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**Dani Carlson**  
**Center for Community Solutions**  
**216-282-4583**  
[dcarlson@communitysolutions.com](mailto:dcarlson@communitysolutions.com)

**Thousands with mental illnesses and substance use disorders behind bars, one man shares his story**

*This is one of the findings in a new report, By the Numbers 4*

CLEVELAND, OH – Thousands of people with mental illnesses or substance use disorders are behind bars in understaffed, underfunded jails and prisons, a report from The Center for Community Solutions and the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition found. Paul Fitzpatrick, a military veteran, was one of those thousands of people.

“The judge, when she sentenced me, she threw the key away. [She] told me I had no chance of coming home,” said Fitzpatrick. He was released nearly 19 years later, and is out of prison now, living in the Cleveland area and trying to give back.

Fitzpatrick said he was fully in his addiction when he was sentenced nearly 20 years ago, dealing with both mental health and substance use issues. The Marine Corps veteran said he had a moment of clarity while in the county jail, and decided to use his time behind bars to work a recovery program and get the help he needed.

“[There are] some really good counselors,” said Fitzpatrick. “Unfortunately they’re always understaffed, they’re always underbudgeted.”

In addition to participating in a recovery program, Fitzpatrick also earned two Associate’s degrees while incarcerated. He considers his education a crucial element of his recovery and how he adds value to society after his release.

“While jails are not mental health facilities, increasingly more people with serious mental illness are occupying county jails and prisons across the state,” said Tara Britton, the Public Policy Director for The Center for Community Solutions.

According to By the Numbers, in 2015, more than 15,500 individuals with severe mental illness occupied jails in Ohio – an increase of 6 percent from the previous year.



“Ensuring people get the behavioral health services and supports they need and diverting them from entering the criminal justice system saves money and lives,” ” said Joan Englund, Executive Director of the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition.

In a series of five installments, The Center for Community Solutions and the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition took a look at the intersection of Ohio’s mental health and criminal justice systems. The installments make up “By the Numbers 4: Developing a Common Understanding for the Future of Behavioral Health Care, Landscape and Analysis of the Intersection between the Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Systems.”

The report takes a look at the current state of Ohio’s mental health and substance use disorder services. It analyzes different aspects of both the mental health and criminal justice systems, and offers recommendations to make real and lasting improvements in both.

Fitzpatrick is willing to speak with media about his personal experiences in and out of prison and Englund and Britton are also both available to speak about the project. To speak with any of them, please contact Dani Carlson at 216-645-1048 or Joan Englund at 216-325-9307.

1501 Euclid Avenue • Suite 310 • Cleveland, OH 44115 • P: (216) 781-2944 • F: (216) 781-2988

101 E. Town Street • Suite 520 • Columbus • OH 43215 • P: (614) 221-4945

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