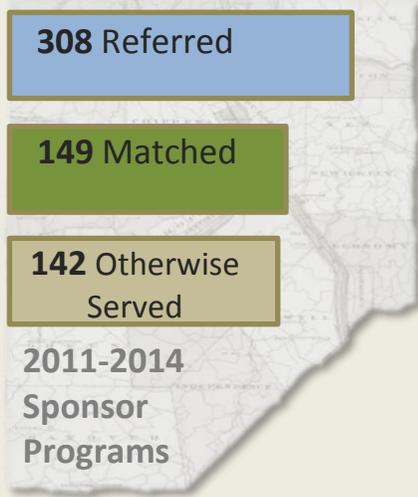


# BEAVER COUNTY SPONSOR PROGRAMS

June 2015

*The Beaver County ChancesR: Re-Entry, Reunification, and Recovery Program targets people with mental health, substance use, or co-occurring disorders (COD) who are sentenced to the Beaver County Jail. ChancesR connects offenders to services and organizations to assist with the re-entry process. This fact sheet showcases one such service, sponsorship programs. The information in this fact sheet is based on interviews conducted with members of the leadership from both ROOTS<sup>1</sup> & TRAILS<sup>2</sup>.*



Sponsor programs are gaining popularity as a way to assist offenders as they navigate the challenges of re-entry. Preliminary research shows promising results for such programs<sup>3</sup>.

Since September 2011, ROOTS Ministries, located in Aliquippa, and TRAILS Ministries, located in Beaver Falls, have been providing sponsorship services to individuals in the ChancesR Program. These agencies match trained sponsors with individuals identified in the Beaver County Jail who can benefit from friendship and mentoring. The role of the sponsor is to provide emotional support and assist the mentee to develop skills, find housing, and navigate life outside the institution. As one interviewee said,

**“They’re [sponsors] a support, someone you can talk to, if you feel like you’re getting ready to lose it, you can call them up.”**

**Identification.** There are two routes for becoming sponsors. First, the individuals in jail identify someone in their life they think would be a positive support and ROOTS or TRAILS ask them if they are willing to participate.

If individuals in jail do not know who to identify, program staff match them with a trained sponsor. These sponsors are community members who are recruited and trained to fulfill this role.

**Recruitment.** Many of the trained sponsors were recruited through an initial campaign when ChancesR began. Since then, the associated churches request volunteers on a weekly basis through the church bulletin. In some cases, program staff use their personal connections to recruit volunteers. As a staff member shared,

**“The one person I have for my first client, she’s actually my next door neighbor...I thought she would be perfect.”**

## The Process

Receive referrals from NHS<sup>4</sup>

Connect with mentee in jail

A sponsor is identified or recommended

They begin meeting with their sponsor upon release

Prepared by:



<sup>1</sup> Reaching Over Obstacles to Succeed

<sup>2</sup> Transforming lives, Restoring hope, Advocating change, Identifying resources, Life planning, and Supporting families

<sup>3</sup> Giguere, R. & Carter, M. M. (2009). Building offenders’ community assets through mentoring. *Center for Effective Public Policy*.

<sup>4</sup> NHS is a service provider in Beaver County

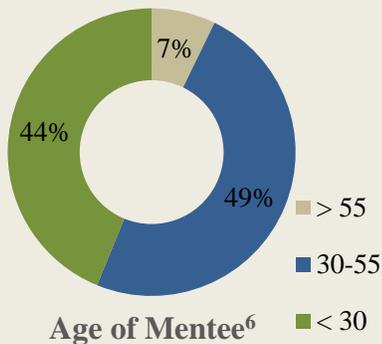
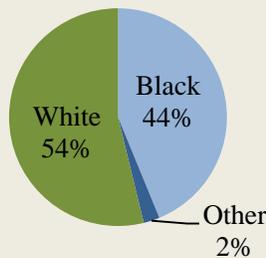
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**Training.** In order to become a sponsor (whether recruited or identified), one must first go through a training. At the training, the roles of the sponsor and mentee are defined. The trainer presents the difficulties re-entering persons face when transitioning back into the community. They discuss appropriate boundaries for this relationship and encourage positive ways to communicate. The trainer also provides suggestions for what to do with the mentee and how to support him/her. Since the program's inception, 65 people have been trained.

Matches Still Active<sup>5</sup>



Race of Mentee<sup>6</sup>



The above figures describe the individuals who participated in some capacity in the sponsorship programs during the April 2014 to March 2015 reporting period.

**Ongoing Support.** An ancillary result of the sponsor programs is the outreach and encouragement their work brings to the sponsor and the sponsor's family. Even with the training they receive, many sponsors are unprepared to handle alone the task of supporting the mentee with the many challenges he/she faces. Many of these sponsors rely on TRAILS or ROOTS to support

## Success Story

Shortly after Richie was referred to the program and identified his brother as his sponsor, his release date was pushed back. Despite this complication, ROOTS made contact with his brother. Through this contact, Richie's brother and his family became deeply involved in the church community and ROOTS helped reconnect Richie with his family. Although Richie is still in jail, the family continues to support and communicate with Richie from the outside. Along with reconnecting the family, ROOTS is investing in the family, which will help build a stronger support network when Richie is released.

**“We’re helping build supports, getting the family together, and supporting him...even though he’s in there, we’re working with the family. So when he comes out, that support will be strong.”**

them with their mentee. At a minimum, staff members have monthly contact with sponsors, and possibly more depending on the needs of the sponsor and mentee. This not only strengthens sponsors' skills and ability to serve the mentee, but in many situations they benefit from the support. Together with the assistance these organizations provide to re-entering individuals, TRAILS and ROOTS impact the broader community.

<sup>5</sup> These data were calculated out of 223 participants. <sup>6</sup> These data were calculated out of 209 participants.