



Ohio

Department of
Rehabilitation & Correction



Citizen
CIRCLE

INFORMATION GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Defining “Reentry”

Reentry Mission and Goals

What is a Citizen Circle?

Goals of a Citizen Circle

How do Citizen Circles Work?

Citizen Circle Membership

Determining the Need for a Citizen Circle

Guidelines for Implementation

The benefits of a Citizen Circle

Referrals to a Citizen Circle

INTRODUCTION

The Citizen Circle publication is a guide to assist local communities with establishing, implementing, and sustaining a Citizen Circle. If your community is seeking an effective process to assist justice-involved individuals, this information guide can assist.

DEFINING “REENTRY”

Reentry is a system of governance that surrounds the return of incarcerated individuals to the community following a period of incarceration in jail, prison or detention facility (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). This “system” includes many entities that all have a role in successful reentry. Jails, prisons and detention facilities engage in various forms of release preparation; however, more is needed for men and women to successfully return to Ohio communities.

OVERVIEW OF REENTRY

Communities play a great role in ensuring the men and women we serve are successful upon returning home. Our goals acknowledge that strong partnerships with community providers, employers, the faith community, survivors, and others are necessary to effectively address recidivism. They also recognize that simply being crime free is not enough for successful reentry. Successful reentry includes meaningful relationships, employment, and a sense of belonging to a community and its members. Reentry efforts attempt to avoid isolation, maladaptive thinking patterns, and individuals returning to the community with the same behaviors. Citizen Circles are just one way to equip individuals for a successful return.

Reentry Goals:

- Developing a successful transition for those returning to the community from a period of incarceration.
- Ensuring individuals are prepared to return home better equipped at the completion of reentry than at the time of their admission to the correctional system.
- Equipping individuals with marketable skills, thereby enabling them to be productively employed.
- Assisting individuals in returning as responsible parents, supporting their children and families, and becoming better neighbors.

- Providing individuals with effective coping skills for successful transition to the community.
- Enhancing awareness of the impact of their crime and providing them with opportunities to make amends for the harm caused.

WHAT IS A CITIZEN CIRCLE?

Citizen Circles create partnerships that promote positive interactions, social support, and accountability for justice-involved individuals. Together, justice-involved individuals and Citizen Circle members embark on a journey of transformation to create fundamental changes in people, relationships, and communities. Citizen Circles provide a holistic and collective approach to individuals at any stage of their reentry. Many need assistance immediately upon release; however, at times others who have been released for a period of time may need specific assistance from the Circle, such as obtaining employment.

Goals of Citizen Circles

Reintegration: To support individuals with a seamless transition back to Ohio communities.

Community Partnerships: Community members take an active role in developing partnerships to assist individuals.

Accountability: Justice-involved individual's responsibility and commitment to positive change

HOW DO CITIZEN CIRCLES WORK?

Citizen Circles operate in a safe and welcoming environment. Two important components to Citizen Circles are: having a diverse membership and a consistent location with a standard time for the meetings. This allows the participants to remember, even if years later, where to go for assistance.

Citizen Circle membership are those community members that participate in the Citizen Circle sessions. Training for Citizen Circle members is conducted by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's Office of Reentry and lead agency of the Citizen Circle. The training includes: best practices on how to work with justice-involved individuals, motivational interviewing techniques, role playing, recognizing trauma and types of trauma, and instruction on how Citizen Circles are to be operated.

The leadership of the Circle will ensure all its members are made aware of any updates and success of previous participants and attendance at the previous Circle. By doing this, membership remains steady as members realize the importance of the Circle as well as determining if there are other areas that need represented for additional resources.

A referral process should be established with each of the Circles throughout Ohio. A designated member of the Circle should be appointed to receive the referrals and schedule individual times for participants to attend. It is helpful to have a few open time slots available for walk-ins or to spend additional time with someone.

The Circle should maintain records that document attendance regarding number of participants and Circle members, what needs surround participants, and referrals made for the participants and the follow-up regarding those referrals. If your Circle is associated with a local Reentry Coalition, your records can be incorporated into coalition data also.

FACILITATING THE CIRCLE

It is important to ensure the participant feels welcome and safe during the meeting. Therefore, each individual appointment should have multiple Circle members participating in setting goals and making referrals. Each participant will meet with the group Circle members to ensure confidentiality unless the Circle participant invites a family member or support person to attend the Circle with him or her.

Circles need to be mindful of the number of members participating. The Circle does not want to overwhelm the participant. The Circle members will engage the participant with the purpose of providing hope through an open conversation using motivational interviewing techniques. Once the areas of need are established and there are no barriers identified to address these areas, the Circle members will assist each participant in setting obtainable goals and provide support and resources for the participant upon completion of the individual session. The Circle should always try to make something happen NOW. Therefore, if possible, provide the participant with an immediate need such as a bus ticket, clothing, food, or an appointment to an agency or any other additional resources.

It is a best practice for a Circle member to reach out to the participant after a few days or a week to make sure they are progressing and answer any questions. It is important to communicate the progress with the members so they can adjust referrals in the future and see success in their efforts.

CITIZEN CIRCLE MEMBERSHIP

County reentry communities must have a robust and diverse membership from a wide range of partners throughout the county. The membership shall understand that each individual is unique and recognize individual differences. Circle members may include agency and service provider representatives, a representative from neighborhood groups, the faith community, merchant associations, mental health representative, and many others.

When determining the membership of Citizen Circle, it is imperative that membership represent the needs of the justice-involved individuals. Recommendations for Circle membership are:

- Employment agency representative
- Education/Vocational representative (such as the local Adult Education center)
- Family agency representative
- Substance Use Disorder
- Mental Health /Crisis Intervention specialist
- Housing agency representative
- A mentor or a cadre of mentors for peer support

The Circle should maintain a minimum number of five members for each meeting of the Citizen Circle that reflects the needs of the participants scheduled to meet with Circle. This number may fluctuate based upon the number of clients scheduled to be seen by the Circle.

DETERMINING THE NEED FOR A CITIZEN CIRCLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The initial step in determining the need for a Citizen Circle is to gather a group of community reentry stakeholders to discuss the concept and determine interest.

The group would need to:

- Identify current processes/approaches available for those returning to the county.
- Identify the number (roughly) of justice-involved individuals and their families currently living the community.
- Consider the community's history of dealing with the justice-involved individuals and the current sentiment toward this group.
- Educate the community with the fundamentals of the Citizen Circle and what the requirements would be from the membership.

Some of the fundamental elements of a Citizen Circle are:

- Assisting justice-involved individuals re-connect with their family. This could consist of helping to repair the damage to relationships and regaining trust.
- Surround the Circle member with people who want to help them be successful.
- Reduce recidivism

- Provide resources for a successful, purposeful life.
- Provide networking availability to resource providers.
- Justice-involved individuals connecting with several resources in one place.
- Offer mentoring to provide social networking.
- Assist Circle participants in identifying risky attitudes and beliefs about crime.
- Assist Circle participants in identifying behaviors that could lead to re-offense.
- Capturing and tracking the system of activity and evaluations.

Guidelines for Implementation:

Once you have determined to create a Citizen Circle in your county, please feel free to reach out the Reentry Coordinator in your area for assistance or ODRC Office of Reentry. It is important to create a diverse group of members for your Circle. The members should be able to address the areas of risk for recidivism according to the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS). There are seven areas of risk:

- Criminal history
- Education/Employment
- Family and social support
- Substance Use Disorder/Mental Health
- Peer Associations
- Attitudes and Behavior patterns
- Neighborhood

It is recommended that any new members attend at least one existing Citizen Circle not in your county to observe their operations before committing to attend the Citizen Circle training.

The initial training of the Citizen Circle members will be completed by ODRC Office of Reentry staff. This is done to make sure everyone is receiving the same material and to answer any questions from members of the new Citizen Circle. In addition to the training, the members of a new Citizen Circle will discuss: mission and vision of the Citizen Circle, membership requirements, roles of the members, referral processes, and establishing a tracking system.

THE BENEFITS OF A CITIZEN CIRCLE

Citizen Circles provide benefits to those returning from incarceration, benefits to agencies and benefits to local communities.

Benefits to Returning Citizens: Social support is linked to reduced recidivism and positive reintegration. This social support has been found to increase self-regulation, improve problem-solving skills and social skills. The support provided by citizen Circles also reduce experiences of isolation, loneliness, and rejection for those returning to communities. Many individuals returning home lack positive social support and find much value in the consistency of the Circle.

Benefits to the Community: Citizen Circles assist with developing a genuine sense of belonging that result in stabilizing communities. Community members can also be part of a restorative network that assists justice-involved individuals with ongoing efforts of reentry.

Benefits to the Members: Citizen Circles are established to target social support for those returning from incarceration to help individuals obtain goals. Circle members receive knowledge of reentry through participation and gain satisfaction from seeing their assistance as helpful to others. Many Circle members report the training they receive to be a major benefit of Circle membership, stating it fosters cohesion, encouragement, and personal growth. Circle members also find that volunteering as a Circle member provides them an opportunity to share their experiences, skills, and wisdom with others.

Why make a referral to a Citizen Circle?

Citizen Circles create a team-approach to address the issues of need for Circle participants. This holistic team approach allows justice-involved individual to receive direct access to reentry resources. Additionally, Circle members gain knowledge of community resources as well as getting to know each Circle participant and needs of that individual. Lastly, the Citizen Circle can provide individuals with hope. Hope is job one for ODRC as well as a major goal for the Citizen Circle.

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness"

-Desmond Tutu

ESTABLISHING A CITIZEN CIRCLE

This information guide provides an explanation of what Citizen Circles do for the justice-involved individuals, members, and communities. If you would like to schedule a Citizen Circle training, would like more information, or would like to observe a Citizen Circle, please feel free to contact the ODRC Office of Reentry at: DRC.OfficeofReentry@odrc.state.oh.us