



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*An agency providing solutions for successful living to individuals in your county*  
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RE: Community shows interest in Partners in Justice

How are individuals with mental retardation or mental illness dealt with in the law enforcement world? Is their behavior a crime or a circumstance? Is incarceration the best alternative for the individual?

Nearly sixty people gathered for a public forum on February 16 to discuss these questions and to better understand mental illness, mental retardation, developmental disabilities and the dually-diagnosed (while mental retardation is not mental illness, people with mental retardation could also suffer from some form of mental illness). By increasing the ability to recognize individuals with these challenges, law enforcement, judicial officials and other community partners learned how to assess and deal with certain types of behavior and identify various alternatives and collaboration that could better assist these individuals.

Hosted by Champaign Residential Services, Inc. (CRSI) and funded by a grant received from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, the forum focused on the various degrees and common characteristics of mental illness, mental retardation and developmental disorders and the differences in the three areas. It also focused on how judicial officials can communicate with individuals living with these challenges and better identify whether criminal activity has occurred and how to proceed.

Keynote speaker was Lee Balsler, Director of Development for ViaQuest Behavioral Health in Dublin, Ohio. Balsler was one of the initial members of the Ohio Partners in Justice Committee and has an extensive history of working with offenders with mental retardation, both adult and adolescent. Also presenting information and serving on a panel was Doug Steiner, Clinical Director of Ben-El Child and Family Center; Karen Benton, Associate Professor in Criminal Justice at Urbana University; and Rick Heyn, Behavior Support Director for CRSI. All speakers were introduced by CEO Than Johnson.

Among forum attendees were representatives from the Urbana Police Department, the Champaign County Sheriff's Department, the Champaign County Prosecutor's office and the judicial system.

A follow-up team is being formed to follow up on issues presented at the forum. Persons interested in addressing the needs identified at the public forum or those who would like more information should contact Laura Kiehn, development coordinator for CRSI at 937-653-1301. [lkiehn@crsi-oh.com](mailto:lkiehn@crsi-oh.com).