



Meeting Summary July 21, 2021

Members Present: Patti Echsner, Robert Greenwell, Dan Goyette, Jeff Cooke, Terri Willis, Mary Lucas, Liz McQuillen, Judge Tanisha Hickerson, Amelia Speers, Angela Rea, Dennis Ritchie, and John Fleming

Guests and Staff Present: Tyler Dennison, Faith Augustine, Dr. Brian Schaefer, Marty Johnson, and Dr. Jelani Kerr

I. Welcome/Call to Order

Tyler Dennison opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and reminded all attendees to stay on mute throughout the meeting unless presenting or speaking.

II. Approval of the May 19, 2021 Meeting Summary

The May 19, 2021 meeting summary was unanimously approved as submitted.

III. Opportunity Network Updates

A. Chairperson Vacancy

Tyler informed members that as of this date, the Opportunity Network still does not have a chairperson. Tyler stated that he has reached out to two individuals, one of whom was unable to assume the duties because of their busy schedule. The second person will be letting Tyler know soon if they can accept the position. Tyler is optimistic that a new chairperson will be announced at the next meeting. Additionally, the group is still looking for at least one co-chair, who will run the meetings when the chairperson is unavailable. Tyler asked that if anyone is interested in being a chair or co-chair, to reach out to him via email.

B. New Members

Tyler then gave new Opportunity Network members, who were unable to attend the last meeting, a chance to introduce themselves to the group. The first to introduce themselves was Robert Greenwell, the Human Resources Manager at Rev-A-Shelf. Robert stated that he is excited to be included in the group and looks forward to building relationships with group members and providing support to justice-involved individuals.

Tyler then announced the addition of two new Opportunity Network members from Greater Louisville Inc (GLI), Liz McQuillen and Shelby Williams. Liz and Shelby will be taking over for Bradley Bringardner, who recently resigned his position at GLI.

Liz McQuillen is the Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy at GLI and introduced herself to the group. Liz stated that her job involves lobbying for policies at the local, state, and federal level to improve businesses in the community. Liz stated that she and Shelby are excited to join the Opportunity Network and to learn more about the work the group does. Shelby Williams was unable to attend the meeting on this date.

C. Reentry Workbook Update

Tyler provided an update on the Reentry Workbooks which are currently being utilized at the Louisville Metro Department of Corrections and Webster County Jail. He informed members that there are between 60-70 workbooks being utilized inside Metro Corrections currently and another 25 books at Webster County Jail. Tyler explained that the process has been slow due to the pandemic, but he continues to work with Mane Martirosyan at Metro Corrections to identify new individuals who qualify for the workbooks. Tyler noted that face-to-face meetings with inmates utilizing the workbooks is unfortunately not feasible at this time due to COVID protocols in place within the jail.

Tyler introduced Dr. Brian Schaefer to provide an update on the research portion of the workbook project. Dr. Schaefer stated that so far, three interviews have been completed, which he described as “insightful.” Dr. Schaefer reported two additional interviews have been scheduled and he is hopeful that more will be scheduled soon.

Tyler also stated that he has begun disseminating the workbooks to community service providers. Since the last Opportunity Network meeting, workbooks have been delivered to the Goodwill Industries Resource Center, as well as at the Shawnee Community Center. He reminded everyone that if they would like an electronic or physical copy of the workbooks, to reach out to him. The workbooks are paid for and more will be purchased soon, so the goal is to get them into the hands of people who need them.

Tyler announced that in the near future, possibly before the end of the year, he would like to begin planning a Reentry Workbook for youths. Tyler stated that this workbook would be shorter in length but would touch on similar topics as the adult workbook. Tyler stated he hopes to share more about this in the coming months.

D. Workgroups

Tyler reminded members that the Opportunity Network Workgroups will be reconvened soon. The workgroups were put on hold, due to staff turnover and the pandemic, but Tyler identified three workgroups that he would like to begin staffing as soon as possible:

- **Workforce and Education Workgroup** – This workgroup will be devoted to connecting justice-involved individuals with much-needed employment and educational opportunities. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, conducting mock interviews for job seekers, organizing resume writing seminars, and/or identifying community employers who have a track record of hiring people with criminal backgrounds.
- **Mentor Workgroup** – This workgroup involves supporting the Kentucky Department of Corrections with their Mentor Initiative Program. Examples of this

include but are not limited to assisting with identifying mentor candidates and disseminating applications within the community.

- **Legislative Workgroup** – This workgroup will identify legislative issues related to reentry and involves advocating for positive change at the local and state levels.

Tyler stated that if anyone is interested in joining the above-mentioned workgroups, or if they have an idea for another workgroup, to reach out to him.

IV. Featured Speaker

A. Dr. Jelani Kerr, University of Louisville

Tyler introduced Dr. Jelani Kerr, a professor with the University of Louisville Health and Behavioral Sciences Department. Dr. Kerr's research initiatives involve studying HIV testing and HIV-related stigma among formerly incarcerated African American youths. Dr. Kerr opened his presentation by stating that there is an uptick in HIV cases in the community and researchers and health experts are unable to pinpoint an exact cause. Dr. Kerr stated that in the United States, black people are much more affected by HIV than other groups. In fact, 1 in 20 black men will likely be diagnosed with HIV, compared to 1 in 132 white men. These national numbers, combined with the rise in local cases, are very concerning. Dr. Kerr stated that while drug use and unprotected sex can account for some of these numbers, it does not account for all the numbers, which is why his research is focused on social drivers. Dr. Kerr noted that communities with higher incarceration rates tend to have higher HIV rates. He stated that one explanation is that incarcerated populations do not readily have access to resources that keep them healthy such as doctors, gainful employment, and/or housing.

Another focus of Dr. Kerr's research involves examining how many people are incarcerated. Kentucky alone incarcerates more people than some countries and the result of this makes our community more susceptible to not only HIV, but other health issues. Dr. Kerr explained that research shows that drug use and drug dealing is similar among whites and blacks, but black people are incarcerated at a higher rate than their white counterparts, which further explains the higher HIV rates for the black community.

Dr. Kerr stated that in order to combat this issue and learn more, he and his research team are making sure that those disproportionately affected by HIV have access to the care and treatment they need. Dr. Kerr explained that the common belief among many is that HIV is death sentence and cannot be treated, which is untrue. Great advancements have been made in terms of treating the disease and he hopes to help remove this stigma that follows HIV. Dr. Kerr and his team have developed a survey to administer to those who participate in his research study. The study is conducted once per year for three years and he hopes to have 300 people participate. The population Dr. Kerr is focusing on are justice-involved African Americans, 18-24 years of age. There is a financial incentive for participants each time they complete a survey. Dr. Kerr stated that this is not research just for the sake of research. The goal of this study is to improve services in communities. Dr. Kerr has developed relationships with HIV testing organizations, community service providers, and system decision-makers who can affect policy changes.

Tyler thanked Dr. Kerr for his presentation and informed everyone that they could reach out to he or Dr. Kerr to request more information about the study.

V. Adjourn

Tyler thanked everyone for attending the meeting and reminded everyone that the next scheduled meeting is Wednesday, September 15, 2021. Tyler stated that he had hoped the July meeting would be the last virtual meeting before returning to meeting in person. With the uptick in COVID cases in the community, this may not be feasible. Tyler stated that if the group can meet safely in September, then they would do so, but otherwise would continue to meet virtually. Tyler stated he will give the group proper notice if the next meeting is held in person. Additionally, Tyler informed the group that he will be taking several weeks of paternity leave at the end of September but would return any Opportunity Network-related emails or calls as quickly as possible during that time. With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.