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## Breaking the Cycle

In America we proclaim to be one of the freest nations on the planet, yet our institutions and the treatment of our citizens say otherwise. America's prisons have long been under scrutiny. With incarceration comes many hurdles for individuals who are already facing poverty, addiction, mental health problems, crime, a fractured family system, and the institutionalization of these populations. It's been estimated that 2.7 million children have had at least one parent who was or still is incarcerated, and fathers are more likely than mothers to be the parent in prison (Sentencing Project, 2016). With our justice system propagating recidivism, this can add to the instability within the family structure. With incarceration comes the severing of the connection a child has with their parent and a parent has with their child.

It points to the very heart of the disruption of these important relationships we seek to foster. The chaos of isolation from loved ones is something these families must navigate while combating other hurdles. And our black and brown populations continue to be overrepresented within the prison and child welfare system. A rinse and repeat cycle that puts families on the chopping block of our industrialized, assembly-line-like services. I look to an individual's story of change, for hope and the power of restoration. It is in one man's story that might provide some insight on how our society can proceed forward. I had a chance to speak to an individual named Beto Contreras. His story of resilience and the overcoming of this cycle speaks to the power of change.

Beto was such a man, forced to contend with these harsh realities early on in his life. "I met my mother only once and first met my father when I was 5. I knew early on that my parents struggled to navigate through their own traumas to be actual parents to me." Beto would struggle with having a lack of parental guidance and love in his life. Growing up in the Midwest, various family members would raise Beto until he would soon find his validation amongst those who would accept him. "It was the fools on the



*Beto Contreras and his daughter*

block that became my family. The streets are where I found my acceptance." It was the conditioning of this environment that would soon lead Beto into criminal activity. Cycling through the juvenile justice system Beto would end up in foster care at the age 16. Taken in by the foster care system, this would further antagonize the connection Beto desired with his own family. "With the foster family there was a lot of segregation with us foster kids and the Bio kids. Us foster kids knew we were different. It didn't need to be pointed out to us. We were fed different food and kept separated from the other children. We knew we were being treated differently than the white kids."

This kind of experience would continue to fuel Beto's life choices and he would be fast tracked from the juvenile system to county jail to prison. "The system isn't set up to be positive. It wasn't made to restore a person's inner spiritual wellbeing. Being addicted to this life, commanding respect you get hardened and conditioned to it." Beto would soon find himself a young father trying to navigate parenting behind bars. "Being locked up I, couldn't see my daughters and the contact I had was based on how well I got along with their mother. It put a strain on the relationship I had with the family." Beto would struggle to maintain these relationships and show up to life. He

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**Visit the PAC on the FRIENDS website at [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org)**

## Because Every Child Needs A Champion...

Healthy families build healthy communities, and Tuscaloosa's One Place, A Family Resource Center (TOP) has served families in West Alabama for 24 years. TOP provides a wide array of programs, all designed to promote self-sufficiency through providing resources, strengthening families, and preventing child abuse and neglect.

Fatherhood is a vital component of a child's development, and it plays a crucial role in shaping a child's well-being and future. However, not all fathers have access to the resources and support needed to fulfill their roles effectively. This is where fatherhood programs, such as the CHAMPS program at Tuscaloosa's One Place, step in to make a significant impact on fathers and

their children's lives.

Changing Habits and Making Parents Stronger (CHAMPS) is designed to help non-custodial parents establish and strengthen positive parenting by providing activities that develop and improve parenting skills, communication, education, and economic stability. The program also provides workforce development and other employment services to link parents to high-demand/high-wage jobs so they can provide for their children and improve self-sufficiency. This program has recently expanded to offer specialized services to parents who are re-entering the community from incarceration and includes extensive case manage-

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Sheyanne Smith, CHAMPS Coordinator, works with CHAMPS participants during class to build parenting and workforce skills.

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### Breaking the Cycle

knew he needed a change. "There aren't a lot of programs back in the Midwest for those who have felony records. There are so many barriers for those looking to get help with a criminal past. Housing, employment and food stamps you just don't have access to when you really need it." Yearning for a change, Beto would move to Oregon hoping to have a chance at finding a new life. "I felt trapped in my community and I knew I needed a change. I felt the only way to fix this was to remove myself from the environment." Soon after his relocation, Beto would soon be struggling with addiction and become involved with child welfare, fighting an uphill battle to be the parent he desired to be. This would be the catalyst of change and introspection Beto needed to regain his life. "My change was a combination of lack of support and the dwindling trust that my daughters' mother would have of me. I would have to eventually surrender to life on life's terms, in order to heal." Beto sought to battle his addictions and entered inpatient treatment, which would provide a place for his healing and recovery. "My journey to heal

involved people who identified with my struggle. Learning how to heal meant being gentle on myself. I had to change my perspective on my life. That life wasn't happening to me but, through me." With this new insight and path, Beto found himself looking to help others restore their own lives and find the healing they needed. Being inspired by the change in his own life, he would go on to create, Breakin the Chainz, an organization that further propelled his work with those incarcerated and offered them a second chance in their own lives. Beto would also become involved with Insight Alliance, a nonprofit organization that would fuel his passion to help others regain their mental and emotional footing. Beto's work with Insight Alliance involves reentry services such as peer mentoring, housing assistance, counseling and teaching to those impacted by incarceration, providing them a chance to reconnect with their families. This is community work that sets the tone for connection that is spiritual and transformative. Leading those to a practice of healing oneself. "The work that I do now is a restorative practice that allows the healing to continue within myself.

Instead of being so hard on myself I have come to learn through this work that I can be gentle on myself and be gentle with others. That I had to unlearn the conditioning of the streets that propelled my life for so long. We are the creators of our own experience and our own thoughts. This impactful insight is something I can apply in my daily life."

Beto continues to work diligently with others while being a beacon of hope to those still suffering. As a father, Beto uses his voice to highlight the struggles of other fathers who face an uphill battle within child welfare. Beto works with a Parent Advisory Council to expand upon his work as a practitioner of healing and restorative change, providing fathers and all men the opportunity of hope and the power to be impactful in their own lives. It is Beto's experience that can show us the power of a redemptive soul and turn social conditioning into providence.

#### References:

Parents In Prison (2016). The Sentencing Project. Research for Advocacy and Reform. (Pg1). [Parents-in-Prison.pdf \(sentencingproject.org\)](#). (B. Contreras, personal communication, October 27th, 2023)

by Matthew Porter,  
FRIENDS PAC Member



## Opening the Door for Parents with Disabilities



*Dr. Josie Badger, husband, Michael Novitski, and son.*

Parenting is a unique, gratifying, and demanding experience that requires love, perseverance, resources, and a network of support. When the parent is a person with disability other factors come into play that can negatively impact and even prevent or end the role of parent. For example, there may be pressure on the person with a disability not to get pregnant or terminate the pregnancy. At birth, parents with disabilities may not receive resources modified to their unique needs and may be coerced to put the baby up for adoption or declared incompetent through court proceedings by virtual of their disability alone. For a parent with a disability who wants to adopt a child, or have a surrogate parent, the above obstacles can come into play to deny an adoption/surrogate pregnancy, or to make it so difficult a parent with a disability gives up. In addition, insufficient resources, lack of adaptive materials, prejudice, bias, discrimination, devaluation, low expectations can all impede parents with disabilities from maximizing their parenting experience. Nevertheless, adults with disabilities are, and want to become parents like anyone else and deserve the support and assistance necessary to assume and excel in the parenting role.

Through the Looking Glass (TLG), a national, non-profit organization is a pioneer in creating adaptive baby care equipment and identifying resources for parents with disabilities. TLG has led research, training, and services for families in which a parent or grandparent

has a disability or medical issue and believes that "the unnecessary removal of a child from a safe and loving home, based on a parent's disability, is an inexcusable traumatization of children, and a violation of the civil rights of parents

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### Because Every Child Needs A Champion

ment, mental health support, and mentorship within the program.

Many of the non-custodial parents who enter the program have little to no contact with their children. Other barriers include unemployment, difficulties making child support payments and navigating the court system and overcoming mental health issues. Facing these barriers alone can create strained relationships with their coparents as well. These participants are striving to become better parents and work towards building a healthy relationship with their children, and finding gainful employment to be able to consistently support their children. The Child Welfare Information Gateway reports that when fathers are involved with their children, the children are more likely to have higher levels of educational success, emotional security, and are less likely to get into trouble. The overwhelming outcome is healthier behavior (<https://www.childwelfare.gov>). CHAMPS participants are passionate about creating an enriching parent-child bond, not only by consistently making child support payments, but by being a reliable physical presence and stable emotional support for their children.

TOP's CHAMPS program is funded by the Children's Trust Fund of Alabama. While CHAMPS has been offered in Tuscaloosa County since 2007, this year we are excited to be expanding into Bibb and Hale Counties as well.

Our CHAMPS program sees tremendous success, but TOP of-

fers a wide array of free services designed to strengthen the family, increase self-sufficiency, and prevent child abuse and neglect. TOP strives to be plugged into the community, continually assessing needs, and providing a seamless array of services based on identified needs. Services are non-duplicative, holistic in nature, and are provided on-site and in the community. Our services include after school and school-based social work programs, healthy relationship education, parenting education and home visitation, teen intervention, workforce development, and community referrals. We are excited to look ahead and continue to find ways to build strong families in West Alabama.

*Tuscaloosa's One Place is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that serves local families through after school programs, parenting and healthy relationship education, career development, teen intervention programs, and community referrals. Through a dedicated effort between our staff and community partners, TOP has made a difference in the lives of local families since 1999. TOP empowers people to achieve their full potential by providing resources to promote self-sufficiency, strengthen families, and prevent child abuse and neglect thus improving the quality of life for all members of our community. For more information, visit [tuscaloosaoneplace.org](http://tuscaloosaoneplace.org).*

*By Ashley Cornelius  
Director of Communications  
Tuscaloosa's One Place,  
A Family Resource Center*



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## Opening the Door for Parents with Disabilities

with disabilities". TLG believes that all parties should be motivated by compassion for families and children to avoid this outcome whenever possible ([Through the Looking Glass](#)). TLG found that for some disability populations, removal rates of children are as high as 60%; and in general, whatever the disability population, unnecessary removal occurs too often (<https://lookingglass.org/parents-grand-parents/>). Parents with disabilities benefit from support, mentoring, increased social networks, family assistance and other resources just like many other parents to build their capacity as parents.

Dr. Josie Badger, who has her own consulting business, and is diagnosed with myasthenic syndrome, requiring her to use a wheelchair and ventilator, shared the difficulties she and her husband Michael had in getting permanent legal guardianship of their 15-year-old teenage son, Raymond. Dr. Badger worked with a public adoption agency after finding private adoption agency attitudes toward disability and parenting to be negative. She shares, "Because public adoption is through the state, you don't have to be married, you don't even have to have a partner.... You can adopt jointly, and so that eliminated marriage, plus there was no cost. All you must do is prove is that you have enough income to support a family and you are competent to care for the child."

Dr. Badgers added "Our case workers have been helpful, even if they are just cheer leaders, being able to say, hey, we're dealing with this or that." Attending counseling sessions together has also strengthened their family. And like many families, seeing Raymond getting more involved in extracurricular activities, like football, along with having supportive coaches has been great; and attending his games has been a source of joy and family pride. Dr. Badger said she was grateful that Raymond wants to include her and is protec-

tive too. She wants other people to continue to take him places, mentor and teach him. He has become part of her family with her husband, with her parents, as well as with the people who care for her.

Parents with disabilities, just like their nondisabled peers, may face many challenges and would benefit from universally available and customized support and assistance. Parent education programs, family resource and support centers and permanency planning organizations can raise their consciousness about disability and parenthood, including accessibility beyond ramps and curb cuts, and ultimately better serving all families when guided by both the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (<https://heller.brandeis.edu/parents-with-disabilities//data-hub/ada-workshops/adoption-foster-care/pep-adopt-pl.pdf>). Family serving community organizations should consider ways to promote even greater diversity through inclusion of parents with disabilities in their literature and modified curriculums. While these steps are often seen as only benefiting individuals with disabilities, ultimately many parents may benefit from these adaptations.

Additionally, there are services and programs that can assist a person with a disability to become a parent through birthing or adopting a child and serve as a resource to state and local child abuse and neglect prevention programs.

**The Disabled Parenting Project** (DPP), which is part of the National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities, is an online space for sharing experiences, advice, and conversations among disabled parents as well as those considering parenthood. Also, it gives parents access to research, factsheets, and training resources to help address the issues of discrimination and disparities. (<https://disabledparenting.com/about-us/#>)

**Parenting With a Disability: Know Your Rights Toolkit** - Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation and the National Council on Disability (2016): Provides a summary of disability laws that protect families' rights, along with information on adoption, custody, visitation, family law, and the child welfare system. ([Parenting with a Disability \(ncd.gov\)](#))

**Through the Looking Glass (TLG):** Provides information, training, and consultation to parents with disabilities, family members, and professionals nationally and internationally. In addition to conducting research and providing consultation and training, TLG's other major activities include developing and disseminating numerous publications and training materials concerning parents with disabilities; maintaining a national clearinghouse of nearly 3,000 articles, reports, videos, curricula, and periodicals concerning parenting with a disability; and coordinating a national network of parents with disabilities. (<https://lookingglass.org/>)

**Achieva's Parenting Support:** In some communities, Arc's may have a program like Achieva's in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which provides instruction, assistance, and independent living skills to parents with disabilities. Using a hand-over-hand model, parenting education staff guide families towards achieving parenting and independent living goals and is available to enrolled families 24 hours per day, seven days per week by phone and in-person anytime, for any reason. Achieva has conducted both national and international consultation to teach other agencies how to replicate the parenting education program. (<https://www.achieva.info/parenting-support#>)

by Guy Caruso, Ph.D., Institute on Disabilities at Temple University



## Providing Opportunities for Growth in Parent Leadership



*Vadonna Williams*

Providing opportunities for growth in parent leadership is a vital part of a parent's leadership journey! I

truly can say that I have been afforded several opportunities that have helped me to grow throughout my leadership journey. One being the opportunity to co-present, with Carolyn Abdullah of FRIENDS, at the Alabama Children's Trust Fund Grantee Training.

We presented, "Building the Table Together" and ways to create effective parent and practitioner collaboration. Not only did Carolyn and I train on this subject, but we actually put this practice into action as Carolyn and I both prepared for the presentation. My planning with Carolyn proved that through coaching, leading from "the side", providing feedback, and engaging with me in creating

the slides, it was an effective collaborative experience for me.

I also had the opportunity to participate, with the Alabama Children's Trust Fund State Parent Advisory Council, in a parent-led panel discussion which was offered as a breakout session. This experience also provided leadership growth for me. We not only led the discussion but developed the questions for the panel, as well as the subject matter for the session.

I remain full of gratitude for the wealth of knowledge and growing opportunities that I have been able to obtain during my parent leadership journey!!

*Vadonna Williams*  
FRIENDS PAC Member

## Being A Part of the Change

Equality for Everyone! This is the goal of Paula Bibbs-Samuels, and many others across the nation. In October 2023, Paula was able to attend and present in Nashville, TN during the Annual Race & Tribal Equity Convening. During this robust convening different states were able to share their processes, challenges, and successes with others. Paula, who resides in Texas, is a part of the Texas Race Equity Team and she was able to gather new information attending the conference. She also presented with two others on the advancements made in Texas toward changing the definition of neglect to reduce the number of children entering care due to living in poverty versus being abused.

HB 567 of 2021 has determined that neglect means an "act of failure by a person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare evidencing the person's blatant disregard for the consequences of the act or failure to act that results in harm to the child or that creates an immediate danger to the child's physical health or safety...". As data proves, Black and Indigenous children enter care at a rate that is disproportionate to others.

During a time when the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) announced grants totaling four million dollars to address racial bias and inequity in child welfare, it is understood that there has to be change.

Texas also approved HB730 which "requires caseworkers to tell parents of their rights at the start of an investigation, similar to the Miranda rights given to suspects in police custody" (<https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/foster-care-reform/>). This is a major advancement as oftentimes parents are unsure of their rights or what to expect once Child Protective Services (CPS) is involved. With this change, parents are able to decline drug tests and refuse an investigator's entry into their dwelling without a court order. It has been said that everything is bigger in Texas, hopefully these changes will prove big in the lives of children and families.

The busy bee that she is, Paula also traveled to Houston, Texas to present at the Texas Childcare Administrators Conference (TCCAC). Her session was entitled - *Listen Up: What It Means to Have a Voice*. During this

time, she advocated for the voice of families, resource/adoptive parents, kin parents, children, and fathers. This presentation focused on the differences between listening and hearing, noting that listening is a conscious and active act while hearing is passive. There could be a great amount of change within the child welfare system if others listened with the intent to make changes that will positively affect the children and families served.

If ever asked why she does this work, Paula would respond, "If I change the life of one, I change the lives of many because children are not alone in this world. If a child is affected, a family is affected as well as a community." Advocating for change is one thing, attempting to be a part of the change is something altogether different, and this is what Paula endeavors to do, be a part of the change.

*by Paula Bibbs-Samuels*  
FRIENDS PAC Member



## New Jersey Courts and Atlantic County Gun Violence Initiative: Building Safer Communities and Changing Behaviors

An Interview with Sharnett Clark, Probation Division Manager, and Keenon Simmons, Assistant Probation Division Manager.

### Can you provide an overview of the Gun Violence Initiative by the probation department and its primary goals and objectives?

The initiative focuses on high-risk individuals who are on adult or juvenile probation to guide them toward positive outcomes and steer them away from crime and guns by enrolling them in an intensive supervision program. Their cases are forwarded to the committee for recommended interventions, such as job training and placement, counseling and mentoring programs, treatment, and other community-based services. The committee may also recommend other participants not on probation.

The goal of this collaborative initiative is to consider the voice of the community when determining case plans and supervision methods for the selected group while responding proactively to change. This will ensure probation clients are connected to the appropriate community resources to achieve long-term desistance and subsequent gun violence by strengthening and supporting our community.

### How does the probation department identify and select candidates who qualify for participation in this program?

Once participants have been selected for inclusion in this caseload, their Probation Officer will screen the case to determine each probation client's risk factors. Individuals currently on probation and who are determined to be at "high risk" of being involved in gun or other weapons violence will be selected for the program.

The first requirement encompasses all individuals on proba-

tion for gun and weapons related charges and charges where guns were also found on the individual, though not used.

The second requirement determines whether an individual is at high risk of being involved in future gun and/or other weapons violence. Various methods help to determine this, including risk assessment tools and probation officer determinations along with discussions with their supervisors. As part of this selection process, the officers will review:

- A monthly report of the gun/ weapons cases currently on probation.
- A review of the probation client's criminal history to determine if (s)he has had any prior issues with firearms/weapons.
- Recommendations by probation officers, who know their clients based upon a previously conducted holistic review of each client.
- The officer completes a Gun Violence Initiative referral form recommending their client to the program.
- The referrals are screened by the Vicinage Assistant Chief Probation Officer for eligibility and accepted cases are forwarded to the Gun Violence Initiative Coordinator.

The client's file and all court databases are reviewed, and Comprehensive Automated Probation System Notes are entered. Then a summary will be prepared and presented to the Committee based on the above categories and recommendation of services, which will utilize their programs and community resources to address the individual's specific needs. Gun Violence Initiative codes are entered in the database during each stage of the case.

### Could you describe the key components of the wraparound services offered to participants in the

### program?

Most importantly, we have seen some very encouraging signs since the program's inception. For example, this initiative allows the NJ Courts and Atlantic County community to build an effective collaborative effort to provide clients with services that promote transformational behavioral changes, ultimately reducing gun violence. Clients are introduced to new treatment opportunities, services, mental health, substance abuse treatment, mentoring, job readiness, employment opportunities, housing, legal assistance, vital statistics, transportation, childcare, parenting, DMV services, etc. to create an innovative supervision program. Due to this specialized caseload, clients benefit from a more attentive, consistent, and communicative rapport with a dedicated and skilled probation officer.

### What specific agencies or organizations have you collaborated with to provide these wraparound services, and what role do they play in the initiative?

The GVI program partners with local community organizations that are already engaged in combating the scourge of gun violence, mental health challenges, addictions, etc. in our communities. Additionally, the Courts have used its platform to support and expand the participation of other partners to join in the effort. This community partnership brings programs and resources already developed together. A few of the agencies we are working with:

- Youth Services Commission
- Jewish Family Services
- Volunteers of America
- Case Management Organization (CMO)
- Youth Advocate Program
- Division of Child Protection & Permanency

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## New Jersey Courts and Atlantic Country Gun Violence Initiative

- One-Stop Career Center/Department of Labor

Examples of the programs and services include:

- Expungement Seminars to assist individuals in getting jobs.
- Landlord-tenant seminars to assist individuals with housing concerns.
- The Atlantic County One Judge One School program brings the message into our schools.
- The Atlantic County JOBS program assists with finding jobs for the unemployed and underemployed.
- Safe Surrender Program to help individuals address open legal matters to advance their lives.

### Can you share some examples of success stories or positive outcomes that have resulted from this collaborative effort?

As of 08/29/2023, a total of 143 clients have been presented to the Advisory Board. To date:

- 30 clients have successfully completed probation.
- 50 clients are employed (full time, part time or self-employed)
- 25 youth are enrolled in school/alternative school, 2 of the youth unenrolled have

- completed high school.
- 11 youth are engaged with the Youth Advocate Program for assistance with employment, mentoring, license/ID and school testing assistance.
- 13 youth are engaged in services with NJ Care Management Organization (CMO). Two additional youth were positively engaged with CMO and successfully completed all services.
- 21 youth not in detention have been linked with and are engaged with services. The remaining youth are pending transfer to another County due to residence.
- 10 adults are engaged with the VOA for anger management, employment, documentation assistance (DL/SS Card, etc.) and other services.
- 10 adults are engaged with One Stop Career Center for employment assistance, mentor services and training.
- 7 adults are engaged with Family Empowerment for substance abuse and/or parenting support.

### How do you ensure that the wrap-around services are tailored to the individual needs of each participant?

The probation officer's primary goal is to utilize Core Correctional Practice (CCP)/Cognitive Behavioral Techniques (CBT) to address the root causes of the client's criminal behavior (antisocial attitudes, antisocial personality, and antisocial peers.) With an ultimate end game goal of long-term behavior change.

- Criminal History– past behavior can be a predictor of future behavior.
- Education/Employment– what is the client's day like? Do they have a routine? Too much free time?
- Family/Social support– is this lacking?

- Neighborhood– high crime area, unstable housing
- Substance Abuse – past and/or present, does substance abuse impact employment?
- Peers – antisocial friends
- Criminal Attitudes/Personality – deny responsibility, blame others, system bashing, impulsivity, etc.

### Are there any innovative approaches or strategies that have been employed to enhance the effectiveness of the Gun Violence initiative?

- The GVI Committee may also recommend that a participant who is currently not on probation be eligible for services. This is a gateway toward community engagement and partnership. However, they will not be monitored by probation nor required to complete the program.
- The participants who are on probation will be compelled to engage in services. In addition, they will be required to successfully complete the program as part of their probation.

### How do you measure the impact and success of this program, both in terms of reducing gun violence and improving the lives of participants?

- Incentive to sanction ratio 16 to 1
- Increased the number of services providers.
- Increased our number of clients willingness to receive services.
- Increased number of clients being reengaged back into the community.
- Increase of client successful discharges/terminations versus unsuccessful
- Increased number of clients employed.

### Are there plans for expanding or

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## New Jersey Courts and Atlantic Country Gun Violence Initiative

### scaling up this initiative in the future?

Potential Program Enhancement include:

- Job/Resource Fairs
- Expungements on a case-by-case basis.
- Graduation ceremonies for participants
- Reduction in Probation Term or Early Discharge
- Mental Health Treatment or support groups
- Working with the Mayor's office for jobs and mentor programs
- Reformative Service: Reduction of DEDR Penalty
- Gun buy-back program with the Atlantic City Police Department
- Explorer Program, sporting events, and family engagement
- Adding Grass Roots Organizations to the GVI Committee

- Adult participant speaker series location – All Wars Memorial)
- Youth event with guest speaker

### Can you elaborate on the role of community engagement and involvement in supporting the success of this initiative?

There are already many local programs that seek to reduce gun violence in the community. The Courts have already been involved with many of these programs. Specifically, the Court intends to expand partnerships with the community organizations in the cities of Atlantic City and Pleasantville to build on goals for safer communities and changed behaviors. The Advisory group has included representation from these groups and others in the community.

### What lessons have you learned from implementing this program that could be valuable for other

### probation departments or agencies looking to address similar issues?

We have learned that cases assigned to Recovery Court, Mental Health, Domestic Violence, Adult Sex Offender Supervision, and the Sexually Abusive Behaviors case-loads are not recommended for GVI in Atlantic County to avoid duplication of services and ensure clients receive the targeted interventions for their specialized case-loads.

And, that programs like this one, can make a difference in reducing gun violence in communities by making bridges to help justice-impaired youth and adults become better citizens. The participants of the program have a circle or a network of individuals and agencies who are keeping a promise of being their brother's keeper.

by Michael Cupeles  
FRIENDS PAC Member



FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council members (from l to r, top row): David Armstrong, Paula Bibbs-Samuels, Ashley Cox, Michael Cupeles, Eileen Graham, Anntoinette Johnson, Melissa Zimmerman, and Vadonna Williams (from l to r, bottom row) Matthew Porter, Elizabeth Reddick, Ashley Schmit, Heather Stenson, , Jo Modeste, Joe Whitmore, and Thalia Wilson.

#### About the PAC

FRIENDS has established a Parent Advisory Council to provide useful overall program direction and guidance to the activities of the National Center. Council members share their experience and expertise in child abuse prevention and family strengthening through their active participation in FRIENDS workgroups and the annual Grantee's meeting, development/review of FRIENDS written materials, and by providing resource center staff with consultation and advice.

Contact Information: Vadonna Williams and Michael Cupeles, Editors  
[friends@friendsnrc.org](mailto:friends@friendsnrc.org)

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