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PRESS RELEASE

New Partnership Program in Summit County Developed to Reduce Recidivism

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For Immediate Release: Contact: E.J. Brinson

Linda Weyandt, Oriana House

Daniel Schweitzer, Stark State

Phone: [330-689-8715](tel:330-689-8715)

E-mail: brinsone@icloud.com

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New Partnership Program in Summit County Developed to Reduce Recidivism

The Summit County Think Tank Coalition, Oriana House, Inc., and Stark State College are working together to reduce recidivism by offering people with a felony conviction a chance to earn a Class B Commercial Driver's License (CDL), in many cases free of charge, creating education and employment opportunities for them. The pilot Stark State CDL Pathway Program will offer the CDL course to individuals with a past felony conviction who meet the criteria to earn a Class B CDL. The tuition costs will be determined based on income and Oriana House clients will be able to attend for free. Oriana House is a non-profit agency that provides community corrections services and treatment for substance abuse and mental health disorders.

E.J. Brinson leads the Summit County Think Tank Coalition, a group focused on improving community inclusion, and serves on the Oriana House Community Advisory Committee. Brinson says he is committed to creating opportunities to change the inner city ecosystem. "The top reasons behind recidivism are housing, employment, education, and voter suppression," said Brinson. "These types of community collaborations provide more than just hope but real opportunities to build from in order to win the fight against recidivism." Brinson added. "Everyone wins in partnerships like this."

Michael Randle, Oriana House Vice President of Correctional Programs in Summit County, said research shows that removing barriers to reentry reduces recidivism. "The CDL Pathway Program tackles the issues of education and employment together," said Randle. "Giving returning citizens a means to obtain a CDL certification and become eligible for employment that pays a living wage provides them a way out of the criminal justice cycle, while also linking them to higher education," Randle added. "Collaborating with Stark State and the Think Tank Coalition has allowed us to take a comprehensive approach involving the City of Akron and the business community to identify ways to make sure that individuals who complete the program these will be able to find jobs."

The Think Tank Coalition partnered last year with the Summit County Jail and community leaders to ensure inmates were registered to vote. Randle and Brinson have also met with Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) Executive Director Brian Gage to discuss the Section 8 voucher program for felons. The groups are now exploring how to assist felons who have been denied housing with AMHA by granting a voucher through the appeals process and felon homeless/disabilities criteria.

Participants from Oriana House will begin enrolling in the pilot CDL Pathway Program on Friday, September 18, 2020. In addition to Brinson and Randle, others who worked together on developing this pilot program include Daniel Schweitzer, Stark State, Program Director of Oil and Gas & Environmental Technologies; Jean Barbato, Stark State, Coordinator of Joining Technologies; Marco Sommerville, City of Akron, Deputy Mayor; and David M. Doyle, Oriana House, Academic Employment Coordinator.

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