

IMPROVED REENTRY EDUCATION

VOICES OF REENTRY

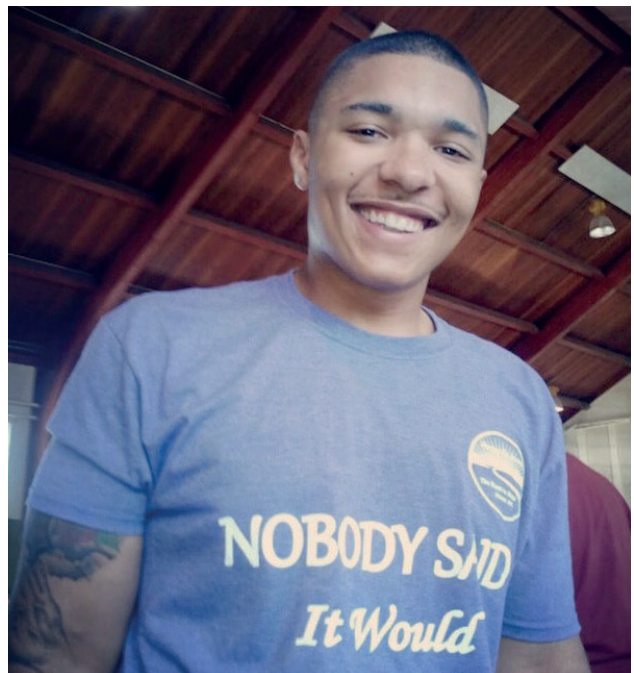
Helping Hands Create Opportunities for Change

Voices of Reentry is a series of profiles of people making good on second chances after they return from incarceration. Articles in the series tell individual stories to highlight the impact of programs funded under federal Improved Reentry Education grants.

Twenty-year-old Thomas (Tommy) Haynie has been enrolled at Lorain County Community College (LCCC) for close to a year, and things are “going really well—better than I expected.” What did he expect? “I’ve always looked at myself as a failure, as not being smart enough. I thought I would struggle a lot, which I do sometimes. I didn’t see myself getting through it, but lately I’ve been able to manage. I’m getting through, my grades are going up.” What made the difference for Tommy? Julie Ford, LCCC’s Second Chance academic advisor.

Julie doesn’t put too much on my plate. She helps in all kinds of ways—sets up the class schedule so it’s not stressful; she helped get a loan to pay off the court fines so I could get my driver’s license. And just being there—being able to talk to her . . . she’s done a lot for me.

Tommy is working toward an associate’s degree in human services; he’s also earning a Chemical Dependency Counselor’s Assistant certificate, which will enable him to work in addiction recovery programs while he attends school. Tommy’s long-term goal is to earn a bachelor’s degree, which he can do at LCCC through its [University Partnership](#) program. For Tommy—who dropped out of school at 15, got involved “with the wrong crowd,” and followed his parents into drug addiction—to be thinking about a bachelor’s degree is a testament both to his own intelligence, resiliency, and grit, and to the holistic approach to student success at LCCC.



Tommy Haynie

The Second Chance program is one of three components of LCCC’s Positive Reentry for Ohio Prisoners (PROP) initiative, an integrated approach to using education to reduce recidivism in Lorain County, where as many as 18,000 of the county’s 108,000 residents could have a criminal history.¹ The Second Chance program supports students with criminal histories by providing a dedicated academic counselor who designs manageable course loads, refers students to a myriad of service providers at the college and in the community, and advises students on everything from



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selecting courses to identifying career paths that are accessible to people with criminal histories. The other two components of PROP are a program within the Lorain/Medina Community Based Correctional Facility (CBCF) to prepare students with a high school diploma or equivalent for college-level work, and a mentoring program at Lorain Correctional Institute (LorCI), a reception center, which offers both residents and staff a credit-bearing coaching and mentoring program. Together, the components of the comprehensive PROP program are designed to connect incarcerated people and returning citizens to college and the community and support successful reentry.

REACHING PEOPLE, ONE AT A TIME

I had a mentee who told me, “I went to this ‘Thinking for a Change’ class—the facilitator was talking, but I didn’t understand anything she said because she was on the collegiate style, but when I came into your ‘Thinking Matters’ class, I understood because you was talking my language.” I understand where they’re coming from.

That’s Howard, a mentor at LorCI, explaining the difference between the peer-to-peer mentoring program at LorCI and other behavior change classes typically offered in prison.² Because he knows where his students and mentees are coming from, Howard is uniquely positioned to help them change their behavior and make positive choices.

QUICK FACTS: PROP CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Two correctional institutions and a community-based facility participate in the PROP program, each serving a different purpose and housing people at different stages in their incarceration.

LORAIN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE

Purpose: A reception center where people come at the beginning of their incarceration.

Number of residents: 1,460

Number of staff: 427

Type: Residents’ movement is very restricted

GRAFTON CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE

Purpose: A correctional institution where men serve their sentences

Number of residents: 1175

Number of staff: 388

Type: Residents’ movement is restricted

GRAFTON REINTEGRATION CENTER

Purpose: A prerelease facility where people spend the last 2 to 3 years of their sentence.

Number of residents: 771

Type: Residents have considerable freedom of movement

LORAIN/MEDINA CBCF

Purpose: Community-based incarceration.

An economical, local alternative to state prison commitments for adults with felony offenses.

Number of residents: 100 men and 32 women

Number of staff: 15 programmatic staff and 25 resident advisors

Type: Residents have considerable freedom of movement.

“The mentoring program “gives people the opportunity to think before they react,” and that change has ripple effects on a person’s incarceration and beyond.””

The skills Howard and his fellow mentors have learned in Success Coaching and Mentoring 1, a college-level class, allow them to diffuse tense situations.

Now we have the opportunity to talk guys down. “Hey, do you really want to do that? Do you know the consequences to that?” We give people the opportunity to vent to us now, instead of just to do whatever comes their way.

The impact on the prison is measureable. Howard observes, “When I was coming through, there was something going on every single day, in every single housing and unit.” Warden Kimberly Clipper concurs: “We have seen a marked reduction in violence and use of force during program hours.”

At its core, the mentoring program “gives people the opportunity to think before they react,” Howard explains. And that change has ripple effects on a person’s incarceration and beyond. Mentors help newly incarcerated people focus on opportunities to spend their time in prison productively, taking classes and learning career skills that will prepare them for successful reentry. Howard and his fellow mentors have evidence of their success:

We have letters that people send back to us that say “I’m out here, I’ve got a job, I remember that story you told me about how to treat my kids, how to treat my wife, and how to look at a job as a way to take care of my family. I remember that math problem you gave me when you told me about the dope game as opposed to working eight hours a day. I remember all that and I just want to send you this letter to thank you.”

The work can be hard, and staying motivated while he serves his own sentence takes effort. But those letters feed the determination to help others and give back that drives Howard: “Just when you get to the point where you don’t think your work is integrated into society, you get those letters. . . . You see that you reached one person, you think, let me try to reach two next time.”

MENTORING CREATES OPPORTUNITY FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

I like seeing people change. I like seeing people have the opportunity to think about their thought process. Individuals coming from where I came from, a lot of us don’t have opportunities to be accountable. We always have those that encourage our negative behavior. Now, seeing a guy like me, that comes from the street, they see how I changed. They see, if you can do it, so can I.

For Howard, becoming a mentor was an opportunity to redirect his natural leadership abilities: “I had the ability to lead, to speak, to guide, but I used it in a negative way. Once I seen that I could take this negative and make it a positive—I wanted to do that.”

Turning a negative into a positive aptly describes the initiative that created the mentoring program at LorCI, a reception center where most residents spend just a few weeks at the beginning of their incarceration while they are classified and assigned to their “parent institution,” where they will serve the rest of their time. The classification process takes about two weeks, but people typically spend 60 to 90 days at the facility. When Warden Clipper took over in 2012, residents had little to do during that time. Warden Clipper worked with her staff to create a suite of programs that transformed unstructured time into opportunities to lay the groundwork for successful reentry.

Once she had a number of programs in place, Warden Clipper turned her attention to developing a peer-to-peer mentoring program. Mentoring is a central component of Director of Ohio’s Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Gary Mohr’s efforts to reform the state’s reception facilities.

Creating a mentoring program where none exists takes time and effort, and Warden Clipper’s first priority was recruiting. LorCI houses two types of people: “reception inmates,” who are on their way to other facilities, are

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the majority of the population, and “cadre inmates,” who stay at LorCI for the duration of their incarceration. Warden Clipper tapped into this pool of experienced long-term residents to serve as mentors for those who spend just a few weeks in the facility. She also recruited people incarcerated in lower-security prisons with more freedom of movement, offering a location close to Cleveland and their families to entice residents to move to LorCI’s more restrictive environment. In May 2015, the first cohort of carefully selected mentors was in place.

The program was a great success. The “mentors did everything I needed them to do. Staff began to embrace the idea,” Warden Clipper remembers. But there was a hitch: “So now I have 70 to 80 mentors in the institution, and I realized that they were all doing their own thing. Even though we provided a handbook, each had his own idea of what mentoring was about.”

That’s when she reached out to LCCC. “I wasn’t sure how they could help me, but I knew I needed to reach out to them.”

LCCC offered help in the shape of Martin (Marty) Eggleston, an experienced mentor and teacher who has worked with incarcerated men for close to two decades. At LCCC, Marty was working as an adjunct professor and basketball coach and serving as an enrollment services counselor. When he was recruited to work with the PROP program, Marty says, “the stars aligned for me to do what I love.”

Under the PROP program, Marty developed a structured mentoring program at LorCI, which includes a 3-credit, 10-week course—Success Coaching and Mentoring 1—that Marty teaches, and a class titled “Thinking Matters” that residents teach to their peers. Success Coaching and Mentoring, also offered at LCC, trains mentors to help mentees change old thought patterns, serve their time productively, and find nonviolent solutions to challenges and disagreements. The mentoring class is also offered to residents of Grafton Reintegration Center,

a prerelease facility located across the street from LorCI, and Grafton Correctional Institution, a men’s prison, who are transported the short distance to LorCI to take the course.

Both residents and staff are eligible to participate in the course, a departure from virtually all other programming inside the prison. “We wanted to make sure staff were getting the same information as the inmates,” Warden Clipper explains. Residents and staff take the class together, and Marty’s goal is for all his students to meet the course outcomes. “We meet everyone where they are; the class helps everyone.” There were challenges entailed in mixing staff and residents in the same classroom, all accountable for the same information, but the program is a resounding success. By now, most of the mentors at LorCI have gone through the mentorship classes, and the lessons Marty has taught resonate throughout the institution. Having the formal structure, “really made a difference in how we do mentorship,” Marty explains. “Everyone is on the same page, everyone knows what the expectations of the mentors are.”

QUICK FACTS: MENTORING AT LORAIN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

Typical number of “reception inmates”: 1,500

Typical number of “cadre inmates”: 122

Number of mentors: 70-80

CLASS TAUGHT BY LCCC STAFF:

- Success Coaching and Mentoring I. Students earn 3 college credits toward an associate’s degree or certificate.

CLASS TAUGHT BY MENTORS:

- “Thinking Matters”

A PATHWAY FROM PRISON TO COLLEGE

Brandon, who doesn't want to use his full name because he hopes to get his criminal record expunged, met LCCC's Julie Ford at Lorain/Medina CBCF, where he enrolled in college classes in psychology and sociology offered under the PROP program. He marvels at Julie's ability to get things done. Once he was released, Brandon connected with Julie on campus, and "within a couple of hours, she had me signed up for school, got my financial aid set up, got me books," and helped Brandon wipe out his debt to LCCC from a previous enrollment. Julie "was very prompt. A lot of people make promises they don't keep. . . . But with Julie there was nothing like that—you emailed, you called—she got back to you promptly . . . that made it very easy."

The PROP program that makes it easy for incarcerated people to connect with college has had a "huge impact," says Todd Angello, education director at Lorain/Medina CBCF. It "completely changed the environment in the day room. There used to be competition around gambling, fighting—now the competition is about getting the highest scores" on the college entrance exams or class assignments. The difference, Todd explains, is in how incarcerated people view themselves, "Once they get started, they realize 'I am somebody, I can go to college,'" then it's "'sign me up for the next class.'" A lot of people are disappointed because they can't sign up for all the classes—they leave too early." One person, Todd recounts, "completed the GED and kept getting in trouble to stay longer so he could complete the entire college course—he got 12 credit hours."

"It's really new to have the pathway to college," Todd explains. Before the Improved Reentry Education grant, there were no educational opportunities at Lorain/Medina CBCF for someone like Brandon, who has a high school diploma or a GED. Brandon was "college ready"—he was able to pass the college placement exam—but many Lorain/Medina CBCF residents with a high school credential have academic skill deficiencies and can't score an 11 on the Test of Basic Adult Education (TABE), the threshold needed to enroll in many community or technical colleges. These students used to be in a kind of limbo—because they have a high school diploma or GED, they weren't eligible for

the GED classes offered in the prison, but they couldn't pass a college entrance exam, leaving them with no pathway to postsecondary education. Thanks to the PROP program, students with a high school credential who score under 11 on the TABE can enroll in LCCC's enhanced Adult Basic Literacy classes at Lorain/Medina CBCF, which provide three nine-hour-per-week classes designed to strengthen participants' academic skills. Once they pass the TABE, students can take up to three college-level courses and enroll seamlessly at LCCC when they are released, with Julie's help.

Some residents who qualify aren't immediately interested in college. Many have innovative ideas and want to open their own business, but they have no idea how to proceed. Representatives of LCCC's [NEO LaunchNet](#), a regional entrepreneurship education network that provides services to students and alumni, came to Lorain/Medina CBCF and met individually with residents interested in starting their own business. These meetings "got residents interested in going to college because they saw opportunity to launch their business," Todd explains.

Lorain/Medina CBCF is the only one of 18 community corrections facilities in Ohio to offer the enhanced Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) program and college classes, and Todd is intensely proud of his facility, which won the [2016 Cliff Skeen Award](#) for excellence in community corrections. "Getting even one college course under your belt is a big accomplishment for these folks," Todd says. He has no doubt that education can and does reduce recidivism. In a letter to Director Gary Mohr, Todd detailed the program's success and urged the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to continue funding the education programs at his facility. Todd's letter concludes this way:

This program has had nothing but benefits.... Education seems like just a small part [of] rehabilitating and recidivism. But looking from the inside out, it plays a major role in rehabilitation. Education is a key factor in helping reduce recidivism and helping people become productive members of society.

“Once they get started, they realize ‘I am somebody, I can go to college,’ then it’s ‘sign me up for the next class.’”

ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AT LORAIN/MEDINA CBCF

PROGRAM:

- GED classes
- Enhanced Adult Basic Education classes
- College classes: Strategies for College Success, Psychology, Sociology, Health and Wellness, Stress Management
- First Aid leading to a Red Cross CPT/AED certificate of completion

SCHEDULE AND STAFF:

- Each class runs for 5 weeks, and students enroll in 1 class at a time
- Classes are held Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. for men, and 1 to 4 p.m. for women
- Total class hours: 45

INSTRUCTORS: 5 (GED—2; PROP/ABLE—2; POSTSECONDARY—1)

Impact:

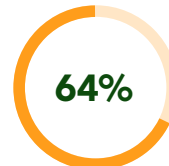
- Over 160 Enhanced ABLE participants since the program’s launch in January 2016
- 371 students enrolled in college-level classes or continued to another class at Lorain/Medina CBCF
- All but 4 of the participants who have attended for at least 40 hours (minimum to retest) have met the programmatic goal of increasing their skill level by 2 grade levels

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & CRIMINAL HISTORY

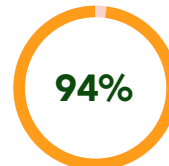
Without a high school diploma or access to postsecondary education, people with a criminal history have limited employment options and are likely to continue to commit offenses, which leads to further incarceration and reduced educational and economic opportunities.



of all inmates have less than a high school diploma



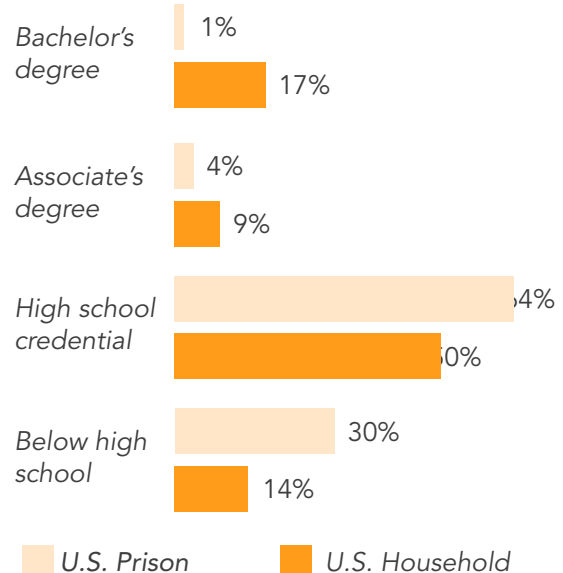
of incarcerated adults have a high-school credential



of returning adults cite education as their primary need for successful reentry³

Educational Attainment for Correctional Population vs. General Population, 2012-2014

Highest level of educational attainment



Source: PIACC Prison Study, 2014;
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016040.pdf>

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS

The Second Chance flyers are hard to miss—they're all over the LCCC campus, designed to reach students like Chad Squires, one of the almost 20 percent of LCCC students with a criminal history.⁴ Chad, who just turned 30, found the Second Chance program through a flyer posted on the wall near his advisor's office and asked to be assigned to Julie Ford. Now working toward an associate's degree in computer science, Chad is recovering from a decade of addiction and a brief stay in jail. Going back to school is something he's wanted to do since he attended LCCC for one year after high school, and finding the Second Chance program means that he has the extra support he'll need to complete his degree at LCCC and pursue his long-term goal of getting a bachelor's degree in computer science.

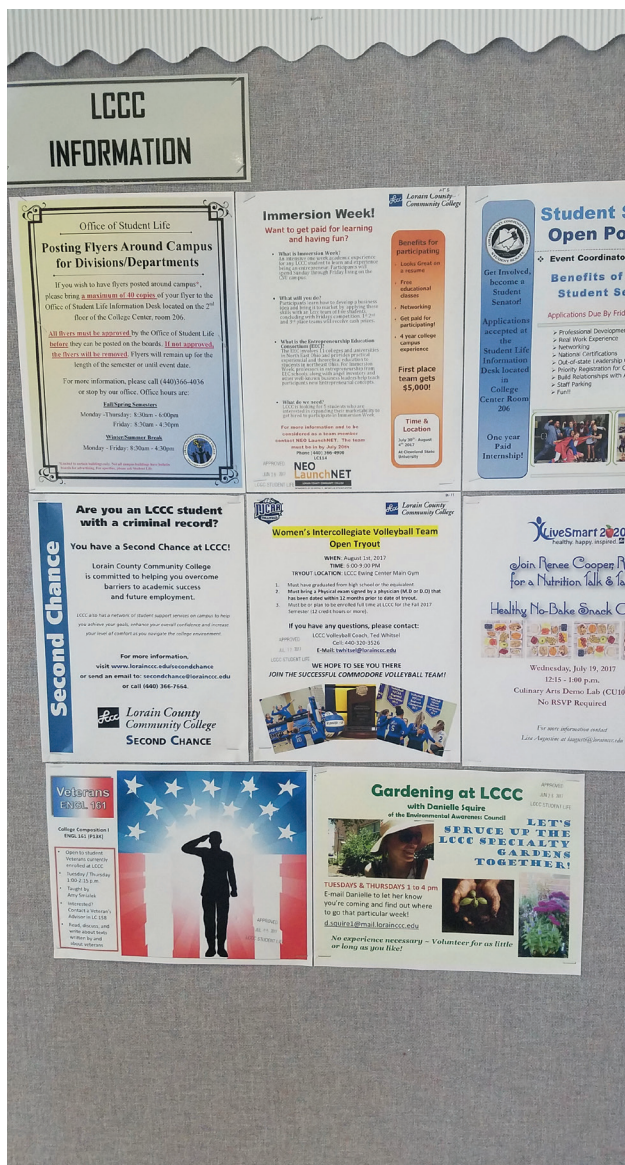
Students come to Julie in many different ways: some, like Chad, see a flyer and seek her out. Others, like Tommy, are referred directly to the Second Chance program by another campus resource. Students can also find Second Chance in the support services section of the college's [website](#), where the program is listed alphabetically, alongside academic counseling, accessibility services, campus police, the food pantry, and the child care center. This matter-of-fact approach captures the college's holistic view of supporting student success. As Stephanie Sutton, associate provost for enrollment management and student success, explains, "One of the most important things I do is make sure we connect students to supports so all students at LCCC learn and achieve."

One of those connection points is the [Lorain County Reentry Council](#). Although the LCRC has been around for a long time, the partnership with the college is new, made possible by the Improved Reentry Education grant. "A partnership made in heaven," is how Nikki Burns Dertouzos, LCRC's outreach coordinator, describes the relationship.

PERSONALIZED SUPPORT

People who come to the LCRC's monthly Citizen's Circle meetings often leave with a handwritten note from Nikki and instructions like these: "Go see Jim at factory X, tell him Nikki sent you and give him this note. If Jim isn't there, call me at this number." This low-tech, high-touch referral system works, Nikki explains, because it gives returning citizens a person to connect with, instead of an institution or a system. Personalized support is critical for returning citizens, who frequently face multiple daunting barriers that can easily become overwhelming. Nikki describes how she approaches a common situation:

We have a very poor public transportation system here in Lorain, and guys come home without a driver's license. They need a job to pay off fines or pay child support, but they can't get a job because of a felony conviction, gaps in employment, and no transport to work. For these guys, there are so many things they need to do, it becomes overwhelming. I help them untangle all of that. We work to create short-term and long-term goals. I help find a job they can walk or bike to; help them understand the driver's license system, how to chip away at the debt. I tell my guys "we don't have solutions to all the problems, but we're your team."⁵



“Julie really connects with students so they’re comfortable coming to her, talking about stuff that wouldn’t be OK to talk about in a typical college setting. She’s so nonjudgmental.”

That team now includes Julie, who attends the monthly meetings and serves as a conduit to everything the college has to offer. “A community college has so much more to offer than a regular four-year school,” Nikki observes, “[but] I can’t wrap my head around all of that.” Julie takes calls from anyone who’s interested in education—including “guys who need to finish the GED. She gets them registered and helps when they’re scared; she helps them overcome whatever barriers they face—financial, educational, logistics.” Having Julie at the Citizen’s Circle meetings is “invaluable,” Nikki explains. “People coming out of prison have a lot of self-esteem problems—having her there saying ‘we can do this. Call me—I’ll help you’ makes all the difference.”

The partnership between the college and the reentry council is a two-way street. Nikki’s phone often rings, and it’s Julie—“I’ve got a student in my office,” she begins, and then Julie and Nikki work together to help overcome the many barriers these students face: finding housing, medical care, food support, and transportation, or getting out of violent relationships, are some of the most common challenges. Nikki refers people to different programs, and Julie “really connects with students so they’re comfortable coming to her, talking about stuff that wouldn’t be OK to talk about in a typical college setting. She’s so nonjudgmental.” For Julie, that openness and willingness to help everyone comes from her mother: “She raised six kids, and she always told us: ‘you may have messed up, but it’s always OK to begin again.’”

SHARED VISION AND MISSION

At LorCI, Warden Clipper has an “amazing staff supporting me. They’re all engaged in the mission” of creating opportunities for people who are incarcerated to change, grow, and successfully return to their communities. That mission is shared by the leadership and dedicated staff at LCCC and Lorain/Medina CBCF, all of whom are working to weave people who need a second chance back into the fabric of the community. The barriers are significant—Julie is acutely aware of the hurdles her students have to overcome, and she understands why many drop out of sight for extended periods. But when they resurface—and they often do—she’s ready to let them know that there are resources for them, and to help them navigate the system in order to access those resources. During a recent visit to LorCI, Julie saw one of her students, who had ended up back in prison on a parole violation. When he spotted her, the young man called out, “Miss Julie—I’m getting out in October, I’m going to see you.” Julie will be waiting.

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ENDNOTES

1. According to PROP, 1 in 6 Ohioans have a felony or misdemeanor conviction. Extrapolating this average to Lorain County's population of 108,000, this would mean that just over 18,000 residents have a criminal history of some kind. Source: Personal correspondence with Martin Eggleston, program director, PROP.
2. Prison regulations prohibit us from using Howard's full name or his photo.
3. Federal Interagency Reentry Council. 2013. Education. New York, NY: Available at: https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/SnapShot_Education.pdf
4. In spring 2015, LCCC polled a random sample group of more than 100 students. Of those respondents, 18 percent indicated that they have a criminal record.
5. Studies have shown that although recidivism rates range from about 31 to 70 percent in different states, when returning citizens are employed soon after their release, recidivism rates drop dramatically and range from 3.8 to 8 percent. These reductions hold true regardless of whether the returning citizen's conviction was for violent or nonviolent crimes. Source: Peter Cove and Lee Bowes, "Immediate Access to Employment Reduces Recidivism," *Real Clear Politics*, June 11, 2015, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2015/06/11/immediate_access_to_employment_reduces_recidivism_126939.html.