*Family Issue* – **FALL 2022**

ARKANSANS FOR

# SmartJustice

**RETIRED CIRCUIT JUDGE JOYCE WARREN**
*Still Championing Our Children*
**PG. 6**

**A DIFFERENT KIND OF POLICING**
*Problem Solving and Respect are Reducing Crime in Fort Smith*
**PG. 22**

## GOVERNOR'S *Initiative* GAINS NATIONAL EYE

*PLUS: DCFS's Mischa Martin on Supporting Families Before They Reach Crisis*

ARKANSANS FOR
# SmartJustice

A PUBLICATION OF
**RESTORE HOPE ARKANSAS**

1400 W Markham St. Ste 300 Little Rock, AR 72201
501-346-3446 – smartjustice.org – restorehopear.org

## Family Issue – Fall 2022
**VOLUME 1 – ISSUE 1**

## Our Mission
To reduce incarceration and the need for foster care through collaborative partnerships.

## Our Model
We do this by utilizing our Crisis to Career model and our collaborative case management system, which allows for effective partnerships between agencies, community service providers and faith-based organizations, resulting in significantly better outcomes for communities.



**Published by Thoma Thoma**

*Arkansans for Smart Justice* is published for Restore Hope Arkansas. Please report any address changes or corrections to Restore Hope Arkansas at 501-346-3446, or email renie@restorehopear.org.

# Join Us in Rethinking Justice

**WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL ISSUE OF *SMART JUSTICE*. IN THIS PUBLICATION WE'LL SEEK TO EXPLORE THE WAYS IN WHICH CREATIVE, INNOVATIVE ARKANSANS ARE REINVENTING HOW JUSTICE CAN WORK BETTER–FOR FAMILIES, FOR SOCIETY, FOR OUR ECONOMY.**

In 2015, Governor Asa Hutchinson kicked off the initiative to rethink justice in our state. With his leadership, we formed new public-private initiatives that have driven extraordinary change in multiple communities throughout our state. Then in 2021 and 2022, individuals from throughout Arkansas came together in a series of summits to envision a new future for our state and its citizens. One in which families are restored, not torn apart. One in which agency and law enforcement staff are connected effectively with community services. One in which people leave prison with prospects, hope, second chances–driving community stability and economic activity, reducing crime and incarceration, lowering the burden on taxpayers.

We believe "Smart Justice" is a fitting description for such a future state. In multiple communities throughout Arkansas, we are already seeing an innovative, homegrown model of collaboration that doubles the foster care reunification rate and opens vast job opportunities for the justice-involved.

We believe Arkansas can lead the nation. Not in incarcerating its people, but in its second-chance employment rate and its success with foster-child reunification.

I welcome you to our first *Smart Justice* publication. In it we will dive deeper into the human, institution and community stories that paint a picture of what is possible when we rethink and connect the programs, services and leaders that surround our justice-involved fellow citizens. ◂

**Paul Chapman,**
Executive Director
Restore Hope Arkansas

**"WE BELIEVE ARKANSAS CAN LEAD THE NATION ... IN ITS SECOND-CHANCE EMPLOYMENT RATE AND ITS SUCCESS WITH FOSTER-CHILD REUNIFICATION."**

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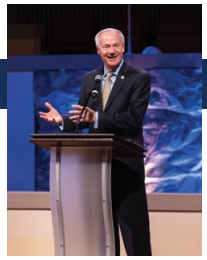


## ON THE COVER

Governor Asa Hutchinson speaks on behalf of Restore Hope Arkansas.
*Photo courtesy of the Governor's office.*

## AN INSTITUTE WORTHY OF ITS NAME

WINTHROP ROCKEFELLER INSTITUTE

**IN THE BEST TRADITION OF ITS NAMESAKE, THE WINTHROP ROCKEFELLER INSTITUTE CONVENES ADVOCATES, EXPERTS AND LEADERS TO ENVISION SOLUTIONS TO HARD PROBLEMS.** Through the Institute's expert facilitation and gracious hospitality, stakeholders from throughout Arkansas have grappled with justice, struck new initiatives and started a movement for change. Our appreciation to Janet Harris and Payton Christenberry and their staff for using the Rockefeller Ethic to facilitate a thorough examination of an issue and for providing a neutral space for all voices to be heard.

# AT RESTORE HOPE ARKANSAS

## OUR WORK BEGAN WITH A COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHEN

# 100 FAMILIES

## AND CONTINUES THROUGH AN INITIATIVE BY THE SAME NAME.

### WHAT IMPACTS ONE OF OUR FAMILIES DIRECTLY IMPACTS US ALL.

A family in crisis affects loved ones, neighbors, schools, businesses, social services, and too often, our justice system. We have come to realize that many of those families need more help than any one of us can provide. In recognition of this truth, we are compelled to act.

- We believe that hope is fuel for action. We will restore hope.
- We will not stand by while families in our community are in crisis.
- We believe that change is possible.
- We will not be about claiming credit but rather changing lives, restoring hope and building our community.
- We will work through differences and break down silos.
- We will recognize the profound importance of life's basics: food, clothing, shelter and healthcare.
- We will look below surface symptoms to discover root causes.
- We will meet the needs of the whole person and whole family.
- We will not ignore the impact of addiction, mental illness, trauma and physical restraints.
- We will seek the change that comes from recovery, wellness and healthy living.
- We will build on the foundations of wellness by educating families about physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual wellness.
- We will work hard on the tasks at hand while empowering individuals toward a stable long-term career.

**WE WILL STEP IN.**
**WE WILL MAKE CHANGE.**
**FOR OURSELVES, FOR OUR FAMILIES,**
**FOR OUR COMMUNITY,**
**WE WILL RESTORE HOPE.**

## We do hereby pledge to work together to help all Arkansas families move from crisis to career.

Our collective success is met when a family moves out of crisis, into stability and starts on a career path that can provide them a living wage.

# To Save Children, Save Their Families

## DCFS'S MISCHA MARTIN PAIRS PROTECTION WITH PREVENTION

By Robin Mero

**THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE AND HUMANE WAY TO SUPPORT ARKANSAS CHILDREN IS TO DIRECT RECUPERATIVE FORCES TOWARD FAMILIES BEFORE THEY SPIRAL INTO CRISIS.**

"So many people in our community are all about saving the kids. But they forget that if you really want to save the kids, you've got to save the family," says Mischa Martin, the six-year director of the Arkansas Department of Children and Family Services.

"We are tasked at DCFS with protecting children in our communities, and we're not miracle workers; we're doing the best that we can do to try and assess a situation and keep a child safe," Martin says. "Sometimes the community thinks, well, you just placed a child in foster care and that's a miracle solution – but foster care comes with its significant challenges and it causes trauma. Just the removal process, placing a child in foster care, causes trauma which can have long-lasting effects on that child's health, mental health, their social and workforce outcomes.

"So we don't just want to prevent foster care; we want to work with families to help them get back on a path of strength and stability, and prevent any future maltreatment."

A shift toward preventative care began in Arkansas about 2015, and well-positioned the state for passage of the 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act, landmark federal legislation providing funds for prevention and emphasizing the importance of children growing up within their families and avoiding the trauma of entering foster care.

Arkansas was the first state to implement Family First, going live and receiving funding in October 2019.

"The system before had been set up to focus on foster care, including through our funding structures. In 2015-16, we started those conversations

about how do we build a child welfare system that doesn't just focus on foster care but focuses on getting upstream and keeping kids safely with their families. What services and supports need to happen? At the time, only about 17 percent of children in foster care were placed with relatives. Today, 40 percent of kids come into care with either a relative or fictive kin," Martin says.

More than 7,000 children are in foster care in Arkansas each year. Yet the department also serves about 14,000 children under Protective Services cases, which are responses to allegations of abuse or neglect. Workers visit the homes and offer services such as for substance abuse, mental health and parenting, depending on the families' needs.

With these cases, the preventative approach can shine. "And when I say prevention, I mean really offering services and support to the families before crisis," she says.

Prior to the pandemic, DCFS was steamrolling ahead with impactful changes, Martin says, but what concerns her the most now are significant workforce challenges.

"We have had such significant turnover related to the pandemic and the work that we do; the work moving forward has to continue to focus on how to build a strong workforce – not just hire, but now we have a whole bunch of new people who need institutional knowledge.

"There is a lot of work that happens in working with families that you can't teach in a book, that you have to learn in the field working with families, and that's going to take a little time. But we need to figure out how to keep the staff, so that we can get them experienced. If we truly want great outcomes for our children and families, we have to have a strong workforce that is stable, that has institutional knowledge. Not just book knowledge, but knowledge of working in the community and working directly with families. You can't teach wisdom, right? It comes with time."

The human aspect of working with broken families is emotionally tolling, she says, particularly with the erratic nature of substance abuse, a factor for more than half of the children entering foster care.

"It's the most significant factor of kids in care," she says. "It destroys families. As a society, we need to figure out how we get these people on the right paths."

Removing children to punish a parent is never the right motive, she says.

"It is super frustrating to me when adults think that foster parenting should be a punishment tool for parents. Because while they stand on their soapbox about helping kids, that type of mentality does nothing but hurt kids."

She favors helping families navigate the intricacies of rebuilding their lives.

"Even if you get clean, you've got to get all this other stuff together: healthcare, criminal fines, education, workforce. I love going to the 100 Families office; you can see how they're working on the education piece, the workforce piece, how they're doing case management of: how do you get your driver's license back, how do you take care of your fines, how do you do a Medicaid application? The list goes on and on of all a parent has to do to get back on the right path – even if they got clean!"

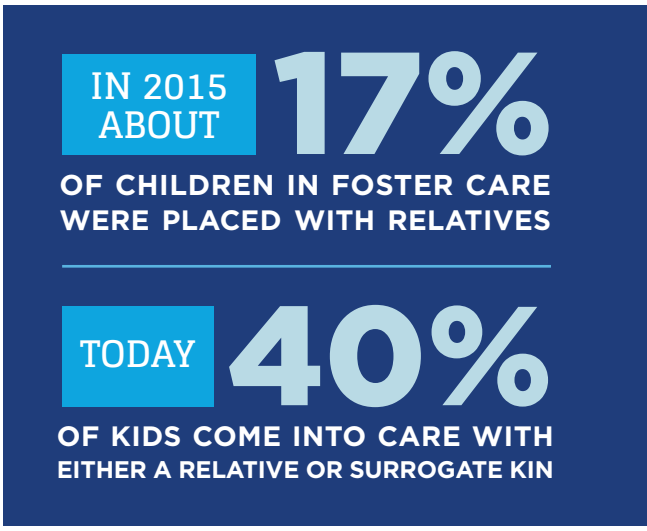
To effect true healing for Arkansas families, a commitment is vital from business leaders, churches, nonprofits and the public at large – not just government entities.

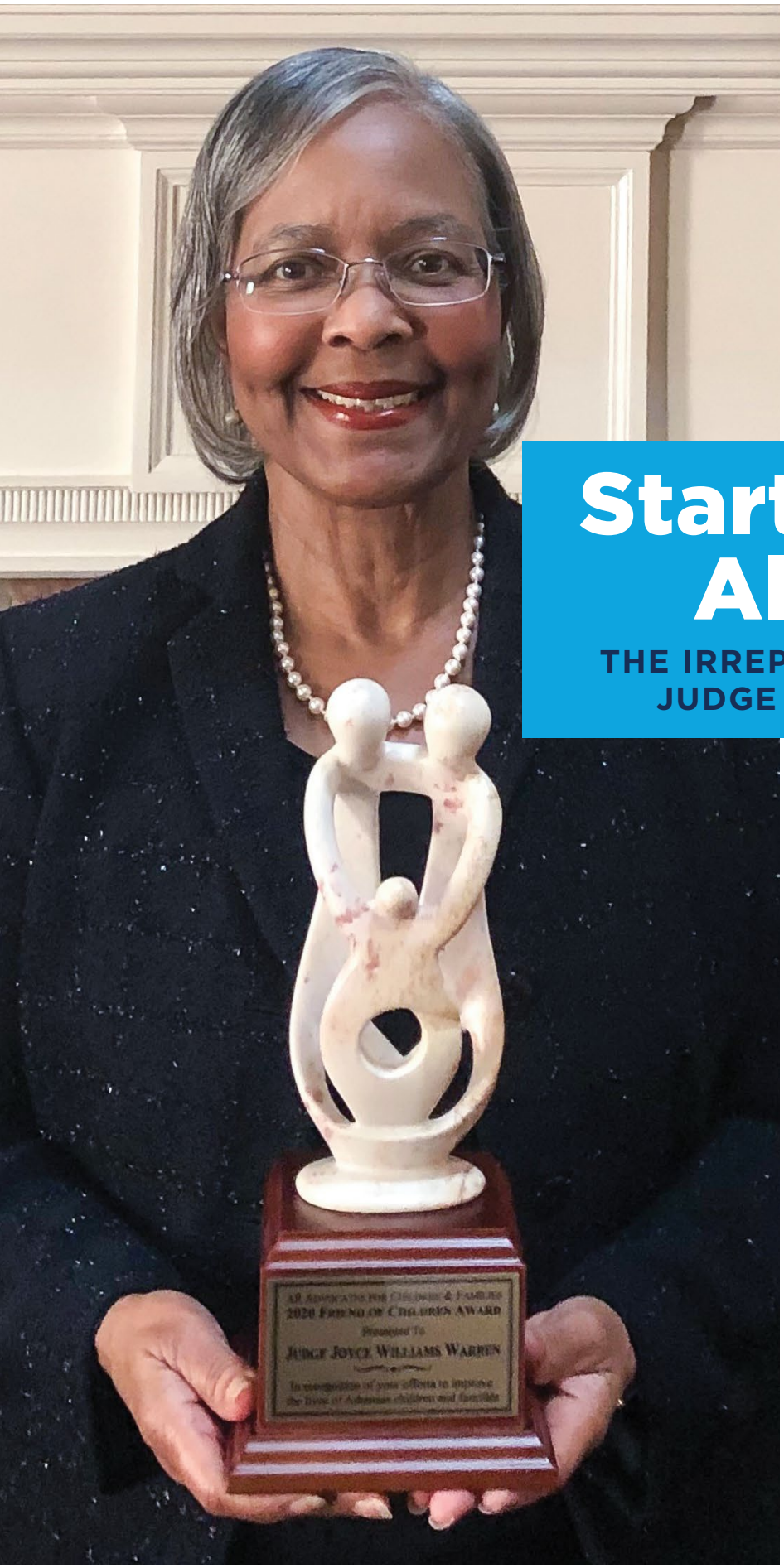
"I think that there's a lot of people in government with big hearts that want to make a difference, but to make a community difference the community has to come together." ◂

**"IN 2015-16, WE STARTED THOSE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HOW DO WE BUILD A CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM THAT DOESN'T JUST FOCUS ON FOSTER CARE BUT FOCUSES ON GETTING UPSTREAM AND KEEPING KIDS SAFELY WITH THEIR FAMILIES."**

**- MISCHA MARTIN,** DIRECTOR OF THE ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

➤ **PHOTO:** Mischa Martin, Director of the Arkansas Department of Children and Family Services.






# Start Early, But Always Start

## THE IRREPRESSIBLE ENTHUSIASM OF JUDGE JOYCE WILLIAMS WARREN

By Robin Mero

**IN THE ALMOST FOUR DECADES SINCE JOYCE WILLIAMS WARREN FIRST DONNED A JUDGE'S ROBE AND LAUNCHED HER CAREER OF PROTECTING THE YOUNG AND GUIDING THEIR FAMILIES, THE WORLD HAS NOT BECOME MORE IDYLLIC.**

Children still hurt. Families remain living in squalor, babies continue to be born drug-addicted. Parents lose jobs, lose custody, and go to prison.

Yet the vigor with which she continues to plead for children to be protected, for their families to be lifted from poverty, and for sensitivity to be offered for traumas they have endured, is none diminished.

"These are all our children, and they need help," Judge Warren asserts. "You've got to have someone continually sounding the alarm. I want a court system, a child welfare system, an employment system, an educational system, and a community that would treat me the way I would want to be treated."

Warren is now retired from Arkansas' Sixth Judicial Circuit (serving Pulaski and Perry counties) and works as a judicial consultant. She continues to confront these challenges with a fantastic determination, despite their persistence.

"We don't have the ideal world, but we need to seek perfection," she says. "The foundation of society

PHOTO COURTESY WARREN

is the home – the family. So you start there with the family, making sure parents have the resources they need, making sure parents get the healthcare, the housing, the food, and that they are healthy enough to do what they need to do to take care of themselves and their children. Every child deserves the best, but every child is not going to have access to the best. What we want is a minimum safety."

Does it feel insurmountable?

"It's important to not give up on this work," she insists. "If you've got one child who needs help, that's our child. And whatever we can do to help our child, we need to do it. Humans should be invested – financially, emotionally, every way – so they can reach their full potential and be giving back to society instead of taking away from society."

And the tools with which to labor? The elements she turns to are timeless: Respect. Kindness. Sensitivity. Starting young. And relentless collaboration.

"It costs money, yes, but it costs much more money on the human side as well as the financial side when you wait," she says. "We need more money poured into what families need, more resources, more substance abuse programs for mothers where they can be in treatment with their children. We need more re-entry programs that are going to help the families when parents have been to prison and have a child in foster care. We need to provide services early on."

Judge Warren in her lifetime has begotten many firsts, being one of 10 Black students to integrate West Side Junior High School in 1961, then being the first Black female graduate of what is now the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's William H. Bowen School of Law, where she completed her Juris Doctor degree in 1976. She was the first Black female judge in Arkansas and the first Black law clerk for the Arkansas Supreme Court. Many other firsts of appointments and awards were to follow.

Her mother, grandmother, and her grandmother's two sisters were school teachers.

"So I grew up knowing that you need to help families in every area, and in a holistic way," she says. "People want to be treated with respect, have a decent wage, have decent and affordable housing. They want their children to be able to live to their full potential. They want a community that's safe."

She is frank and direct. She harps, reminds, and encourages. Her last year on the bench was the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and thus her most challenging, with some caseworkers and lawyers often crying due to stress and shortages. "I would tell them, 'You are valued, you are loved, and it's a pandemic. This work we do is hard, it's traumatic and it has affected us in ways we do not know.' I would sometimes leave my home office where I was working remotely, go into the family room, cry, and tell my husband I did not know if I could continue my job until my retirement date. Then I'd say my prayers at night, and in the morning I'd be ready to go again."

Her devotion now lies with nonprofit ZERO TO THREE, providing babies and toddlers with a strong start to ensure they reach full potential. Healthy connections make healthy brains, the organization says. Safe Babies Court Teams are formed, featuring a community coordinator who assembles a team of resources based on a child's needs – such as doctors, dentists, therapists, foster parents, schools, and agencies.

"Early is best. So with ZERO TO THREE, the beauty is you use the science of brain development. The studies that have been done – and one was done in Pulaski County during the time I presided over a Safe Babies Court Team – show that children who have been involved in Safe Babies Court Teams spend less time in foster care and have a lower rate of recurrence of abuse and neglect after they leave foster care. But even if we don't start early, then, at whatever point we notice a family is in trouble, we need to offer all of our resources. Humans are of value. If we don't take care of them we are throwing away human capital and creating more problems down the line. We know the problems. So if we know them, we need to be addressing them. We dismiss too many things.

"People often assume that parents aren't meeting children's needs because they don't want to, but it's critical to find out what traumas lurk behind any glaring shortcomings," she says.

"You don't know their backstory, and that's why I was always so big on social histories. Everything that touches parents and babies should be done with a trauma-informed lens. I cannot tell you how many times we had some social workers and caseworkers who would say, 'I think we're helping these people too much; we're going to make them dependent.' Well, no. If a child needs to walk you're going to help that child to walk. And when that child is able to walk then you let go, but you're there in case the child needs help again. So if we help people through this process before court, and during court, then we owe them an opportunity for them to continue to move forward after court ends. It's not enabling."

Judge Warren's days now afford her more moments for pleasantries, studying French and playing the piano, but the privations of which she is keenly aware leave her unable to step aside – or to cease outcry.

"I have a part to play. Everybody has a part to play. If one church adopts one family to help. If one business adopts a family to help. If one neighborhood adopts one family to help. You can help one family at a time. 'I see you are in a bad situation; is there anything we can do for you?' We've got to keep trying until we get it right!" ◂

**"EARLY IS BEST. SO WITH ZERO TO THREE, THE BEAUTY IS YOU USE THE SCIENCE OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT. THE STUDIES THAT HAVE BEEN DONE SHOW THAT CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN SAFE BABIES COURT TEAMS SPEND LESS TIME IN FOSTER CARE AND HAVE A LOWER RATE OF RECURRENCE OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT AFTER THEY LEAVE FOSTER CARE."**

**- JOYCE WILLIAMS WARREN**

◀ **PHOTO:** Joyce Williams Warren received the Friends of Children Award in 2020.

# Arkansas Families Struggle with Chronic Poverty

## RICH HUDDLESTON ON THE UNIVERSAL COST

By Robin Mero

**THE STATE OF ARKANSAS CONTINUES TO RANK POORLY FOR CHILD HEALTH AND WELLBEING, AND THE SCORE FOR "FAMILY AND COMMUNITY" CHRONICALLY SCRAPES BOTTOM.**

Data released in 2021 ranks the state 43rd in the nation for factors that include children living in high-poverty areas and in single-parent households, with their head of household lacking a high school diploma, and for teenage births per capita, according to child poverty data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

"Helping each child to succeed will lead directly to success in the workforce and the state's ability to succeed economically," says Rich Huddleston, the 18-year executive director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF). "This work begins with the family."

"You want to do everything you can to protect families and make it more likely that they are going to stay together and succeed, because families, especially parents, are so critical to the long-term success of a child," says Huddleston.

"Wellbeing is best supported when community-based organizations collaborate," he says.

"All the experts agree that a complex, holistic approach is better. How you pay for it and how you actually make it happen in practice are the key issues."

Overall, Arkansas ranks 39th in child wellbeing, slightly better than the prior year at 40th.

Seventeen percent of U.S. children live in poverty, but that figure rises to 22 percent in Arkansas.

**"HELPING EACH CHILD TO SUCCEED WILL LEAD DIRECTLY TO SUCCESS IN THE WORKFORCE AND THE STATE'S ABILITY TO SUCCEED ECONOMICALLY. THIS WORK BEGINS WITH THE FAMILY."**

**- RICH HUDDLESTON**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ARKANSAS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

One bright spot is that figures have declined here since 2013, when it was 29 percent.

"The most troubling indicator in the data book each year happens to be the child poverty statistic, because the research is pretty clear. The younger that you are when you live in poverty, and the longer that you spend living in poverty, have a profound impact on your ability to succeed later in life," Huddleston says.

"We can't seem to break out of having between one-quarter to one-fifth of our kids living in poverty. And the rate for kids under five always tends to be another 5 to 7 points higher than the overall child poverty rate. So you have more kids who are living in poverty at the youngest point in their lives, when they really need resources to thrive and succeed. Depending on which study you look at, anywhere from 75 to 90 percent of a young child's brain tends to be formed during those first few years."

There are major racial and ethnic disparities to child poverty; rates are often significantly higher for children of color.

"Until we take steps as a state to intentionally address these gaps, these disparities of child poverty, we're going to lag behind as a state, because we're going to have large groups of our kids who grow up struggling to succeed in the workforce, which will impact the state's ability to succeed economically."

Though we can't yet adequately measure the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, he says, "it certainly didn't help things. Gaps in educational outcomes more than likely increased during the pandemic, because it's children of color and children for whom English is not a first language, students with disabilities or special education needs, or those in some rural areas, where children probably fell behind during the pandemic; at least that's what some of the early data is suggesting."

AACF relies on a scoring system called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), which consists of 10 traumatic events that a child can suffer that have negative long-lasting effects on health and well-being – and also on the health and well-being of their families when they become adults. Generally speaking, there are three categories: household challenges such as domestic violence, mental illness, parental separation or divorce; abuse – which can be emotional, physical or sexual; and neglect, which can be emotional or physical neglect.

ACES are critical because they are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood – but they can be prevented.

The majority of the population experiences one ACE. "One by itself can be traumatic. But if you start to experience two, three, four or more adverse childhood experiences of those on that list, then the likelihood of you leading a healthy life starts to go down dramatically. Many pediatricians

➤ **PHOTO:** Rich Huddleston, the 18-year executive director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF). *Photo courtesy of AACF.*

believe that ACES are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today." Huddleston says.

A family's economic health can sometimes minimize the likelihood of ACES.

"A lot of ACES, at some level, do tend to stem from a family's economic circumstances, such as bills piling up leading to domestic violence or alcohol abuse. If you can do more to economically support families and put them in a better position to earn higher incomes, that could potentially help avoid some of these ACES. But also making sure you have a program structure in place in your state – programs that help keep families together and deal with mental illness, for instance."

Huddleston notes a positive trend within the child welfare arena to reunite families, "in such a way that you're not just putting the kid back into a bad situation but you're making it more likely to address whatever issues are going on, to make it more likely that they're going to succeed as a family in the long run. So prevention is a key there; you want to try and prevent the conditions that are more likely to lead to abuse and neglect, but then once that happens, making sure you have strategies in place to reunify families and make it more likely that they're going to succeed moving forward."

After years with AACF, Huddleston will retire at the end of 2022.

"I have a vision of a country and society where not necessarily everybody earns the exact same income, but you have reasonable opportunities to at least earn income to meet your family's basic needs, and put your own kids in a position to pursue what they want to do in their own lives and succeed later on," he says. ◂

◀ **PHOTO:** Governor Asa Hutchinson speaks on behalf of Restore Hope Arkansas. *Photo courtesy of the Governor's office.*

ARKANSAS

# Poised TO LEAD THE NATION IN SUPPORTING FAMILIES

## GOVERNOR'S INITIATIVE GAINS NATIONAL EYE

By Robin Mero

**IMAGINE A YOUNG FAMILY IN CRAWFORD COUNTY, EXPERIENCING A CATASTROPHIC EVENING. THE TWO PARENTS ARE HIGH ON METH AND HAVING AN ARGUMENT. WHEN POLICE RESPOND AND DISCOVER ACTIVE WARRANTS, THEY ARE ARRESTED AND THEIR CHILDREN ARE SWEPT AWAY INTO PROTECTIVE FOSTER CARE.**

A complicated reality awaits this couple who are overwhelmed by the chasm between who they are today and the suitable, healthy parents that their children need and deserve.

Dozens of nonprofits and social service agencies exist in Crawford County to help this couple piece together the elements of a healthy home, but how can the couple progress when they're enslaved to a drug habit and defeated by circumstances?

Envision connecting this couple to a caseworker with a strong awareness of the social services that Crawford County has to offer. She assembles a team of service providers for the family, securing SNAP benefits and health insurance, affordable housing options, solutions for transportation and identifying a substance-abuse counselor for treating the drug addiction. A payment plan is negotiated with the courts, resumés are built and distributed, the Department of Child and Family Services worker is kept informed.

The couple can focus on solving problems and compounding days of sobriety and productivity, while the care team communicates about their progress and responds to challenges that arise. This is Restore Hope Arkansas.

"All the agencies, nonprofits, and training programs in a community now operate independently of each other, and the people who we are attempting to help actually need more than one agency can provide," Restore Hope executive director Paul Chapman says. "Therefore, if we want to close in on better outcomes for families, instead of starting a new program, what we need to do is help existing programs to work better together."

Restore Hope today is operating in six Arkansas counties and aims to reach the 25 largest counties in Arkansas by 2025, making collaboration between social service providers the missing link to creating population-level change for justice-served families.

"At Restore Hope, we help a community do what it's already signed up to do; we don't provide the social services ourselves," Chapman says. "The organizations are already there. They just need something to connect them."

**"IF WE WANT TO CLOSE IN ON BETTER OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES ... WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS HELP EXISTING PROGRAMS TO WORK BETTER TOGETHER."**

**- PAUL CHAPMAN**
***RESTORE HOPE ARKANSAS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR***

**PHOTO:** Restore Hope Arkansas in collaboration with Winthrop Rockefeller Institute at the iR3, Incarceration: Recidivism, Reentry and Reunification summit in 2021.

## INSPIRATION AND ACTION

When Gov. Asa Hutchinson took office in 2015, he inherited the fastest-growing prison population in our nation. A staggering number of Arkansas children were relegated to poverty and foster care, and waves of 6,000 prisoners reentered communities each year with 48 percent of them being unemployed and having little hope of transforming their conditions and habits.

At one point in that era, Arkansas ranked highest in the nation for the percentage of children having at least one parent who had been incarcerated: 16 percent.

Hutchinson went directly to the faith community for help, forming a Restore

# REUNIFICATION RATES

## WITH PARENT(S)

**76%** 100 FAMILIES

vs

**43%** STATE OF ARKANSAS*

## WITH PARENT(S) OR RELATIVES

**80%** 100 FAMILIES

vs

**59%** STATE OF ARKANSAS*

** from the 2021 Annual Report Card (arkansas.gov)*

Hope initiative and task force, on which Chapman, who was part of Fellowship Bible Church of Little Rock, was asked to serve.

When a Restore Hope summit was held in Little Rock during the summer of 2015, the governor shared his dismay that half of the children needing protective services were coming out of drug environments.

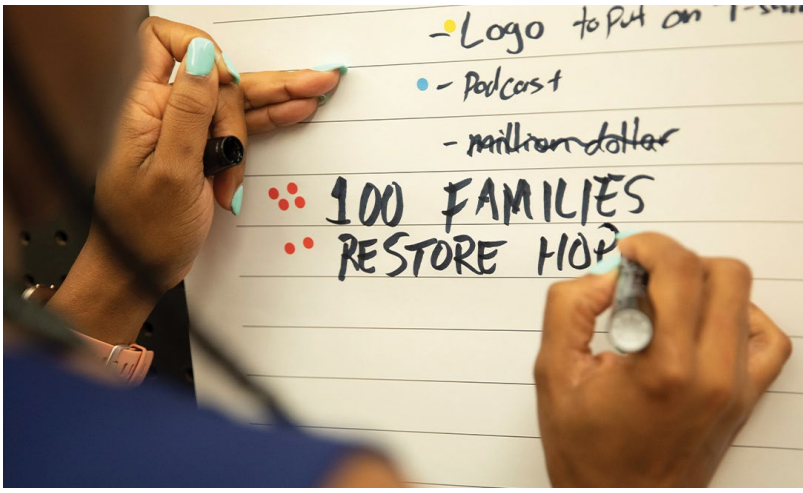
"When we see (drug problems) impacting and endangering children, I hope we will give some thought to the root cause, as well as making sure we have the solutions for our children," Hutchinson challenged the group. "The people in this room reflect the people of Arkansas in that we care, we hope, we desire, we want to serve. It's a matter of mobilizing that concern that exists in the hearts of Arkansans."

"Let's not depart this summit with only hope," Hutchinson pleaded. "We need to follow with action."

Chapman presented ideas and was called upon by the governor to implement them. Now in its sixth year, Restore Hope has the hard data to demonstrate efficacy and scalability of its initiatives.

**"...WE CARE, WE HOPE, WE DESIRE, WE WANT TO SERVE. IT'S A MATTER OF MOBILIZING THAT CONCERN THAT EXISTS IN THE HEARTS OF ARKANSANS."**

**- GOVERNOR ASA HUTCHINSON**




**PHOTOS:** The iR3, Incarceration: Recidivism, Reentry and Reunification summit in 2021 was a two-day event where participants identified strategic objectives.

## IN THE PAST 3 YEARS

*100 Families Initiative has helped reunite*

**126 FAMILIES**

*meaning*

**344 CHILDREN**

WERE REUNITED WITH THEIR PARENTS

## FAMILY PRESERVATION:

*100 Families Initiative has preserved*

**1,183 FAMILIES**

*meaning*

**2,638 CHILDREN**

REMAINED SAFELY IN THEIR HOMES WITH THEIR FAMILIES

# STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

IN THE PAST YEAR, WE HAVE HAD THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS THAT ENROLLED IN THE 100 FAMILIES INITIATIVE

**87%** INCREASE IN FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

**257** PARENTS GAINED EMPLOYMENT

**77%** FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT RETENTION RATE

MOVED **221** FAMILIES INTO STABLE HOUSING

MOVED **181** PARENTS INTO STABLE RECOVERY

MOVED **281** CLIENTS FROM CRISIS TO CAREER

**FAMILIES SERVED HAD ON AVERAGE A 42% INCREASE IN INCOME**

### THE DATA

The overall reunification rate for families that have a child removed and put into foster care in Arkansas is 43 percent. At last measure, those families participating in Restore Hope's programs experienced 76 percent reunification.

"Just by helping organizations in a community to manage a family's issues together, with a shared mission and constant communication, you're able to have that kind of impact," Chapman says.

In Crawford County, as an example, 66 percent of families coming into the program were unemployed; that has been reduced to 23 percent. Seventeen percent of families didn't have transportation, which has been reduced to 4 percent.

Overall during the past year, 1,270 clients with 2,719 children were served; 257 gained employment, 221 homeless families moved into stable housing, and 181 parents who had been using drugs or alcohol at intake moved into stable recovery.

"All these factors impact reunification," Chapman says. "You're not getting your kids back until you're into an apartment or house that's environmentally sound. You're not going to get them back if you're actively using, so we look at recovery.

"The data produced through the alliances has value far beyond the individual family level," Chapman says. "Bringing data to a situation allows things to be more centered on fact rather than observations."

**RESTORE HOPE ALSO HAS PROGRAMS FOCUSED DIRECTLY ON RE-ENTRY AND REDUCING THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO RETURN TO PRISON.**

➤ **PHOTO:** Paul Chapman, Restore Hope Arkansas Executive Director.

An even more important measure than reunification is the thousands of times that the removal of children from a household has been prevented.

"As Americans, we're not nearly as impressed with prevention. We have the best healthcare system if you're sick, but not so much for preventing sickness. In the same way, everyone is very impressed, and they should be, by the reunification numbers the communities are getting, but more impressive is the prevention of removals. The reunification rate is hundreds of kids but the prevention of removal is thousands upon thousands of children. It's just, wow; do you get excited about something that didn't happen? As Americans, traditionally we don't."

Restore Hope also has programs focused directly on re-entry and reducing the number of people who return to prison, yet accumulating that data will take at least 4-6 active years, Chapman says.

## COMMON OBJECTIVES

The willingness to work together can be slow to develop between the agencies and nonprofits that desire the same results but may compete for the same funding dollars.

"Your outcomes are terrible and you know it," Chapman is known to admonish people working in social services, "and no one from Washington or Little Rock is going to come save you. You're going to have to plot a course and journey it out together. Coming to that realization is step one of becoming good."

Each county fashions its own alliance, so that its case managers know and use the resources there. All that is needed is for one organization to step forward to serve as the hub. Recently the Journey Church in Russellville started an alliance in Pope County, and the Literacy Council in Texarkana established one in Miller County. Restore Hope provides training, helps these organizations find funds to hire case workers, and provides access to software, called HopeArk, which allows the care team members to track a family and communicate with each other about needs and issues, with the necessary privacy compliances built in.

Chapman asks, "Are you tired of spending money and never seeing population growth change?

"We just need someone to call from Pine Bluff, from Fayetteville. We'll send our affiliate program agreement. We'll train them."

## THE BROADER PATH

Chapman's work to strengthen Arkansas families gained intensity more than a decade ago, when he was visited at Fellowship Bible Church by a woman armed with a laptop and entreaty: "The Bible says that the church is to care for orphans. You seem to be the leaders of the church; my slides say there is a crisis in our community and therefore there are orphans. I'm coming to make you aware – and I want to know what you're going to do about it," he recalls her having said.

Chapman and his wife eventually adopted two children (they already had three). And while he had planned to fund his children's college educations by rejoining the banking technology sector where he worked in the 1990s, his trajectory was altered by the governor's plea at the Restore Hope summit.

**"WHEN PEOPLE BEHAVE BADLY, THE WAY WE CARRY OUT JUSTICE HAS CONSEQUENCES ON FAMILIES. ALL OUR ACTIONS SHOULD BE TO STRENGTHEN AND PRESERVE FAMILIES. THE HUMAN APPROACH TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM IS TO TEAR SOMETHING DOWN. "**

**- PAUL CHAPMAN**
***RESTORE HOPE ARKANSAS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR***

During both his banking career and his prior involvement with a prison pre-release program, Chapman had studied collaboration. He was influenced by the Stanford Social Innovation Review's 2011 report on collective impact, which lamented the lack of results from decades of attempted education reform and highlighted some remarkable exceptions that succeeded by using collaboration.

He also is personally invigorated by confronting problems.

"When people behave badly, the way we carry out justice has consequences on families. All our actions should be to strengthen and preserve families," he says. "The human approach to criminal justice reform is to tear something down; on the left, to say law enforcement and courts are ineffective and racist, on the right, to diminish social organizations."

"The balanced, middle approach is to preserve our institutions; they need to be built up and aligned. And the most important institution of all is the family," Chapman says.

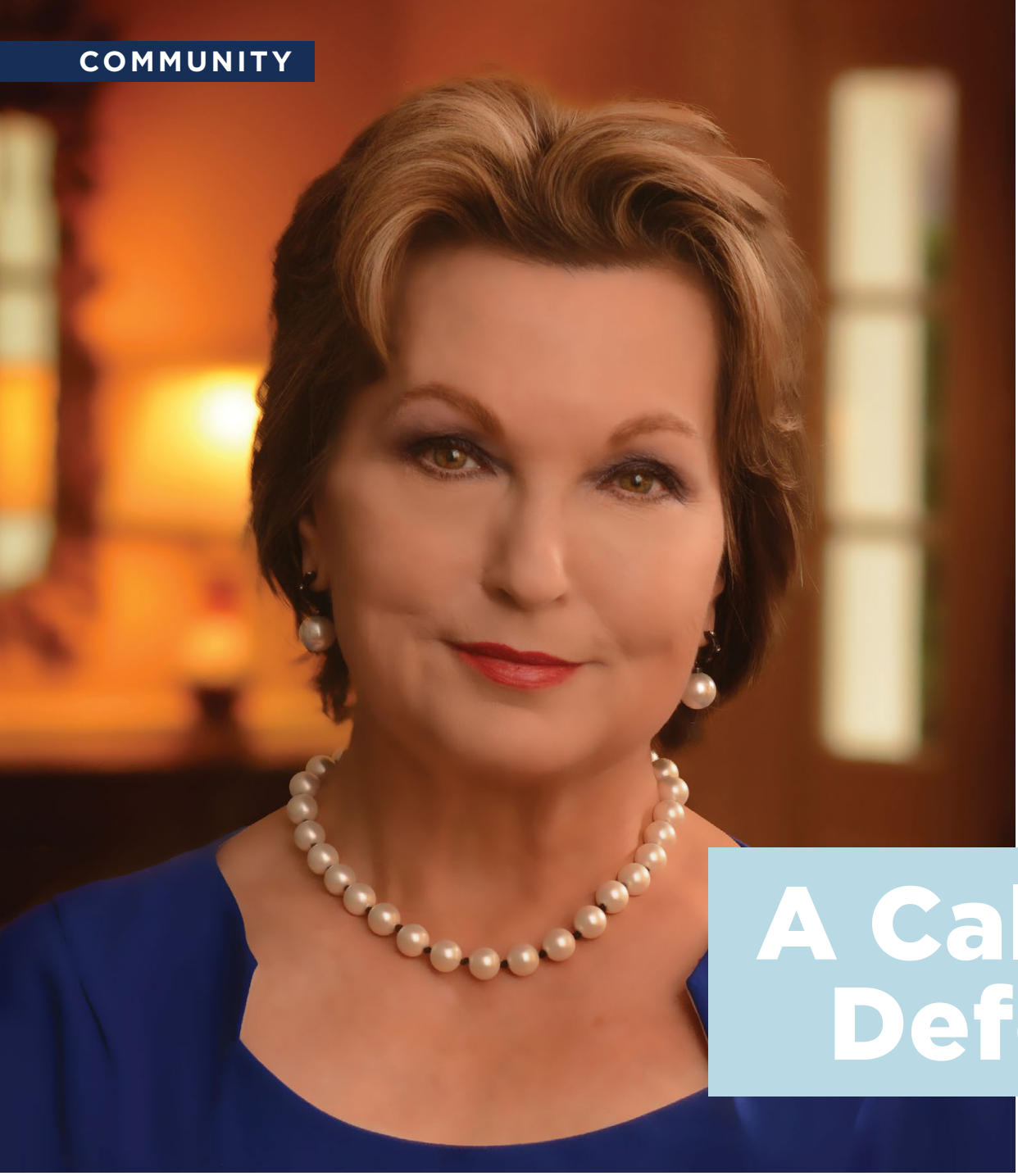
"Governments and nonprofits should always seek to involve and strengthen family, to hold family up as a high value. The stronger we can make families, the more we prevent crime. But really, that happens outside of the government's purview," he says.

"States throughout the country have been contacting Restore Hope for information about implementation of the program," Chapman says, reverberating Hutchinson's words of 2015:

"We have two objectives, two missions, of all the needs in our state to be focused on: children, and those who need a second chance. Arkansas has an opportunity to be a national leader."

Now imagine again that Crawford County couple, benefiting from services, rising above drug habits and regaining custody of their children. They find good jobs and have a third child; the household is reconstructed, healthier, and structured. You will meet the Myer family in this issue.

"We in Arkansas have been called upon to collaborate and vigorously address the unrelenting challenges that continue to cripple thousands of our families," Chapman says. "Our social service agencies and nonprofits, together with the criminal justice system, can no longer operate independently. The most foundational institution of all – the family – needs the worthy resources that already exist in our communities, with the added elixir of alliance that can for our state truly Restore Hope."



# A Call to Defend

By Robin Mero

**PHOTO:** First Lady of Arkansas, Susan Hutchinson

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

**WHEN THE FIRST LADY OF ARKANSAS, SUSAN HUTCHINSON, WAS A CHILD, HER FAMILY EXPERIENCED A DISTURBING OCCURRENCE ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN THEIR ATLANTA, GEORGIA HOME.**

Susan's aunt, her mother's sister, placed a frantic call for help using a neighbor's telephone. Susan sensed her parents' concern as they loaded the family into the car and quickly drove to the aunt's neighborhood. She overheard her parents talking about the aunt's husband becoming violent; guns and shooting were mentioned, and Susan also worried about her cousin, an only child a few years older.

"I thought I was going to find my Aunt Grace dead, because her husband had discharged a gun and pulled the landline phone out of the wall," she says. "He was the meanest man I've ever met; he was violent toward my aunt even when she was pregnant. I may have been 6 years old, so it was very impressive."

Susan's aunt and cousin came to live with the family for several months. As Susan observed

**"THERE IS A SMALL WINDOW FOR BONDING FROM HUMAN TO HUMAN, AND IF YOU DON'T ALLOW THE BABIES TO BOND WHILE THAT WINDOW IS OPEN, THE WINDOW WILL CLOSE AND THEY WON'T BOND; THEY WON'T BOND WITH ANYBODY AT ANY AGE."**

**- FIRST LADY SUSAN HUTCHINSON**

them and their grief, she developed an immense sympathy for the problems of others and the traumas they may confront.

"I think that was the quietest, most stable time my cousin had ever experienced," she said. "I stayed close to her for a long time, and she was like a sister, but she was jittery and easily upset. I learned later that the brain remembers trauma, especially chronic abuse. The body remembers. The body creates chemical markers in response to chronic emotional and traumatic events; these compounds will then attach to your genetic material."

These markers can potentially cause impulsive behaviors later in life and affect one's attention, learning, response to stress and emotions.

"Some of the myths about children who are exposed to violence are that they won't remember, or that they're resilient, or they will grow out of it. All of those are lies," she says. "These children will need help, specific counseling and care to overcome. Even when a child is not yet vocal, the brain records those injuries and that trauma and that emotion."

When her husband took office almost eight years ago, Susan focused on endeavors to protect children who have experienced trauma, including serving on the state board of Children's Advocacy Centers of Arkansas.

Her husband governs a state where 22 percent of children live in poverty; the incarceration rate is within the country's top five; substance abuse is on the rise, and almost 7,000 children enter the foster care system each year.

She insists that the youngest of children be treated tenderly and intentionally, as childhood years set the stage for the quality of adult relationships, health and economic prosperity.

"There is a small window for bonding from human to human, and if you don't allow the babies to bond while that window is open, the window will close and they won't bond; they won't bond with anybody at any age. It's like they don't recognize fellow human beings as human beings, that they can hurt like they hurt, love like they love, dream like they dream. It's very important," she says.

Particularly when foster care is needed, she demands the least amount of disruption and scrupulous attention to situations that could be perceived as threatening or traumatic to the children.

"The child's safety and nurturing and emotional and neurological development is a priority. We need to recruit more foster parents. We need to get back to what families really mean. It's the greenhouse that we're to be born into, that protects us from the harsh elements of life," she says. "Children need stability and regularity. Children have to get a sense of the world in stages. They need time to grow and for their brains to mature, for their thinking processes to mature. Let them have normalcy. Let them have time. Let them have

**IN ARKANSAS**

**22%**
**OF CHILDREN LIVE IN POVERTY**

EACH YEAR ABOUT
**7,000**
**CHILDREN ARE IN FOSTER CARE**

that greenhouse effect where they're nurtured, they're loved, they're guided, they're taught the basics of life and right from wrong.

"I tell people to pray for our DHS agents and for our police officers; I understand that the most dangerous call a police officer can respond to can be domestic violence. We need to emphasize training for police officers in how to handle these situations so they're not harmed, so they can de-escalate situations and go home to their families. We need more trauma-response training. Medical personnel at hospitals need to understand how to recognize signs of sex trafficking. Hotel employees need to recognize sex trafficking, and to care and to call law enforcement."

Susan is also sensitive to the plight of the incarcerated and calls upon society to constructively use prison time to offer mentoring and programs that are enriching.

"Have we prepared them for leaving? And not just six weeks before. What have we been doing all along? Whether they've been there for three years or five years or a hundred years, are we doing things to help them be the best they can possibly be?"

A high percentage of those in prison were also in foster care as children, she points out.

"If we don't have a safe community, we can't build on what we have. They need consensual programs on the outside where mentors come alongside them and help them navigate this strange world with all its complications that they've come back into. I think if we can be more effective with that, we can see a lessening percentage of our population that needs to be incarcerated."


Welcome to The
PORCH

# An Unexpected Life

By Robin Mero

**100 FAMILIES IS A RESTORE HOPE ARKANSAS INITIATIVE OPERATING IN SEBASTIAN COUNTY THAT CONNECTS FAMILIES WITH A MYRIAD OF SERVICES – FROM JOB TRAINING TO SECURING HOUSING AND RECLAIMING DRIVERS' LICENSES.**

**THE FIRST USE OF METHAMPHETAMINES CAN CREATE FEELINGS OF EUPHORIA – A SATISFACTION OF ACCOMPLISHING TASKS WITHOUT TIRING. A HAPPIER MOOD AND AN EASE IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS.**

Amanda Myer was vulnerable to this in 2018.

She and her boyfriend, Patrick, had moved to Arkansas from Colorado, settling into an apartment in the River Valley during the late summer's oppressive heat in order to be closer to Patrick's dad. Patrick enrolled in HVAC school while Amanda stayed home with their two children.

She was unhappy, missing the mountains.

A neighbor, a nice fellow, offered to get them high, and the feeling she got surprised her. She discovered what seemed a better version of herself. She could clean the apartment spotlessly. Take the kids to the park. Make a nice dinner. And she liked feeling happy and being nicer to the people around her.

"That's before I started to feel the physical effects of it. Something that made it so hard to stop was that I knew I could do this and it would solve all of my problems," Amanda says on a Zoom call from her Barling home.

Amanda didn't foresee the downward spiral to come. That her body would set a new baseline, increasingly demanding that she get high again or it would leave her feeling worse than when she had started.

"One of my things that made me keep using was the energy, that I could do all the things for my family that I always wanted to do but I didn't have the energy to do, or I had just been sad and didn't put forth the effort," Amanda explains. "Eventually you're sick; like having the flu. If you do drugs, that's the only way you're going to feel better. Even now there is still a thought that comes to me: 'There's something you could do to solve your problems,' but now the thought that comes after that is, 'You can't do that, you're going to ruin your life. And you have such a way better life than you ever thought you were going to have. So don't do that.'"

—

Amanda and Patrick met in 2012 working evening jobs at Pizza Hut in their hometown of Atchison, Kansas - a small town on the Missouri River. Patrick was 26, and during the day he worked a construction job. Amanda, 21, was taking CNA classes. She lived three blocks from the restaurant and Patrick began driving her home, devising ways to make each short trip last longer. They moved in together almost immediately and were later joined by Patrick's son, Noah, age 7.

At that time, Amanda's confidence was low. "I never ever felt very good about myself," is how she describes it now. She largely had a happy upbringing, with stability and love from her mom and grandparents, and she describes her childhood as fairly normal.

Yet she'd also endured traumatic events. She didn't know her biological father until she was 19. Her parents had initially used drugs together; then her mother got clean and he didn't, so her mom had moved on. "Girls need their father," Amanda says. She had also experienced sexual abuse as a young girl from two different abusers.

"I didn't tell anyone for a long time, but when I did it wasn't dealt with," she says. "Then I was

◀ **PHOTO:** (from right) Patrick Myer holding son Monty, Amanda Myer, daughter Lemony, and son Noah. *Photo courtesy of Myer.*

harassed by a principal in middle school, and when I said something no one believed me. It's probably why I don't deal with things now. Dealing with my problems – I never have. I definitely acted out and did cry for help. I started cutting myself and partying when I was young. There were definitely signs that something needed to be addressed."

But Patrick was a good partner for her. After a couple of years together they decided to sell everything and move to Colorado. Patrick especially loved the idea of being free of possessions and having a fresh start. They stayed with friends. Patrick found work and Amanda became pregnant. After their daughter Lemony was born, they wanted the children to be closer to Patrick's dad, and thus the move.

Living in Fort Smith, Amanda felt depressed and wasn't enjoying Arkansas. The relief she thought that meth was giving her began to wane. She and Patrick fought more and money dwindled. One night they were arguing; police responded and arrested both Amanda and Patrick on warrants. Their daughter Lemony, 18 months, and Noah, then age 12, together went to a foster home.

After Patrick's dad bonded them out of jail, Amanda immediately called the Department of Human Services to ask what classes they should sign up for and what else they needed to do to get the kids back.

"I was putting my case together before I even had a case worker assigned. We were so depressed. For two weeks straight we just woke, ate and went back to sleep unless we had class or had visitation with the kids. And after every single one I would bawl my head off. It was terrible; to get two short hours with your kids and then see them leave with somebody else, especially when you have a little baby who doesn't understand and an older kid who's trying to be strong for the baby."

They went through drug and alcohol assessments and psych evaluations and enrolled in both parenting classes and therapy for drug and alcohol use. A therapist, in particular, helped Amanda with an active technique called eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR).

"There was so much trauma from my childhood that I never dealt with," she says.

In parenting class, Amanda kept hearing about 100 Families, a Restore Hope Arkansas program operating in Sebastian County that connects families with a myriad of services – from job training to securing housing and reclaiming drivers' licenses. The program doesn't provide the direct services, but rather connects clients quickly and smoothly with agencies and resources that can.

"I knew they helped people get their kids back, so I called," Amanda says. "We went in and met Karen (Phillips, her case manager). We were there for hours. We just spilled things out about what was going on and that we were using drugs.

"When we enrolled, we needed so many things before the kids came home. They helped us write letters to get our drivers' licenses back. We needed more affordable rent and they helped us get on HUD. They helped us get our electric bill paid one month, they sent emails to get us in drug/alcohol assessment classes. So many things. And from then on, Karen was just kind of our person. She has been the person that we can talk to. She'll have a solution and she'll probably feed us."

The agency had a crib delivered to the family, one of the requirements for getting the kids back.

"And so many rides," Amanda says. "We had some car trouble; we didn't have a car for whatever reason, but I remember Karen taking me and my husband everywhere we needed to go – to work, to therapy, anywhere. So many times calling late in the evening because something happened; I just needed somebody to talk to me, and I had somebody."

Amanda and Patrick got married, and the kids came home in October 2019. Amanda still faced a slow climb. She relapsed. She struggled to find a good job fit. She had another baby, a boy they named Monty, and the family lived in a shelter for a time.

"To say how hard it was doesn't sum it up," Amanda says. "When we wanted to get clean, Patrick and I definitely had to rely on each other. I tried to be around other people who weren't using. I got rid of all the people on Facebook that I did drugs with."

—

Amanda enrolled in cosmetology school because she needed work and she wanted something fresh for her mind to focus on; it was not a great fit for her, but she persevered. She also did some volunteering for Karen in the 100 Families office.

What Amanda didn't know was that she'd impressed Karen, who saw in her the potential for helping others. Karen asked Amanda if she would like to work as a case manager. Amanda successfully interviewed with the 100 Families county coordinator and now works full time to be the same resource and anchor that she benefited from before.

"All across America there are struggling families who need help to be productive and keep going in their lives," Amanda says. "There are times I can just be there to support people, and that is probably the biggest thing for me. I always want to make sure people know that the most important thing that I got from 100 Families was the support – people that I can call when things aren't going right, or you know, to talk to, that I know are going to listen to me, definitely help me to come up with a solution and not just say, 'I'm sorry.' I don't know how other places go about reunification properly without something like (100 Families).

"Most people want opportunity but don't know how to go about finding it," Amanda says. "It's hard

**"WHEN WE ENROLLED, WE NEEDED SO MANY THINGS BEFORE THE KIDS CAME HOME. THEY HELPED US WRITE LETTERS TO GET OUR DRIVERS' LICENSES BACK. WE NEEDED MORE AFFORDABLE RENT AND THEY HELPED US GET ON HUD ... SO MANY THINGS."**
**- AMANDA MYER**

**PHOTO:** Amanda Myer credits a big part of her recovery to 100 Families, a Restore Hope Arkansas program. *Photography by Andrew Kilgore.*

for people to give you a second chance, and when there is a group of people who want to help you take control of your life and get everything back together, that's a great thing to have behind you. I don't know anywhere in America that wouldn't benefit from something like that."

The 100 Families program is lifting people out of crisis but also helps them stay out, she says.

"Generational poverty is a real thing. I have clients who come in and their parents are my clients, too. They're just surviving the only way that they've ever known how. To be able to take those people who, kind of like me, never thought they would have a real career, helping them get to where they can pay their bills and have their own stability and don't have to rely on anybody else to support them," Amanda says.

"Now I care about things a lot more. My relationship with Patrick has changed a ton. We work harder at being a couple, and at being parents. Now that I have a career and have something that's mine that I work for … I didn't realize how important that was. I never thought I was going to have that. (In my mind) we were never going to have nice things, or not just nice things but not even decent things.

"I think I am lucky; my husband and I built everything that we have now. We really started at the bottom with nothing and worked our way here through a lot of hard work, but luck also. I can think of so many times that I went into Karen's office with a need and it was met. And now I try to follow that kind of example. If somebody ever told me that I was their Karen, that would mean the absolute world to me."


**“MYSELF AND A LOT OF MY PEERS ARE STARTING TO SAY, ‘LET’S THINK ABOUT DOING POLICING DIFFERENTLY.’”**

**- DANNY BAKER, FORT SMITH POLICE CHIEF**

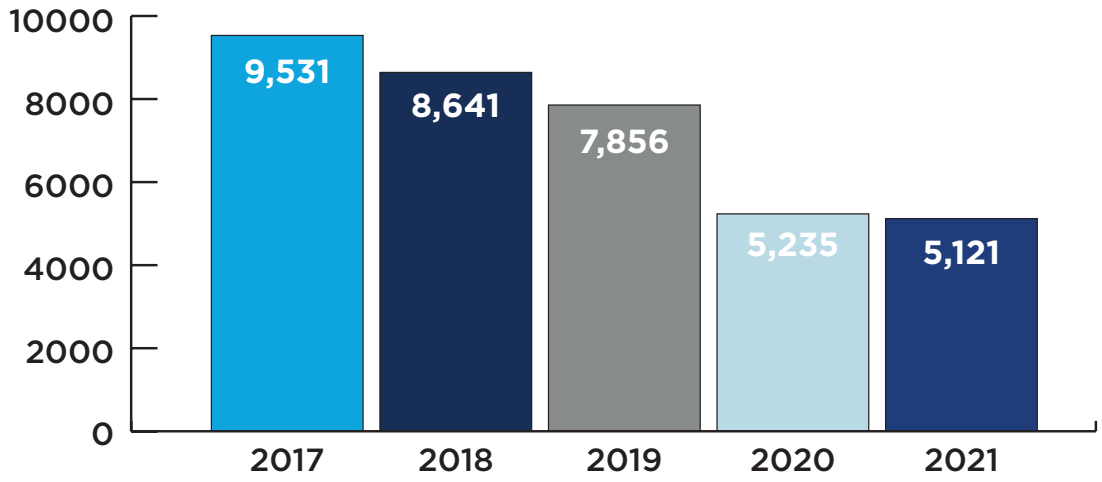

**PHOTO:** Sebastian County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Shue and Police Chief Danny Baker alongside University of Arkansas Fort Smith Police staff.

# Fort Smith Embraces POLICE-LED Diversion

By Robin Mero

**FOR MANY YEARS, SEBASTIAN COUNTY SUFFERED PER CAPITA THE STATE'S HIGHEST ARREST RATE AND THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.** These numbers have shifted downward significantly due to efforts and collaborations among police, social services, government agencies and the community. Fort Smith Police Chief Danny Baker and his department are increasingly using diversionary techniques to keep citizens out of jail and to help families solve their problems. The department's vision includes this goal: "We will strive to improve the lives of everyone we encounter."

## NUMBER OF PERSONS INCARCERATED ANNUALLY BY THE FORT SMITH POLICE DEPARTMENT:




**Q: Rates of violent crimes and incarceration are soaring across parts of Arkansas and the United States. What's happening in Fort Smith?**

**BAKER:** We saw an over 40 percent reduction in our incarceration rate by the Fort Smith Police Department from 2017 to 2021. It was significantly less than we'd seen in previous years while much of the rest of the state, the rest of the country, is seeing a phenomenal increase in violent crime – it's literally at a crisis point in some places.

And, while we have seen small increases in certain types of crimes, there is no huge crime increase or violent crime increase in Fort Smith. In fact, we saw an overall 6 percent reduction in Group A crimes during 2021. (This group includes assaults, homicides, breaking and entry, fraud, kidnapping, vehicle theft and sex offenses.) I think that's statistically significant and, hopefully, we can maintain it.

And that's amid a hiring crisis. Our police department has been operating with a significant number of vacancies with police officers and dispatchers for several years now; '20 and '21 were the worst times that I've seen in regards to people getting out of the profession.

Myself and a lot of my peers, hopefully more every day, are starting to say, 'Let's think about doing policing differently.' Some people have taken that to the extreme and said, 'Let's defund the police.' Nobody expects that to happen. We've got to have police officers, folks who are willing to put themselves in harm's way to protect others and to be the guardians of the community. But we can think in terms of rebuilding faith services and using sobriety facilities and crisis intervention, things that we know work, because in every place they're being done, we're seeing results. Often the results come more quickly than anyone anticipated.

**Q: How do you instill this vision for your officers?**

**BAKER:** Diversion and looking for alternatives to incarceration are only one small part of it. We encourage our officers, even though there's less of them, to take as much time as they can in trying to solve someone's problem the best way. And that is a huge departure from where we came from – when you have huge crime issues, you use traditional policing tactics and you arrest everyone you see, you stop everything you see.

We really encourage our officers to think through a problem and try to find an alternative to arrest whenever they can, and to be involved in the community. I think the officers are starting to see the results of their community policing efforts and are realizing that it's more than a feel-good thing. It is actually a crime-fighting tool.

**Q: How does community involvement become a crime-fighting tool?**

**BAKER:** We've had several violent, high-profile incidents in the last couple years that, because we had taken the time to build the trust in the communities where those incidents happened, people were willing to work with us. And so, when we have incidents, instead of being met with silence or opposition, or folks, you know, 'I didn't see anything,' or, 'I live in this neighborhood and if I tell you anything you're not going to do anything to protect me,' we're beginning to have more

**"WE REALLY ENCOURAGE OUR OFFICERS TO THINK THROUGH A PROBLEM AND TRY TO FIND AN ALTERNATIVE TO ARREST WHENEVER THEY CAN, AND TO BE INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY. ... IT'S MORE THAN A FEEL-GOOD THING. IT IS ACTUALLY A CRIME-FIGHTING TOOL."**

**- DANNY BAKER**
FORT SMITH
POLICE CHIEF



➤ **PHOTOS:** (From top) Governor Asa Hutchinson (left), Officer Robin Gaines (middle), and Chief Danny Baker. Gaines was awarded 2022 Officer of the Year for FSPD.

Danny Baker joined the Fort Smith Police Department in 2001 and was named Chief in 2019.


cooperation from the public when we do have a violent crime or something that we need to get somebody in jail for.

If we have a high-crime, low-income apartment complex, and particularly one where we have difficulties with witnesses coming forward and giving us information, we send our crime prevention and community policing teams out there with a Tahoe full of sack lunches. They set up in the parking lot and give away food. And that's it. Nobody's asking questions, nobody's running names, nobody's checking warrants. And that came from our response to the pandemic in trying to address domestic abuse and child abuse that we were seeing during the quarantine times.

The officer's job is to look for and create the opportunities to engage with the community in non-enforcement activities, non-enforcement contacts and roles. That is part of their performance evaluation.

**Q: Is it challenging for officers to shift to this approach?**

**BAKER:** For the most part, it's generational in thinking. Those of us who have been in the profession for a long time, it may be a little harder for us to see the difference. We require a lot more personal restraint and de-escalation.

Leadership has to be intentional and deliberate. We all have to be on the same sheet of music.

The younger officers are already looking for something different. This generation of those who want to be police officers, who are willing to be police officers, has a different expectation of what being a police officer is about than I did when I started 25 years ago.

The changes we've adopted in Fort Smith are attracting candidates. Candidates are telling us that is the reason they're seeking out the department.

**Q: You've been quoted as saying, 'For a long time in law enforcement, we've had discretion but we haven't had options for that discretion.' What does this mean?**

**BAKER:** There are some things we have no discretion in, for instance domestic violence. We are required by law to make an arrest if we have probable cause that somebody has committed domestic violence on someone, and there are a couple of other areas that we have pretty clear guidance on what we do.

But in other areas, it's baked into the law that the individual officer has the ability to determine what's best and how to solve a problem. The answer doesn't always have to be to arrest someone. In my experience, we've unfortunately had very limited options as to what else we could do other than arresting someone and putting them in jail to temporarily abate the problem.

And so we've been trying hard to develop options for the police officers on the street, to give them avenues for that discretion. We now have an arrest-diversion program that an officer can direct someone to. Or to the 100 Families initiative and other services that we now know exist. We're moving toward sobering facilities in Arkansas. And our Crisis Intervention Team, they live and breathe in discretion because they are trying to find solutions for people's problems without putting them in jail.

**Q: How could diverting an arrest help the bigger societal picture?**

**BAKER:** At the end of the day, if you fix one individual and move them from crisis, addiction or untreated mental health, to a healthy, unaddicted, treated, functioning individual in our community, that one person is going to have a significant impact on everyone around them. The change is

**"IF YOU FIX ONE INDIVIDUAL AND MOVE THEM FROM CRISIS, ADDICTION OR UNTREATED MENTAL HEALTH, TO A HEALTHY, UNADDICTED, TREATED, FUNCTIONING INDIVIDUAL IN OUR COMMUNITY, THAT ONE PERSON IS GOING TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON EVERYONE AROUND THEM."**

**- DANNY BAKER**
FORT SMITH
POLICE CHIEF

**PHOTO:** Community Relations Unit FSPD distributing food to those in need during a winter storm.

**PHOTO:** Baker addressing community relations staff.

## "WE WILL STRIVE TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF EVERYONE WE ENCOUNTER."

exponential, like a pebble in a pond. And that's really what drew me to 100 Families, what impressed me so much about what they were trying to do.

Everyone can take a little bit of time to improve somebody else, and that's actually part of our vision – using every encounter with another human being as an opportunity to improve lives. It takes everybody. The public, the businesses, the faith-based organizations can provide things in ways that we can't. So we involve them in everything that we do.

Arkansas still has work to do in mental health and the way it handles those who are in mental crisis. The criminal justice system would rather that you get people the help they need through the system. So police officers are pressured; you get them in jail, you get them in front of the criminal justice system and now the courts and prosecutors can handle getting them plugged in to the services that they really need. The problem is that a lot of times you are incarcerating people who are ill, who need some type of medical care, even if it's mental help. That's not a criminal justice issue.

So we fill our jails up with people who need help, and we get to the situation we've got now with jail overcrowding, prison overcrowding, families that are dysfunctional or nonexistent, kids in foster care. What we're doing is not fixing the problem, and we've been doing it a *long* time.

What we do see, and what we intuitively should know, is that what will impact those problems are things like keeping families together and giving people the tools to equip them to be stronger individuals and families, to work through their problems and to connect to the services that they need to succeed. And beyond that, there has to be a desire to see the people in your community do better, not just, 'Let's just get them out of our community where we don't have to deal with them.' That's not working.

**Q: How do you advise other police departments that are looking to incorporate changes?**

**BAKER:** If I have a department of 163 police officers and each one spends just a few minutes out of their week serving the community, that is going to have a significant impact on people in a real way, and it's going to have a significant impact on crime as well. It's also going to impact officer safety.

If I can't win folks over from any other angle, I will go to the officer safety angle.

If you have a negative encounter with somebody and you don't treat them right, if you disrespect them, chances are much higher that their next encounter with a police officer could be negative and possibly violent. If, on the other hand, you take a little time and show respect and help them, and don't immediately react in a negative way to any negativity they're giving, the chance that their next encounter with a police officer will be negative or turn violent is going to be less. Just a few minutes that you took is going to improve the safety of your fellow police officers. You can't argue with that one.

Don't be afraid to try a different way. The less time we have to spend on people who are struggling with substance abuse and mental health because we're getting them the help they need and fixing their problems, the more time we're going to be able to spend on those really bad folks that we need to be spending our time on.

**"I SERVED MY TIME, BUT WHEN I CAME HOME, SOCIETY STILL LOOKED AT ME AS IF I WAS THAT PERSON. YOU DON'T EVER MAKE UP FOR WHAT HAPPENED; YOU JUST BUILD WHERE YOU START FROM, YOU BUILD ON TO IT TO MAKE IT BETTER."**

**- ANTUOINE WELLS**

# Second-Chance Academy

**By Robin Mero**

**ANTUOINE WELLS HAS LIVED BOTH AS A FREE MAN AND BEHIND BARS. HE'S BEEN RAISING A DAUGHTER AS A SINGLE PARENT, WORKING AS A BARBER.** He now has a new career as a long-haul truck driver through an initiative of Restore Hope Arkansas, which is helping people with troubled pasts access a great job with a starting pay of about $60,000.

Antuoine is one of 23 people who in the past year have earned a commercial driver's license through a collaboration with the CDL Academy in Fort Smith. Graduates driving over-the-road are earning $1,200 to $2,000 per week, and the $6,500 training cost is covered through the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services if the student qualifies.

Antuoine, 44, says that finding good work after prison is challenging, "for the simple fact that once you have that label on your back, it's hard. Doors slam. Most people go back to what they know."

When Antuoine was 18, he ran with gangs on the streets of Little Rock. "I was trying to be an adult before it was time," he says. During his senior year of high school, he rented an apartment, fell short on cash and made a bad decision.

"I was thinking I was doing everything right, but the responsibility was bigger than I was expecting," he says. After being arrested for aggravated robbery, Antuoine spent seven years in prison. He doesn't regret his lessons as they taught him about consequences.

When Antuoine was released from prison in 2003 at age 26, his focus was the "straight and narrow path," he says. But he had no career or skills to speak of, whereas his friends had accrued multiple years of work history. He also lagged in maturity.

"Mentally I had to catch up. You have to learn to live. You're learning to cope with society. About not blowing money. Fixing your credit; or learning

**PHOTO:** Antuoine Wells with his daughter, Autumn Rayne Wells.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RESTORE HOPE ARKANSAS

what credit's even about," he says. "When you're incarcerated, it's 10:30 bedtime. Up by 6 or 6:30, go to work. The barracks for lunch. Eat dinner at 5, shower. Sit around until lights out. Your appearance may develop but your mind doesn't."

Antuoine often turned to his mother, big sister and godbrother for guidance.

"I reinvented myself. I can't speak for all, but for me I didn't want any more of that. I had to do everything in my power to stay out. I served my time, but when I came home, society still looked at me as if I was that person. You don't ever make up for what happened; you just build where you start from, you build on to it to make it better."

Antuoine found his first steady work when his godbrother encouraged him to attend barber school and they opened a shop together. Antuoine had a daughter in 2012. Then in 2018, the child's mother was shot and killed in a parking lot while holding their daughter in her arms and in the presence of her three other children. Antuoine's daughter also was shot but recovered. Antuoine was suddenly a full-time single parent, but he did have the ongoing support of both extended families.

"It was easier for me than some, because my daughter's mom and I had always co-parented, and I have helped to raise two other children who didn't have a father. I have a nice support system. But to this day my daughter still has some nightmares," he says.

Last year, Antuoine was cutting a man's hair and telling him about his experiences. The man was a caseworker with Restore Hope Arkansas' 100 Families initiative, and he informed Antuoine about a program for training to earn a CDL. Antuoine had been interested in this work before, but the path seemed expensive and impractical with his barber's schedule. He earned his CDL in October 2021.

Antuoine now drives a truck five days a week and is home each weekend, allowing him to continue serving barber clients. The extended family cares for his daughter during the week.

Increasingly, men and women in Arkansas with felony records and difficult histories are earning their CDLs, helping address a nationwide shortage of 80,000 drivers, a current estimate from the Commercial Vehicle Training Association.

Billy Pemberton, director of operations for the CDL Academy, says the trainees referred by 100 Families complete the 160-hour training in 4-6 weeks. Their backgrounds are not relevant and aren't shared with the staff.

"My school is a second-chance school. We're going to treat you like we do everyone else," says Pemberton. When the hiring companies come in to recruit, some exclude those with troubled backgrounds. "But many say, 'I don't care what your past is; we want to see what your future is.' Finding a job is no problem. With a CDL you'll never want for a job.

"Even if a trainee decides life on the road isn't for them, a CDL opens doors for other opportunities in the industry, such as working as a shipper, receiver, load planner or in a break-down department," Pemberton says.

For Antuoine, the work makes for a good living, particularly as girls need pricier things as they get older, he laughs. "The training is not hard; when you put your all into it, then you get your all out of it. Now I have two skills I can take anywhere in the world and use them."

**"MY SCHOOL IS A SECOND-CHANCE SCHOOL. WE'RE GOING TO TREAT YOU LIKE WE DO EVERYONE ELSE. FINDING A JOB IS NO PROBLEM. WITH A CDL YOU'LL NEVER WANT FOR A JOB."**

**- BILLY PEMBERTON**
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS FOR THE CDL ACADEMY

## ABOUT THE CDL TRUCKING ACADEMY

**PROGRAM STARTED**
May 2021

**REQUIREMENTS FOR ENTRY INTO THE PROGRAM**
Must be able to read. You do not need a GED and you can be a felon.

**CURRENT ENROLLMENT**
Six in Fort Smith, five in Little Rock and five in Searcy

**TOTAL GRADUATES**
35

**LENGTH OF PROGRAM**
160 hours, which includes one week of classroom and three weeks of driving training.

**STARTING PAY**
$40,000 to $60,000

**APPROX TIME FOR JOB PLACEMENT**
Job offers are made to students the second week of school by recruiters with the condition they pass their tests.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM**
One week in the classroom and then pass the written test, at which point the student begins learning about the truck and driving on the lot prior to driving on the road. After three weeks of driving training, the student takes a test at State Police headquarters. If they pass, then they are ready for the road. If not, they keep practicing until they do pass.

**EMPLOYERS HIRING GRADUATES**
Amazon, FedEx, all food distributors, Coke, Pepsi, Walmart, USA

**JOB OPTIONS**
Long haul drivers, delivery drivers, etc. Some drivers are limited to distance outside of county by their parole regulations.

**OPEN TRUCKER JOBS IN THE STATE**
8,000

**OPEN TRUCKER JOBS IN THE NATION**
80,000

**WEBSITE FOR MORE INFO**
Arkansas Trucking Association
arkansastrucking.com

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Importance of Family in the Justice System

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**EPISODE 4 • SEPTEMBER 28**
What About the Kids?

**EPISODE 5 • OCTOBER 5**
Trauma's Long-Term Impact

**EPISODE 6 • OCTOBER 12**
Is There a Way Forward?

## FEATURING

**BILLIE INMAN**
Director of Department of Justice program for Pulaski County Jail

**DANA BAKER**
Community Coordinator of White County 100 Families

**ANTUOINE WELLS**
CDL Graduate and 100 Families Client

**JIMMY MCGILL**
Director of Peer Services for Arkansas Department of Human Services

**KAREN PHILLIPS**
Restore Hope Operations Director

**SCOTT MCCLAIN**
Director of Pathways to Freedom

**JUDGE SHANICE JOHNSON**
Circuit Judge for Perry and Pulaski Counties

**ANDREW BAKER, PH.D.**
Executive Director of Center for Social Impact at Harding University

**DR. ROSE SMITH**
Family Practice Psychologist

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COMMUNITY JUSTICE INNOVATIONS