

PRISON OF THE MIND

'Frontline' follows mentally ill inmates as they gain freedom

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BY ALAN JOHNSON

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Keith Williams was just about to get out of prison after a two-year sentence for burglary.

Suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, he had no family with which to reunite but said he would return to Toledo to be "with my people."

His people?

"My mommies, angels, cats. . . . If I'm not mistaken, they live all over the world -- all over the world."

Williams ended up in a state mental hospital after he was released.

Back in jail today, he faces a 10-year prison sentence on charges of assaulting a police officer. He is one of thousands of mentally ill patients who each year spin through the "revolving door" of Ohio prisons.

Frontline, the PBS program of investigative journalism, looks at the problem in *The Released*, to air at 10 p.m. Tuesday.

The piece follows up on the 2005 documentary *The New Asylums*.

As they did four years ago, Ohio prison officials gave *Frontline* producers Karen O'Connor and Miri Navasky unfettered access to all aspects of lives and treatment behind bars.

The first documentary focused on mentally ill inmates in prison; the new installment centers on what happens after they're released to communities that often seem foreign and unwelcoming.

The result: a grim but realistic look at a growing problem in Ohio and



FRONTLINE PHOTOS

Keith Williams, who suffers from paranoid schizophrenia and keeps landing back in prison



Exiting a psychiatric-care van outside Faith Mission, from left: Kevin Phillips, program coordinator of Homeless Outreach Teams at Southeast Inc.; and client Gary Brown

the rest of the nation as mental-health hospitals close their doors and prisons, by default, take their place.

Terry Collins, director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, knows the issue all too well.

In the past five years, the state has become a national leader in treatment for mentally ill prisoners -- although much remains to be done.

"Mental-health treatment is not part of the job; medical treatment is not part of the job," Collins told *The Dispatch*. "But those are things we have to do."

The care of mentally ill inmates is important not only for their welfare but also for the welfare of other inmates, members of the prison staff and the community into which they are released, Collins said.

The idea for a second Ohio-based film surfaced, Navasky said, when the producers saw how quickly many of the inmates featured in the first film returned to prison after being released.

"I was surprised by the revolving door," O'Connor said. "To see it firsthand was really stunning. Exactly the same thing is happening in the towns and cities across America."

Of the four inmates profiled in *The Released*, one has succeeded in the outside world by moving to a group home in Ashtabula.

Two others went back to prison, and the fourth was shot to death.

O'Connor and Navasky hope that their film points out the problem along with the solution: community-supported group homes that are well-run, -staffed and -supervised.

Such an outcome, they said, comes closer to the "promise of deinstitutionalization" made by state officials when Ohio mental hospitals were emptied in the 1970s and '80s.

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FRONTLINE

A guard escorts William Stokes, who has schizoaffective disorder, as he is released from prison in Grafton.

• Karen O'Connor and Miri Navasky will discuss *The Released* on at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday on WOSU (820 AM). *The Released* will be shown on at 10 p.m. Tuesday on WOSU-TV (Channel 34).

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