

After Release: Reducing Repeat Visitors

[00:00:00] **Eloy Perez:** I was even preaching to guys, man, don't go out there and do it again. Don't go out there and do it again. Don't do it no more. Don't do it no more. Like it's I'm done. I'm done. And I know I got another one in me. I got to know I'm like, no. You're gonna be my age coming home 50 years old

[00:00:17] **Jason Hibbs:** It's what frustrates law enforcement breaks up families and costs us money We're talking about the so called Revolving door of prisons and how to slow it down on this episode of the rethinking jails and justice system Produced by WGTE Public Media and made possible by support from the John D. and Catherine T.

MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. I'm your host, Jason Gibbs. So far we've talked about community organizations, race, behavioral health, opportunities from behind bars. Saving our kids and predicting behavior.

But this is another topic that just keeps coming up in conversations about criminal justice reform, and that's reducing recidivism. That was Eloy Perez we heard from at the top and you may remember him from a previous episode. But today I want to reintroduce you to Avis Files. She's the Director of Family and Supportive Services at Pathway Incorporated, a community action agency providing service and assistance to those in need.

[00:01:30] **Avis Files:** How do I help this dad re enter into his family and keep him from recidivism when he's going right back into the neighborhood? He's going into the neighborhood with these people that are mad, his homeboys are saying we're glad you're here. You want to smoke some weed, get drunk? You want to get your package, you can make a come up because does anybody want to work 12 hour days a day, for seven days?

[00:01:52] **Jason Hibbs:** She says 10, 000 MacArthur Grant dollars helped her agency expand their existing Returning Fathers program by offering it to 40 additional men living in a halfway house. In this program, the men are reintroduced or in some cases introduced to their kids for the very first time and they're taught how to be good parents.

[00:02:12] **Avis Files:** It's an evidence based curricula that's used to talk about things like communication what it looks like from fathering from the inside, the father's roles what it means to be a man, showing and handling your feelings the child's growth, discipline, and of course working with mom, the co parent, which is always key when you're returning home, learning how to work with your co parent is very, it's very huge.

[00:02:35] **Jason Hibbs:** She says they also help participants access other services, including therapy.

[00:02:40] **Avis Files:** Because it is cohort style, and it is done together, like the men are together in cohort style what we do is then we say to them Let's go to counseling now. It's just like this. No, it's not really like that. It's not it's not really that kind of thing.

It's no, it's like counseling, but it's just one on one. And now you're not with a bunch of people because black people don't go to counseling. We've been told for years, no, you don't, we don't do that. We don't talk to people about our business, right? And so we're saying, hey, why don't you go talk to somebody now?

So the trauma that you've experienced from when you were a kid, one of the things that we always talk about is like, what happened with your dad? Where's your dad? What happened with your dad? You'd be surprised. Sometimes some people, they've had their mom and dad. They just, the streets just caught them up, right?

But for the most part, it's been proven that most men that go to jail, they don't know who their dad is, and they don't know who their grandparents are.

[00:03:29] **Jason Hibbs:** Files says overall, participants come from different places. Some simply live in targeted zip codes, which tend to have greater needs. Some are on house arrest, and others come from a halfway house.

But she says all of them take a test before the program, and then again after. After, and the results show that the program works not just by increasing knowledge, but changing attitudes

[00:03:52] **Avis Files:** and actually talking with them about making decisions going to work. Just the whole thing from you're coming back home.

What does that look like from the eyes of your child? What does that look like from the eyes of your co parent? And then how do we help you navigate those relationships at returning home? So So, some dads might have been gone five years. And so what does that look like? Their child was 10, but now they're 15 and we know what teenagers look like.

And so maybe there's some animosity, maybe there's some hurt, some pain, and maybe trauma that this young person's been through. Sometimes co parents don't. Keep connection to the father and make sure that they're able to talk with their child and see their child. So how do you walk back in into the lives of your children and into your lives of your co parent and navigate those spaces?

The majority of them have a record because they are selling drugs, trying to figure out how to make money to get this fast life, to get out of the lifestyle, right? And that encompasses the violence and all the things that happen with it, right? If I'm selling drugs, then I'm going to carry a gun because now I have to be afraid.

And now I'm going to be in gang activity because that's just what this world looks like, right?

[00:04:56] **Jason Hibbs:** Just like the fathers they serve, Files says the Brothers United program had some babies of its own.

[00:05:02] **Avis Files:** And from that, we've developed our Brothers and Sisters United co parenting program, our Brothers United Healthy Start program that focuses on around infant mortality, our B Youth and S Youth program that focuses on working with young people who are 12 to 17 who are or are not parents.

It was driven by the fact that. When you work with fathers, and especially black fathers in the community, you begin to work with the whole family. And there's no way you can walk in a space and only work with the father, but not work with the co parent. We started our Sisters United program based on the fact that the fathers were like, it's good that you're telling me.

But somebody needs to tell her too, so then we can figure this out because he's got renewed think and thought and he's going in going, Hey, I'm better now. And she's no, you're not. And how do you navigate that? How do you teach them to navigate it? And then how do you work with the mothers and co parent and teach them a co parent together?

When the romantic relationships over.

[00:05:57] **Jason Hibbs:** Files says long term success is hard to track, but their data shows that participants 20 to 24 years old generally do not re offend within 90 days. But beyond that, she relies on feedback from former participants, often coming from the streets.

[00:06:14] **Avis Files:** This guy's in the street like, Brothers United.

And I'm like, what? And he's let me talk to you. And so he's yeah, like I went to jail again. And I'm like, why? Like how can you be one of our fathers going back to jail? You missed it. You missed it. And he literally said, I was between the ages of 20 to, I was in my 20 to 24 and I didn't get it then, but I clearly get it now.

Can I come back? And we're like, absolutely, you can come back because maybe you forgot or maybe you didn't you didn't get it. And we're just in the work. We have very little money to go and track along because it takes a lot of money and time and energy to track fathers for a period of time that needs a staff member and it needs some attention.

And so I don't know, but I guarantee you, if I put you on a brothers united shirt and I sent you down the street, everybody be talking to you. They'd be like, how are you doing bro? As if you're part of it and you would just. nod your head, right? Because we, and we know that because we started new staff, right?

And so staff who weren't working back then, but they're like, Hey, you brought you, you work for them? Yeah, we know you work for them. And so the level of trust that we have in these pockets of communities and in, in the reentry space is amazing to me.

[00:07:24] **Jason Hibbs:** She says her program is about building trust among other things.

She says many people of color, black men in particular, don't trust the criminal justice system because it failed them by disproportionately sending more black men to jail.

[00:07:38] **Avis Files:** So if you send a dad away from the kid for five or eight years and now mom's mad because now she can't get any money So now and now the kid doesn't understand why my dad's in jail.

Now the dad's going to jail So what do you think he's learning in jail? He's I guess what? I'm not coming back to jail for child support. I'm learning how to get back home, flip some dope, make sure I pay my child support so I don't have to go back to jail. Now you flip a dope. Now you're back in jail.

Now we got an old vicious cycle, but nobody ever talks about it.

[00:08:02] **Jason Hibbs:** As you may remember from a previous Rethinking Jails and Justice podcast, the MacArthur Grant helped Lucas County expand their diversion programs and offer many programs for free as an alternative to incarceration. But building trust takes time, and everyone within the system

[00:08:20] **Avis Files:** If my PO don't really work with me and they're mean to me, and I was on probation before, so I know what it feels like, right?

So if my PO is mean to me and disrespectful to me and you think I'm going to trust that? And then particularly for black men, how would they trust a system that's continued to fail them? The system would have to stop failing them in order for them to trust. And then we're saying, come on, trust this system that sometimes I don't trust at all either.

And I'm doing the work. But I'm not making referrals. I'm like I hope he gets a good worker there. I hope someone is going to be fair when there's not. And so it's very difficult to be able to say to a black man when he comes home, You'll be okay. There's resources for you. Where is it? Is it resources?

[00:09:04] **Jason Hibbs:** For years now, to help people being released back into the community access the resources they need, resource providers have set up at the Reentry Coalition's first Wednesday's event on the first floor of One Government Center in Toledo.

[00:09:19] **Jamie Klear:** How's it going? Good, how are you doing? Good, good.

[00:09:21] **Jason Hibbs:** So I stopped by.

[00:09:22] **Jamie Klear:** The goal of this is to make sure that people have what they need.

[00:09:25] **Jason Hibbs:** And met Jamie Klear.

[00:09:27] **Jamie Klear:** We are one of the Medicaid Managed Care Plans and my role is Community Relations Rep. We do resource tables for all of the recent recently released individuals that come here looking for resources to get them reintegrated back into society.

[00:09:43] **Jason Hibbs:** Like preventative care, vouchers for a free diabetes screening, and annual wellness visits.

[00:09:49] **Jamie Klear:** But then sometimes the conversations look different, like mothers looking for child care resources. So it's really great to be here amongst all of these resources, and to help navigate individuals to each other, so that all of the services that they need can be taken care of, like a one stop shop.

It can be overwhelming, and a lot of information, but luckily we're all trained. To be able to make the appropriate referrals.

[00:10:15] **Jason Hibbs:** Mark Vaughn with Umadop Lucas County set his table up in the hallway leading to the main room.

[00:10:22] **Mark Vaughn:** We have some Umadop masks. We have some fans that say, know the real one pill can kill.

We have the cocaine pamphlets, drug abuse pamphlets, fentanyl pamphlets. We have some calendars. So I got some books. Some calendars, pens, bracelets. We just give away stuff. We want people to come to the table so I can get to talk to them.

[00:10:47] **Jason Hibbs:** He's confident that if recently released people take advantage of human doubt and the other agencies here, there's a good chance they won't cycle through and end up right here at first Wednesdays.

Again,

[00:10:59] **Mark Vaughn:** it's all different types of things here today. On first Wednesday, you got care stores, you got the, why you got different things in here today that these people. Coming back from re entry, they need these things.

[00:11:12] **Jason Hibbs:** The representatives here know that not everyone who walks through the doors will take full advantage of the programs in front of them.

But that doesn't seem to stop them from offering to help. Because so many people I've met who work in recovery, Vaughn has a very personal reason to keep on going.

[00:11:31] **Mark Vaughn:** I had a friend when I was younger, he's passed now, but I think it was good. Great ball player played ball together, we went to school together, and he just got on the wrong path, man, ended up over the end and all that.

[00:11:42] **Jason Hibbs:** Despite advertising and participating in events like these, many in the community, including other non profit workers, are unaware of the available organizations and resources. Retired Ohio State Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Stratton, Director of the statewide Stepping Up Initiative, which helps criminal offenders with mental illnesses connect to treatment, says she's observed this lack of awareness across the state.

[00:12:09] **Justice Evelyn Stratton:** I'll talk, I'll give a whole presentation on housing and state resources and everything for supportive housing and then I'll have the local housing authority and any local non profit that's got running a housing unit for persons with mental illness have them co present and the connections made inside a county just from those co presentations has been huge, valuable.

They think they're coordinating, they think they're 10 people on the call that haven't connected with them that need to.

[00:12:36] **Jason Hibbs:** The Justice holds meetings in Stepping Up Counties across the state, including Lucas County.

[00:12:42] **Justice Evelyn Stratton:** Lucas County was one of our very early Stepping Up Counties. I'm the center of those connections because I'm off the bench, I'm not campaigning, I don't have an agenda, I'm not running for anything.

So it gives me a nice spot to work from in working with everybody. My local attendance has doubled or tripled because they could all hop on a Zoom. It used to be very tough to get judges to, leave their docket and come to the lunch. I could browbeat them all to coming on for 10 minutes during their lunch break.

As I was a trial judge, you need to take a lunch break. Don't give me no, I won't take it. So for example, we had a judge from a Southern County say, and I said,

tell these people on this call what your needs are what you're facing, what your issues are. One judge said I've got three opiate clinics within a stone's throw.

They won't take fentanyl, they won't take meth, and they won't take mental health, and I only had two opiate cases on my docket the whole year. The community needed to know that because they weren't serving his, their needs. Another judge says I'm having a terrible time getting competency cases evaluated.

They sit in the jail getting worse and worse for two, three weeks, sometimes a month or two. I can't get a doctor to come and evaluate them. There's such a shortage. And I, I need, I need that we have a whole task force now that's starting to work on that issue. So then housing. Every place I go, housing is the biggest issue.

They don't have enough housing for supportive housing. That's probably our hugest issue. It's supportive housing, which means these people can't live independently. So they have to have a housing with access to treatment, maybe support services with transportation to a treatment visit or to a job.

It's different than affordable housing. Affordable housing is often used for like seniors. They may give them bus passes or they may have some pro, but supportive housing means you have to have some sort of treatment help, psychiatry help, whatever. You need some supports to actually survive. And so there's a lot of housing credits that I worked with our housing authority, our finance housing authority.

They have a lot of tax credits for developers that will develop these units. Some of the more modern building codes say if you build a 300 bed apartment, you have to make so many affordable. That's okay. But if you don't have supportive, that's not going to help. So a lot of these supportive units, there's a couple that are a single Units that you can rent out, but they try usually to get like they take over an old hotel and convert it to affordable house or supportive housing, or they actually build a standalone unit for affordable housing.

[00:15:12] **Jason Hibbs:** Justice Stratton says the other two big needs across the state are crisis centers and transportation.

[00:15:18] **Justice Evelyn Stratton:** It's consistent. It's crisis centers, transportation housing. I keep coming up over and over, but supportive housing is crucial to help them stabilize and be able to function, because if you didn't have those supports, they would just live in an apartment and fall apart again.

[00:15:37] **Jason Hibbs:** So that answers The housing issue and the mental health issue Does it address transportation?

[00:15:44] **Justice Evelyn Stratton:** No, we I have not really delved into transportation yet in great detail and trying to find solutions because they're so individual for each county What some counties do is provide bus passes. Some counties actually have a van they buy to transport people We always try to anyone that's veterans A service organization will transport vets to and from some tried to, hopefully build supportive housing on a bus line.

So if they need to get anywhere but house transportation is still an issue that hasn't really had a statewide solution yet.

[00:16:18] **Jason Hibbs:** Justice Stratton says stepping up uses intercept mapping, which details how people with mental and substance use disorders come into contact with and move through the criminal justice system.

[00:16:30] **Justice Evelyn Stratton:** And there's seven steps. There's pre trial. Trial, post trial, incarceration, reentry. There's all these steps and then a lot of people just cycle right back at the beginning, go back in again. And so it's how do you intercept at each of these sections to break that cycle of going back in and out.

And then when you get the infographics, one of the ones I would look at is The housing, the first housing infographic on supportive housing and how it compares, it's called Making the Business Case for Supportive Housing. We did a study of one gentleman in Delaware County who for eight years had cycled in and out, 400 plus years in jail, 400 plus years in prison, that 400 plus years in a hospital bed, and it cost him 844, 000 because we added, The rest of this, the hearing before the judge the, the bed and the we added all these different systems that he touched and what it cost and it cost me.

One man. They put him in supportive housing with robust services and it cost them only 244, 000. If they had done that for eight years, it would have cost him 244, 000. If they were not to do that, they would have spent an additional 600, 000 with no outcome because he was still cycling. There's a second infographic on the back side of that one.

Next to that one, the next one, which is on a gentleman, I think from Ross County, they have not yet been able to stabilize, he's already cost them a million dollars. And every single system has multiple, what we call frequent users of the system. You get them stabilized in housing, here is the proof financially.

Of how much difference it makes.

[00:18:14] **Jason Hibbs:** We have the intercept mapping infographics uploaded to our website, www.wgt.org/r_jj Back at Pathway Toledo Vis files says she does get frustrated that she doesn't get more cooperation from community leaders, but she tries to stay focused on her mission, which is building more than a brotherhood, but a community of people who care enough.

to help others stop the cycle and slow the revolving door.

[00:18:47] **Avis Files:** Every man gets a shirt. I'll show you a picture. Every man gets a Brothers United shirt or a BU Nation shirt. So they have a little brand recognition when they walk out and people know them. And it's building, I like to say that fatherhood builds brotherhood.

And so these guys are going through this cohort together. Some of them are getting out at different times. But the connection is still there for them. When they're out on the community they can have somebody, building, building their own social support network within the community.

[00:19:13] **Jason Hibbs:** File says Brothers United presents their program at First Wednesdays. They've been at this since 2015 and to date have worked with more than 2, 700 dads who have a total of 7, 500 children. More than half of their clients are returning home. From prison. Thank you for listening. The Rethinking Jails and Justice podcast is produced by WGTE public media and made possible by support from the John D.

and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails. I'm your host, Jason Hibbs.

On the final episode of the Rethinking Jails and Justice podcast,

Even though sites have a varying degree of success in both like keeping their jail numbers down and working on racial and ethnic disparities, you can find some successes and challenges in each of those sites.

[00:20:16] **Jason Hibbs:** A candid conversation with the MacArthur Foundation that might surprise you.

Yeah, it's tough right now. We are Going through a rough patch.

[00:20:25] **Jason Hibbs:** Why the foundation could be switching gears.

Two steps back, two steps forward, more steps back. Like it's just really hard.

[00:20:35] **Jason Hibbs:** What that means for Lucas County, and we take a wider look at the future of criminal justice reform.