

SUPPORTING REENTRY

Meet Alissa McBride



As a social worker, I enjoy the many hats I often wear in my profession. I work for a non-profit that has been providing services in the community for over a century and was located around the corner from the correctional facility. After hearing a presentation from the Executive Director of “In His Eyes Outreach,” a faith-based non-profit designed to assist individuals in and out of jail, I immediately thought, “Why aren’t we providing services to this population?” With the assistance of “In His Eyes,” I reached out to the jail and was lucky to find a warden committed to providing quality services to the people in his facility. He wanted a commitment that we would treat everyone with respect and that we would not disappear once the funds disappeared.

I quickly found myself leading an evidence-based parenting group, Guiding Good Choices, with women in the facility—something I still love doing over ten years later. My work became so much more than just what was in the curriculum. My role became a case manager, connecting people to resources and programs to help them be successful. The continued need was evident as the years went on, so our following grant was to expand our case manager services. In 2017, we obtained Justice Assistance Grant funding through PCCD and started our first reentry coalition, The Montgomery County Reentry Initiative (MCRI). Collaborating with the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee, key stakeholders, community partners, and people with lived experiences, we quickly learned that so many people, organizations, and groups wanted to help and, more importantly, to work together. MCRI now has over 100 active members. We accept anyone willing to help. Our membership includes government and non-government partners working together to improve the outcomes of the men and women leaving the facility.

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Reentry work provides us with an opportunity to discuss success stories and how, if we work together using evidence-based practices, positive change is possible for everyone.

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Collaborative Approach

Reentry will not be successful unless we work with our partners. The collaborative approach has improved many of our outcomes. Having our partners and stakeholders working and meeting together keeps our energy alive. There is not one person or one agency that can do it all. Working with our partners at the correctional facility, pretrial, and probation has driven our success. We rely on each other's expertise and knowledge to ensure individuals are provided with the programs they need to successfully re-enter the community.

Assessment Driven

MCRI believes in the importance of data-driven work and outcomes. We assess individuals in the correctional facility every three years by evaluating their current risks and needs. We use questions from actuarial risk/needs assessments, screening tools for drug and alcohol/mental health, and questions related to stabilization needs such as housing to understand where our efforts will have the greatest impact. In addition, we also survey stakeholders to identify their perceptions as they pertain to the population's needs. MCRI then utilizes the data collected to write a three year strategic plan prioritizing the five most critical barriers. We then assign an action team to each goal. Our current action teams are Career Development, Housing, MH & D&A, Financial Wellness and Parenting, Childcare, and Natural Supports.

Evidence-Based Interventions and Programs

MCRI recognizes the importance of using interventions that research has proven effective with our population and their needs. Our staff uses the Reentry Tool of the Ohio Risk Assessment System to identify the domains we need to focus on while the person is in the correctional facility and our reentry programs. Staff have all been trained in the Critical Time Intervention model, which helps individuals during transition times by strengthening their community support network. We also run various groups in the correctional facility, such as Parenting Inside Out, which provides tools to parents who are justice involved. Seeking Safety is a counseling model to help people attain safety from trauma and addiction.

Lived Experience Representation

Nobody knows more about the struggles of reentry and where the successes lay than those who have lived the experience. Books and research often lack the true perspective of what it is really like. We have found that having people with lived experiences in our coalition and the delivery of our programs has increased our effectiveness and our understanding. We also find that people respond better and have an increased respect for those who have been successful with their re-entry. We often use certified recovery specialists and peer specialists to ensure that individuals receiving our services can visualize their own success.