

Senate Finance: Corrections Subcommittee

HB 64-FY 16-17 Operating Budget

Proponent Testimony of: Sheronda Ridley

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My name is Sheronda Ridley and I'm a 15 year employee at the Correctional Treatment Facility which is the Lucas County Community Based Corrections Facility. The significance in my opening statement is that it was the last place I was incarcerated at. In 1989 and 1991 I was convicted of drug charges and drug related charges and was sentenced to the Ohio Reformatory for Women. Upon my release, I returned to the same environment and began using drugs immediately. I had a 5 year run of using and committing petty misdemeanor crimes to support my drug habit.

April 25, 1996 would be the last day that I used any mind or mood altering substance. I was arrested for the 3rd time that month and would not be released back into the community again. I served 2 months in the county jail awaiting my sentence on a probation violation and felony drug abuse. On June 10, 1996, I was sentenced to 4 months at the Lucas County Correctional Treatment Facility and 5 years community control. Once there, I was introduced to some life changing and life sustaining information.

Even though it was still in its infancy stage, it was a very intense program. We programmed from 8 am until 5 pm, and sometimes later depending on any evening programming. Initially I was resistant to the classes because I had never been in an environment that exposed some things that were embedded deep inside of me. What the program offered me was an opportunity to look at my entire life, not just my drug use. One particular class that addressed those embedded belief systems was a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy known as Thinking for a Change.

Thinking for a Change attacked my faulty belief system and challenged me to look at my criminal thinking and justifications. Once completing the entire program, I learned that my drug use and time in the penitentiary were a result of my own attitudes, thoughts and feelings. I was better served by receiving treatment in the CBCF in my home community. This allowed me to

remain in contact with family and positive role models that remained in my life, and taught me how to live sober in my own neighborhood.

Upon a recommendation from CTF, I was mandated to a 12 step recovery based transitional house for women for one year. I also was the first resident of CTF to participate in the aftercare outpatient program. By having access to outpatient programming at CTF, it created a true continuity of care. Aftercare gave me the additional support I needed and increased my ability to face my fears and problem solve situations that had previously resulted in me using drugs to cope.

Approximately 6 months from my release, I enrolled at the community college and graduated with an Associated Degree in Applied Business in December 1999. During this time, CTF also allowed me to come to the facility on a voluntary basis and talk with the women's unit. In May of 2000, I saw an ad for an administrative clerk I position at CTF and after praying about it, I applied, interviewed and began working there on May 30, 2000. January of 2003, I was promoted to Correctional Officer and in March of 2010, I was promoted to shift supervisor in corrections. In May of 2011, I received my undergrad degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, applied for a case manager position and was promoted to treatment staff. In July of 2013, I received my Masters in Psychology, with a concentration in Addiction and in December of 2014, I received my 4th promotion to Senior Supervisor to oversee a new program called the Midas Program, which provides treatment services to high risk misdemeanor offenders. This program was contingent upon acquiring my LDCD III by March 1, 2015. On February 14, 2015, I passed my AOD exam, and currently possess my LCDC III license.

Have I reached my goals? No. My #1 goal continues to be to remain sober because without my sobriety none of this would have been possible. Currently I aspire to obtain my Doctorate Degree

in Psychology and my Independent Licensure in the near future. However, I must continue to stay sober and remain active daily in my sobriety.

I used to ask myself why me? As I look around 19 years later, I still see some of the same people who I used drugs with, committed crimes with, still in and out of the system. So my question is no longer why me but why not me? I've learned to get in touch with my spiritual being and I believe that this is my calling. Who better to give those that are still destitute some hope? Hope that one day, if a higher power continues to spare their lives, they too can find a new and better way to live. I truly believe that serving in this capacity is my purpose in life. I'm no better than them. I just happened to have been given the opportunity to learn a new and better way to live through information I first heard at CTF. By being employed at CTF, I have the opportunity to carry and teach the same message I received to the willing and unwilling. It is important to note that underneath all of the chaos involving offenders, lies a human being.

Chairman and committee members thank you for your time, and we will answer any question you may have at this time.