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Good Afternoon. Thank you. We are Ron and Catherine Tijerina, Co-Founders and Co-Executive Directors of The RIDGE Project. The RIDGE Project is a non-profit organization, founded in 2000, with the mission of improving the lives of individuals, building a legacy of strong families, and empowering generational responsibility. We believe that generational responsibility, the foundational belief that our responsible actions today will directly and positively influence the generations of tomorrow, is a defining thread that runs through the fabric of our society.

Prior to founding The RIDGE Project, we personally experienced poverty in our own lives. It was through our own experience that we developed our award-winning programs. In 1991, Ron went to prison for a crime he did not commit. I was left alone, raising 2 small sons by myself and on welfare. I was a TANF recipient who received the following services: housing assistance, heating assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, and SSI for one of my sons. I was uninsured for 9 years while my husband was also supported by tax dollars as an inmate. We have an intimate, firsthand, understanding of many of the pro-social barriers faced by the majority of people living in poverty.

Since founding The RIDGE Project, we have served more than 400,000 Ohioans with one or more of our TYRO courses. TYRO curricula include: TYRO Dads for positive character development and responsible fatherhood, Couple Communication for healthy marriage/healthy relationship, and TYRO Jet for workforce development. All of our programs are relationship driven and designed to permanently impact the individuals we serve. We provide these services through partnerships with ODRC, churches, schools, NGOs, and state and national agencies. Our programs are nationally recognized, evidence-based and transformational. They have been evaluated by numerous evaluators, including the Applied Research Center from Miami University, James Bell and Associates, ICF International, Midwest Research & Evaluation, Research Triangle Institute, Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Urban Institute. Additionally, our TYRO programming, which has an established presence within the Ohio prison system, is transferrable to other at-risk populations, such as welfare recipients, and unemployment recipients – or any individual or family that is or has the likelihood of utilizing dependency funds.

Today, we would like to share our ideas regarding solutions to the many problems and barriers that affect many people who are in the judicial system. These problems are directly linked to pro-social behaviors like poverty, incarceration, and the single-parent home, a comprehensive personal and professional development would be an effective “first response” to all of those in the system, along with their families, treating the problem at its root cause. DRC can address these problems, but not alone. Adding a requirement for personal, family and ethical development would allow Ohio to be proactive in with community partners, with the individual recipients, and with their families. As the individuals are empowered to make healthier, more responsible decisions, safety will increase and the associated costs to the state will decrease in multiple ways, including reduced incarceration costs, increased access to necessary care,

increased family stability via healthier marriages, increases in child support payments, and improved job retention. This is, in essence, the first step in building a level of generational responsibility into Ohio demographics that need it the most and thereby reducing the entitlement mentality and increasing public safety.

Building this type of permanent generational responsibility is not something that happens overnight or by offering the same solutions to ongoing problems. Instead, it is the culmination of years of refinement in the best practices in educating and training individuals and families in the areas of positive character development, healthy relationships, responsible fatherhood, and workplace ethics. Both the activation and cultivation of these four key components of generational responsibility, is necessary to foster within our Ohio communities the foundational belief that our responsible actions today will directly and positively influence the generations of tomorrow. It is especially essential in at-risk populations within the state. Only effective, evidence-based curricula have the power to impact these various population segments in positive ways. Our TYRO suite of programs meets these requirements and sets the bar for transformative programming.

Our family strengthening strategy includes addressing the primary predictors of incarceration: fatherlessness, literacy barriers, and the culture of entitlement that is often created by cycles of generational incarceration and poverty. By focusing on strengthening the family, intervention and prevention work together in tandem. As we teach those we serve the true value of being a productive citizen and then help them learn to manage their relationships better, we see thinking patterns begin to change. Men and women begin to consider stewardship and the seed of independence and the idea of building a family legacy is planted. Now, we can move them to become “employment ready.” This means they cannot only get a job, they can keep that job.

Some of the specific barriers that must be addressed (that are not currently being uniformly delivered) in order to really help recipient families:

1. Healthy relationships, communication skills, and conflict resolution (decreases domestic violence, increases family stability)
2. Identifying and addressing pro-social barriers
3. Addressing a lack of budgeting and financial planning. Helping understand the relationship people have with money - Healthy vs. Non Healthy financial habits
4. Helping people to see that the experience they bring to a company is the experience they receive. If they can view a job as an *opportunity* instead of an *obligation*, both their satisfaction and success will be greatly improved upon employment.
5. Helping people understand there's only one thing that differentiates someone who is successful from someone who is not; attitude. Success is not defined as being rich or obtaining material things, it is defined as being able to set a goal and see that goal accomplished. Small steps add up to big changes—but every big thing is only made up

of small things.

6. Teach families that their past does not define who they are. But it can qualify them for their future, if they let it. This concept allows families who have been stuck in poverty for generations to dare to consider that they could live their lives differently.
7. Teaching people the importance of fulfilling social roles and accepting responsibility for their families, neighborhoods and communities.
8. Teaching people that hard work equals profit; those things worth having are worth putting effort into achieving. Achieving your dream will cost you something. It is hard work, but the profit will come not just as finances, but as self-worth and self-confidence, respect, and self-sufficiency. Many of our clients have never been challenged to think in these terms.
9. In order to really address the pro-social barriers that are eating up dollars in corrections and many other social programs, it is vital to teach people not to be afraid of change. We show them how to change for the better and begin to dream again for their families. If you never see a dream or goal realized, you will stop dreaming. If we want to see transformation, we must help people find the hope necessary to dream again.
10. Teaching relationship skills builds stronger, intact families and then translates into higher incomes, healthier people and increased child well-being.

To effectively address these barriers, our TYRO programming model can be scaled throughout the state. Together with collaborative partners, TYRO can deliver services that align with their core competencies and actively contribute to building generational responsibility. In addition to this, newly developed mobile digital engagement technology provides the necessary means for effective case management and client engagement within the successful TYRO programming model, and provides users an effective method of outreach to various target populations. The RIDGE Project's TYRO suite has been proven successful as a stand-alone transformational programming model and has also been shown to be effective in building generational responsibility in at-risk populations.

The TYRO suite of programs accomplishes this by:

- Developing positive character traits within individuals, fathers and families
- Teaching and fostering effective communication skills within relationships
- Promoting responsible parenting
- Attacking the culture of incarceration and entitlement
- Engaging individuals via digital content, which also supports intensive case management, data tracking, and evaluation
- Connecting clients to ongoing support and accountability networks of alumni to ensure permanent success
- Actively seeking collaborative partnerships with churches, schools, community and faith-based organizations, and state and national agencies

The TYRO programming model WORKS and is changing the way we think about our problems in Ohio. It is opening the door for better, more cost-effective solutions that can positively affect every Ohio citizen. These actions have broad fiscal implications relating to family stabilization, increased health, tax revenues and decreased welfare dependence, among others. By laying a solid path for future generations, and with an ongoing commitment from the stakeholders in this endeavor, we can leverage our existing framework to build a sustainable and replicable initiative that has the power to impact our entire state. This model has the potential to be the cornerstone of many successful human services initiatives in Ohio.

# TYRO®: BREAKING GENERATIONAL CYCLES OF POVERTY, INCARCERATION AND ENTITLEMENT



"Real men don't play house. They build them."  
- Ron Tijerina



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