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Prisons shift culture to provide safer environment, meaningful programs for inmates

By [JONA ISON](#)

After spending more than three years of his post-adolescent formative years locked up, Daniel Ervin is just four months away from heading home to South Charleston.

Ervin, 25, shakes his head a little as he gives a basic explanation of what brought him to Chillicothe: hanging out on the streets with the wrong people and breaking into people's homes.

"It just caught up to me," he said.

In July 2009, he was sent to prison for three years and six months on charges of breaking and entering and burglary in Clark County. His prison voyage took him to Noble Correctional Institution in Caldwell and to Dayton Correctional Institution before he arrived at Ross Correctional Institution in Chillicothe to work on the farm a year ago.

"It's a learning experience. I was raised on a farm, but I never really learned things. I never had time because of running on the street," Ervin said.

During the past year, Ervin said he's learned responsibility and how to work. He's learned things he ignored when his father tried to teach him, things he hopes will help him be a good father to his own son, who was 1 when Ervin went to prison and will celebrate his fifth birthday the day Ervin is released.

"I work out here five days a week, 14 hours a day. When I get home, I'm going to already be prepared for that (to work)," Ervin said.

Although Ervin doesn't know much about the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections' new three-tier system, he's saying the things Director Gary Mohr hopes more inmates will leave saying. The restructure of the system's culture is geared toward reducing violence, rewarding good behavior and increasing opportunities that will provide the skills needed to be successful after release.

Mohr sees changes to the system as being critical to reducing recidivism and truly rehabilitating inmates. The three-tier system has been in development for about 18 months and implementation at the prisons began about six months ago with training employees. The first control unit was finalized in Mansfield earlier this year and the reintegration units will be completed by fall.

"What we observed 18 months ago was a significant level of violence ...The reality of people being afraid was negating so much of the positive activity," Mohr said.

Article continued here:

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