Athens County Veterans Court honored its second graduate with a certificate of completion, a token to remind the graduate of his journey of sobriety, and a locally made cake.

The event was attended by fellow Veterans Court service providers, Veterans Court members still going through the program, and the graduate's daughter who presented Judge McCarthy with a heartfelt letter that thanked His Honor and the service providers for not giving up on her father and for seeing him as "more than just an addict." Other veterans currently enrolled in the program also sat in and enjoyed the celebration in support of the graduate and to witness the celebration that lay within their own futures.

We thank Judge McCarthy and the members of Veterans Court for their investment in the community and are excited to see the other active members continue their journeys. Veterans Court meets every other Tuesday at the Athens County Municipal Court.

TASK FORCE PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Sheila Shafer graduated from Ohio University with a bachelor's degree in Social Work and later obtained a Master's of Public Administration from the same institution. She has worked at Athens County Children Services since 1988 starting out as an Intake Caseworker and working into various supervisory roles with her current position as Deputy Director of Programs since 2007.



The mission of Athens County Children Services is to protect children, strengthen families, and secure futures, which guides their practice as well as their philosophy in engaging with families. The ACCS offers a wide variety of services to families in need of assistance from the Child Protective Services Program. Sheila feels passionate about significant, lasting positive change that the community can support. She states that being part of helping the parent be the best that they can be caring for their children is very fulfilling and that anybody who works in the field knows that this is not always possible. But when it does, it is such a powerful success that it remains a motivating force.

Sheila was asked to attend the Task Force meetings by Andrea Reik, the prior Executive Director of ACCS, to represent the agency, collaborate with other involved organizations to effectively utilize community resources, provide advocacy for persons reentering our community and assist in developing a coordinated reentry effort. She has been attending the Reentry Task Force meetings since 2013.

Sheila believes any services that can help the reentry population feel accepted and a valued part of our community are to be supported and expanded. She believes that it is really changing the perception of persons that have made errors in their lives. "As a Social Worker, I believe that personal growth is always possible. It is our job to help break down the barriers and build bridges for persons wanting to make that change." To Sheila, there are no barriers, only factors that need to be considered and addressed before moving forward.

The Athens County Reentry Task Force wants to thank Sheila Shafer and the wonderful staff at Athens County Children Services for the work that they do to help children and families in our community to have a better life.

SECOND VIVITROL GRADUATION



The Athens County Prosecutor's Office held their second Vivitrol Graduation Ceremony at Trimble High School on Wednesday, December 6th. Prosecutor Keller Blackburn began the event by thanking all of the families, friends, community members, and service providers for continuing the support of those in recovery. The event celebrated 19 new graduates, making for a total of 52 individuals who have successfully completed the program. Two graduates of the program spoke at the event, including last spring's graduate Bryan Darst who recently accepted a peer mentor position to work with families navigating their own journeys of recovery.

Athens Reentry Task Force members Becky Filar and Reuben Kittle of the Athens County Prosecutor's Office thanked the 317 Board for making the program possible and noted that the graduation was not "an end of the relationship with the people you have met on your journey [of recovery],

it is a celebration of how far you have come."

REENTRY RANTS & RAVES

I was fortunate enough to attend the Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition meeting on 12/20/17 in Lancaster with the Fairfield County Reentry Program (Valerie Carpico- Coordinator) hosting and presenting along with several other DRC/Reentry-involved organizations. Fairfield County has developed a large network of providers to address the issues surrounding the Opioid epidemic and to help people struggling with addiction. This in turn helps to reduce recidivism and make the community safer.

Gary Mohr, the Director of DRC, gave the opening remarks. I want to highlight some of his speech and thoughts on the direction that he would like to see funding from DRC move towards for helping communities in the future. Director Mohr made the statement that approximately 25% of the state budget goes into the operations of the prisons which also includes staffing and probation officers.

He states that "It's a great day to be alive" but "There are tough times in the neighborhood" as mentioned in a Travis Tritt song. This is a simple yet very powerful statement regarding our current times. Director Mohr hopes to be able to direct a significant portion of money in 2018 from the DRC budget to help people to succeed in the communities and therefore reduce the prison populations.

He states that great people leave prisons and do great things, but society and the media focus on the people who commit the violent crimes and fail, thus leading us to believe that all felons are bad and not to be trusted. We need to work on changing the stigma surrounding people with a felony. Director Mohr says, "Where you put your resources identifies where you think that your priorities are" and "Our worth as human beings can be found in how we treat others".

I feel fortunate to be connected with such a driven, goal-focused network of people that are currently working on the front lines and behind the scenes to help people with a felony to succeed in our communities.

— Shawn Stover, Reentry Coordinator

NEXT MEETING INFORMATION

The next task force meeting will be on **January 22nd at 9:30AM** at the Athens County Job and Family Services County Home Office (13183 St Rt. 13 Millfield, Ohio 45761) in the conference room. See you there!

This newsletter was a collaborative publication between Athens Reentry Taskforce Chairperson Shawn Stover and Newsletter Editor AmeriCorps VISTA member Madison Yee working with the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet) released on December 28th, 2017.