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Decatur County United Fund  
Joane Cunningham 812-663-3342



Pictured Dave Burnett, Chaplain/Program Director for Decatur County Detention Center, United Fund Executive Director Joane Cunningham, and Sheriff Dave Durant.

### **United Fund Partners on New Initiative at Detention Center**

The Decatur County United Fund has been awarded a \$53,778 UnitedIN20 matching grant from Indiana United Ways. These dollars were made available to support community work in education, financial stability or health, by matching local fund-raising increases during the recent 2020 Campaign.

Decatur County United Fund will utilize these dollars to provide educational programming and improve life skills through Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) at the Decatur County Detention Center under the direction of the Decatur County Sheriff's Office. MRT is a type of behavioral therapy aimed at decreasing the likelihood of someone returning to abusing substances or alcohol. It utilizes a combination of psychological practices to assist with egocentric behaviors and improve moral reasoning and positive identity. Its cognitive-behavioral approach combines elements from a variety of psychological traditions to progressively address ego, social, moral, and positive behavioral growth. MRT takes the form of group and individual counseling using structured group exercises and prescribed homework assignments.

The Moral Reconciliation Therapy workbook is structured around 16 objectively defined steps (units) focusing on seven basic treatment issues: confrontation of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors; assessment of current relationships; reinforcement of positive behavior and habits; positive identity formation; enhancement of self-concept; decrease in hedonism and development of frustration tolerance; and development of higher stages of moral reasoning.

The Decatur County United Fund will provide \$48,400 to the Decatur County Detention Center for the Program Director's salary to implement the educational programming in 2021. The remaining funding of \$5,378 will allow the United Fund to expand their digital services.

The Decatur County United Fund Executive Director, Joane Cunningham, shared, “We are very excited about the potential these grant dollars bring to Decatur County. This educational initiative was selected and approved in July 2020 by the United Fund Board of Directors. The grant was submitted in July to the Indiana United Ways for review and approved last August. The campaign match was met in January of 2021 and now the initiative work can begin.”

Jamie Bridges, before leaving the sheriff’s office, submitted the original proposal and worked along side the United Fund to secure funding and implement this programming.

Sheriff Dave Durant stated, “This is a very exciting day for the sheriff’s office to offer this type programming. This will allow us to enhance the much-needed internal programming for our inmates. Our long-term goal is to reduce recidivism and better equip individuals for the return into the community. When this program shows positive outcomes, we will be able to seek other grant dollars to expand even more.”

He continued by adding, “This educational correctional programming encompasses a broad array of services and interventions, including substance abuse treatment, educational programming, and life skills classes. The objective of providing prisoners with programming is to improve their behavior, both before and after release from prison. Correctional programming is intended to not only enhance public safety by lowering recidivism, but also to promote greater safety within prisons by reducing misconduct. It is also important that Decatur County focuses on reducing recidivism to encourage family preservation for the children of our future.”

Outcome research on MRT has been conducted on offenders a full 10 years after treatment and release. In general, by the tenth year, the MRT-treated groups show actual rearrests and reincarceration rates about 20-35% lower than that observed in nontreated offenders. This study, consistent with the prior meta-analysis, shows that short-term recidivism is cut by at least 50% in MRT-treated offenders.

David Burnett, newly hired Program Director for the Decatur County Detention Center noted, ‘What an exciting time for us here at DCDC. It is a great honor and privilege to partner with Decatur County United Fund in this very important work. I look forward to implementing this program.’

About Decatur County Sheriff’s Office: The DCSO was established back in 1822 to serve and protect Decatur County. The Sheriff’s Office and Detention Center recently moved into a new 236 bed facility that includes all necessary functions of a modern-day jail with additional development space to grow. The building includes housing and recreational space for inmates, areas for inmate services, the Sheriff’s office, a multi-purpose room, squad room, and training room.

About Decatur County United Fund: Established in 1957. Our mission is to mobilize the power of our community to develop and maintain resources that meet human needs.

